



The Cauldron

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PAGAN JOURNAL OF THE OLD RELIGION

SAMHAIN 1981

SAMHAIN or Summer's End is the ancient Celtic fire festival celebrated on November 1st. It is sacred to the Dark Goddess in Her aspect as the Old Crone and the Horned One as the Lord of the Wild Hunt. In olden times it marked the beginning of winter and the New Year. On Samhain Eve the gates of the Otherworld opened and the faery folk, Shining Ones and Old Gods rode out of the hollow hills. On that magical night we greet our loved ones who have passed through the gates of death as they return from the Summerland beyond the setting Sun to be with us once again and share our festivities.

PERSECUTION 1981. A few years ago it would have been unthinkable for an article with this title to be published in TC but, in the immortal words of Bob Dylan, the times they are a-changing. Although much has been achieved during the last few years in making the Old Religion publically acceptable it was obvious to most of us that a puritan backlash was not far away. Today pagans have become prime targets for the fanatical new breed of Christian fundamentalists whose malign influence is spreading both here and in the States. Faced with a serious decline in membership Christianity has been forced to attract the emotionally insecure and xenophobic in society by launching a moralistic crusade against the twin scapegoats of sexual permissiveness and the occult. Many of the new style Christians attack astrology, witchcraft and spiritualism in their crude propagandist literature. A bestseller in religious bookshops is 'From Witchcraft to Christ', the sensational biography of an ex-stripper and drug addict who claims she was initiated as a witch. Few pagans will recognize the lurid image of "witchcraft" presented in this publication. Even innocent spiritual studies such as astrology, dowsing and yoga are condemned as the work of the devil by hellfire preachers. In the U.S. a lunatic fringe group called 'Killers for Christ' (we kid you not!) have claimed responsibility for firebombing several occult bookshops. Last Hallowe'en, a Craft conference at the Holiday Inn in Amarillo, Texas was besieged by 200 chanting Christian demonstrators and the lectures were disrupted by bomb threats which the local police took seriously. In Florida our pagan brothers and sisters face a triple threat to their religious freedom from F.B.I. harrassment, infiltration by Satanists and physical attacks by thugs from the American Nazi Party.

If you do not believe it can happen here, we heard recently of a shop in the North Country which had its windows blacked by religious fanatics. Its crime was to sell tarot cards and incense sticks! In Kent within the last few weeks the proposal to open two occult centres offering advice on hauntings and contacts with covens has been attacked by an unholy alliance of the Roman Catholic Church and local Spiritualists. Newspapers in the area have featured banner headlines about "Black Magic dangers" and the alleged threat to young people. Earlier this year a Worcestershire woman who was believed by her neighbours to be a witch was subjected to obscene telephone calls, death threats and an arson attack on her house. In recent months an all-party group of M.P.s called on the Government to set up a committee to look into 'fringe religions', occult groups and witch covens. In the summer a directive was issued by the Independent Broadcasting Authority banning programmes on witches being transmitted on commercial television or radio "in case they frighten people". Unfortunately persecution of pagans is not restricted to the mainstream of Christian traditions, it also permeates certain sections of the so-called New Age movement. Last year disparaging remarks were made about witchcraft in the official programme of the Festival of Mind and Body. This year when a local clerical condemned the Bristol F.M.B. as "encouraging witchcraft" one of the organisers ignorantly replied that nobody practising black magic was allowed to exhibit at the festival. Witchcraft is not black magic despite what you may read in the Sunday newspapers! Despite this /fact one New Age group present

fact one New Age group preaching love and tolerance which attended a smaller festival condemned the pagans present at an adjacent stall as "black magicians". While the New Agers have recently discovered ley lines and power centres they totally reject the Ancient Wisdom which goes with them. Others label our pagan past and such holy places as Glastonbury Tor as "evil" and dismiss the Old Religion as the debased worship of the powers of darkness. It is therefore hardly coincidental that the best known symbol of the New Age movement is St. Michael killing the dragon. In our myths the dragon represents the untamed forces of Nature, the earth energies which flow along the ley lines between our sacred places and the Great Goddess who is the patroness of the old fertility cults which used them long before the coming of the new faith. It is a pity that the New Age bigots do not take a lesson from the late Dion Fortune who successfully balanced the Christian and pagan aspects in her spiritual studies.

IRISH ATLANTIS? We have heard that an article was published recently in the 'Irish Times' describing the alleged discovery by a French archaeologist of the lost temple of the Atlantean sea god Posiedon off the coast of Eire. It said that the pillars of the temple were intact and carved with strange heiroglyphics in an unknown form of language. (Presumably Atlantean?) At present we are not sure how seriously to take this unconfirmed report as surely such a find would have made worldwide headlines in all the international newspapers. We would welcome further information or even a copy of the said article from any of our Irish readers who also saw it.

MILITARY PAGAN RECOGNITION According to an item in 'Circle Network News' a U.S. Army handbook for chaplains includes Wicca as a legitimate religion practised by some members of the Armed Forces. The handbook clearly states the differences between Wicca and Satanism and gives a general description of Wiccan beliefs and history. The U.S. Army seems to be slightly more enlightened than its British counterparts for we have on file several cases of people with pagan sympathies being forced to resign from the U.K. armed forces because their religious beliefs became known.

ROYAL PAGAN NIGHTS While wisely ignoring reports emanating from the States that the new Princess of Wales is interested in Craft matters (we await a subscription for TG from Buck House in due course) we note that on the eve of the Royal Wedding over 100 beacon fires blazed on the ancient hills of Albion. On the morning of July 26th The Guardian' newspaper reported the fact on its front page as follows "... on the eve of his Christian marriage the heir to the throne last night celebrated the ancient pagan ritual of fire. Four hundred torchbearers lit his path to the beacon in Hyde Park where he kindled the chain of great fires across the kingdom."

WITCHCRAFT AND FERTILITY Back in the 1920's when Margaret Murray's books first appeared witchcraft was described as a fertility cult and designated as the Old Religion of Western Europe dating back to the Stone Age. Fertility obviously meant the harvesting of crops and a high birthrate among humans and animals. Before mankind learned to practise agriculture it meant plenty of game for the hunters. In short it was concerned with the forces of life. Today we live in a changing world. We are on the eve of the Age of Aquarius so what should fertility mean to us today? It has frequently been observed by writers on modern witchcraft that there are many different sorts of fertility beyond the basic multiplying of humans and animals. Indeed with the desperate problem of world over-population it is not more humans births we need but less. It has therefore been said that in the modern age we need fertility of the mind, creativity in the arts and the way we live. Both witchcraft and other branches of modern paganism are actively concerned with these aspects of fertility today. The Old Religion provides inspiration for art, music and poetry. But is this all? No, not by a long way! The year 1969 saw the publication of a remarkable book, now deservedly famous, 'The View Over Atlantis' by John Michell. His theme was an entirely new look at prehistoric civilisation with particular reference to the lost knowledge of earth energies possessed by our distant ancestors; knowledge which is being rediscovered in the present day. Michell's references to the ley system and its implications should have given new insights into what the Old Religion is really all about - that is if the different sects of paganism had not been too busy criticising each other to notice. For the first time it was publicly revealed just why, for instance, witches traditionally used to meet at crossroads. Not merely because it is convenient but because ancient crossroads are often ley centres. So are the pagan mounds on which old churches are often found to be built. So are standing stones and stone circles which are visible survivals of our ancestors' religion. And these too are traditional witches' meeting places.

A decade of research into the mysterious power which courses along the leys has shown that they are connected with both kinds of fertility; physical and also spiritual. A kind of life pulse of the Earth appears to flow along them. Does this mean that the Earth itself is a living being? According to some scientists that is exactly what the Earth is.

exactly what the Earth is. This idea has become known as the Gaia hypothesis and was first published by Dr. James Lovelock F.R.S. and Dr. Sidney Epton in 'The New Scientist' dated 6.2.75. (Just after Candlemas which is a curious piece of synchronicity). Gaia is the name of the Earth Goddess of ancient Greece who was a form of the Magna Mater or Great Mother. According to Robert Graves She is the primitive and original deity worshipped by humans before all the other gods were conceived. If this theory is correct then our Earth is not a mere ball of matter that has somehow evolved living forms upon its surface but a vast intelligent Being in whose biosphere all life, including our own, is inter-related. And our "primitive" ancestors were wiser than we were in worshipping the Magna Mater and trying to enter into harmony and sympathy with Her. Such ideas as these have obvious importance for the future. Witchcraft as the Old Religion is not a mere quaint survival from the past kept alive as a sort of secret society but doomed to die by the pressure of the modern technological age. It is one of the most potentially dynamic trends in our society as the Age of Aquarius looms nearer. Moreover, I suspect that the religious, and possibly even the political, Establishment are also aware of this. They know that if witches and pagans join forces generally and support each other we are going to have an impact on public opinion and established privilege. Could this possibly be the reason why so many promoters of discord and intolerance keep surfacing within the Craft? Are all these people merely the spiteful, self-righteous egotrippers they seem to be or should we look for something more sinister behind their activities? It is the sort of question we should ask them to their face but they seldom show it preferring to hide behind pseudonyms. Another characteristic they share is that they all denigrate the late Gerald Gardner. Now the Old Boy was by no means perfect but he did start the modern revival of witchcraft. So why should they hate him so? Every now and again one of these people crawls out of the woodwork causes as much trouble as he or she can, making great claims of superior knowledge which are never substantiated, and then disappears back again. Odd, isn't it? I have heard that witches in the U.S.A. have had similar strange experiences. Someone over there started an association to support pagans who were being harassed for their beliefs. The association was swamped with so many phoney cases that it folded up. Now who organised that I wonder?

Instead of wasting time and energy on deliberately stirring up controversies I would like to see witches more aware of our own potentials in the modern world, of the implications of the rediscoveries of earth magic and their accompanying research. Did you, for instance, notice the passage in 'The Secret Life of Plants' by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (Penguin Books 1978) about the work of Marcel Vogel in the U.S.A. This describes how Vogel and a group of experimenters found that talking about sex seemed to stir up a sort of energy in the atmosphere which affected plants. This discovery caused them to speculate that "the ancient fertility rites in which humans had sexual intercourse in freshly seeded fields might indeed have stimulated plants to grow." Another book with important implications for pagan study is 'Earth Magic' by Francis Hitching (Picador 1977). This deals with the megalithic remains scattered so enigmatically over our landscape and the whole vista of new discoveries connected with them. We read about the strange experiences of dowsers at the Witch Stone near Honiton, Devon and the Rollright Stones in the Cotswolds. Many people have experienced power coming from ancient standing stones and there are indications that this power is affected by the phases of the Moon. Some alignments of the old stone circles are related to the times of the greater and lesser Sabbats. See also 'The Ley Hunter's Companion' by Paul Devereux and Ian Thomson.

What are all these mysterious energies? Or are they basically all one energy? We talk about "raising power" but just what is this power and how can we raise it more effectively and constructively? Are not these the questions which should really occupy our minds? I am not suggesting that we should spend our time reading books. We should come close to these things in living Nature and the countryside. Let us broaden our minds and look to the future, to the New Age and the part we can play in it. In ancient days the Old Religion was vitally concerned with the life of the community. We too should be concerned both to learn and act. Our seasonal rituals may be more important than we know for the redemption of Earth from the blight that Man's materialistic blindness and greed has cast upon Her. They may not be just the same as they were in the old days for times change on an ascending spiral. Without creative fertility in all senses of the word our race can have no future. We are now within the last 20 years of this century and coming uncomfortably close to Nostradamus's fatal date of 1999 which is one of the few definite dates given in his cryptic prophecies. The old systems based on materialism, both Capitalist and indeed Communist, are visibly breaking down. What is going to take their place? As neo-pagans we are part of the answer.

Doreen Valiente

We would like to thank Doreen for contributing this very thought provoking article to TC and would welcome feedback and comments from our readers on its contents and theme of the Old Religion's possible role during the critical years to come. ED.

ELFANE CRAFTS have recently moved from Surrey to the Welsh hills. If you are looking for an unusual Yule gift for pagan friends then they will be able to help. Hand carved pendants, altar pieces, wands, wall plaques and candleholders can be supplied to your designs or requirements crafted from natural woods by a pagan shaman. Send s.a.e to Bel, c/o Elfane, Myndcerig, Pontyberem, Nr. Llanelli, Dyfed, S. Wales.

STONEHENGE SCANDAL News reaches us that the Department of the Environment have suppressed an independent report on Stonehenge. From what we can gather this report was hardly controversial but merely recommended improved toilet facilities and the setting up of an education centre (sic) at the site. The present deplorable state of Albion's premier prehistoric monument was highlighted in a 'Sunday Telegraph' article published on 16.8.81. Despite an estimated annual income of £250,000 the site is in urgent need of improvement. The tarmac path leading to the fenced off standing stones has recently been painted green to simulate grass but unfortunately it ends halfway around the monument and has been dubbed by Stonehenge staff as "the road to nowhere". It also boasts the dubious advantage of being the most litter strewn site of historical interest in the country which is perhaps hardly surprising with 600,000 + visitors per annum. The portable loos cannot cope with the physical needs of this amount of visitors while five blackboards dotted around the site give inadequate information. "It is not much to describe 4,000 years of history" comments one tourist guide wryly. The National Trust, which owns the surrounding land, is urging the D.O.E. to spend £4 million (a drop in the financial ocean compared with this Government's wasteful defence budget) on improvements because although attendances are high they have been steadily dropping over the last three years. It all seems a long time ago when your Editor first visited Stonehenge and the only sign of officialdom was a little old lady sitting in a wooden hut selling souvenir post cards for sixpence each!

PAGAN SYMBOLS OF YULE Some pagans may feel slightly guilty at celebrating Christmas but due to family responsibilities and/or social pressures be unable to escape the dreaded seasonal banfeast. Fortunately such guilt is misplaced for, so like many other Christian festivals, the traditional symbols of Christmastide were borrowed by the Early Church from pagan originals. The birthday of Jesus did not originally have a fixed date but in the 4th century c.e. the Church decided to adapt December 25th for it in an attempt to stamp out the pagan celebrations of Yule or the mid-winter solstice. This was a date sacred to the Church's early rival, the Sun god Mithras who, starkly obvious to pagans, shared with Jesus a birth in a stable, a virgin mother and the adoration of shepherds. The pagan Romans also celebrated their Saturnalia at the winter solstice when masters had to bow to slaves and a Lord of Misrule was elected to organise the orgiastic festivities. Such pagan revels survived into the Middle Ages (for a graphic account see 'Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising' by Prof. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Penguin 1981) and in 18th century London it was reported that the King and mayors still elected their own Lords of Misrule who reigned from Hallowe'en to Candlemass. The traditional Xmas tree, introduced into England by Prince Albert, is said to have originated when St. Boniface cut down a sacred oak used by German pagans and replaced it with a fir tree. An interesting fairy tale but the truth is that fir trees and pine cones were symbols of the Horned God long before Christian saints came along. At the winter solstice great bonfires blazed on the hills to welcome back the Sun and a burning branch of log from the sacred fire was regarded as a good luck charm. The Yule log was kept until the following year when it was used to kindle the new fire. Other Yuletide greenery such as mistletoe, sacred to the Celtic Druids, and holly, symbolising immortality are also pre-Christian in origin. Mistletoe is still feared by the Church as a heathen plant and for that reason is not allowed inside churches. To the pagans it symbolised peace and hence the delightful practice of kissing under its white berries reflects this belief.

One of the most loved seasonal characters at this time of the year is Old Father Christmas yet even a glance at this larger-than-life personality brimming with a natural joie de vivre reveals his pagan pedigree. Santa Claus as we know him today started life in 19th century America and was a literary creation based on the old European version of St. Nicholas. Early illustrations of Father Xmas depict him as a very elemental, gnomish figure associated with reindeer, a sledge and entering houses through chimneys. In an entertaining and very illuminating article published in 'The Sunday Times' colour supplement in December 1980 Roger Taylor of Lancaster University speculated that Father Christmas was related to the Siberian shamans who worshipped a stag god and used the sacred mushroom to induce visions of the spirit world. Dear old Santa is also related to the Northern European god Odin, inventor of the magical runes, who visited his worshippers around the winter solstice to distribute gifts. Therefore we should not feel any remorse about celebrating our festival of the Sun at Christmas time for it is really a pagan season after all.

PAGAN CAROLS While on the subject of the pagan origins of Yule, TC readers may be interested in Norman Illes new book 'The Pagan Carols Restored'. In it he claims that Christmas carols were originally pagan songs dating from the time when December 25th was still celebrated as the Winter fire festival by Sun worshippers. Carols survived in their pagan form until as late as the 14th century c.e. when the priests crudely censored their overt sexual symbolism (i.e. the naughty bits!). Norman has transcribed several well known carols and restored them to their virile pagan originals. Copies of his book are available price £3.00 from 381, Marine Rd., Morecombe, Lancashire. He also produces Yule cards with ethnic/abstract illustrations and verses from the unexpurgated pagan carols.

EIGHT SABBATS FOR WITCHES by Janet & Stewart Farrar. (Robert Hale & Co Ltd. £6.95) Most TC readers will have heard of Stewart Farrar if only as the author 'What Witches Do' written shortly after he was initiated into the Craft by the Sanders. When it was published some purists said it should have been entitled 'What Some Witches Do' as it contained material which did not belong to the mainstream of British paganism. In his latest book Stewart and his partner Janet make amends by including in their revised Book of Shadows traditional material drawn from Irish folklore. They have also consulted Doreen Valiente, who is apparently responsible for many of the rites used by modern Gardnerian witches, so as to provide a comprehensive series of rituals for the seasonal festivals plus a requim rite for those who have passed to the Summer land, a handfasting (marriage) ceremony and a Wiccaning rite for a young child. In my opinion these will all be of use to beginners, who may not be au fait with ritual structure, and the ritually apathetic who prefer to utilise existing ceremonies in their religious practise, rather than improvise their own. It is difficult to say that any continuity flows through this book and readers will find that some rites work better than others. Logically, as the book is based on a seasonal cycle of the birth, death and rebirth of the sacred king, one would expect each of the festivals to follow on in synthesis. However, there are one or two nice touches such as the election of a Lord of Misrule at the Winter Solstice sabbat and the blessing of the household god or hearth spirit at Beltane. All in all 'Eight Sabbats for Witches' is recommended as a useful guidebook for pagans seeking to establish ritual observances for the changing year. At least it is one book on witchcraft you can tell people to buy without first warning them to ignore the Qabalistic bits!

Simon Barlett

LID OFF THE CAULDRON: A HANDBOOK FOR WITCHES by Patricia Crowther (Muller £5.95) Having heard some time back that Patricia Crowther was working on a new book I was looking forward to it with anticipation, after all she is one of the leading figures in the Craft revival and what she has to say should be of interest. Now that it has been published I must admit to a slightly uneasy feeling of anti-climax. For a start the dustjacket claims that it contains previously unpublished material. This is true as far as the do-it-yourself rituals and some other odds and bobs go but the first part of the book covers ground already worn well by other writers such as Murray, Gardner, Graves et al. After all there is a limit to the number of times that anyone wants to read about the Cerne Abbas giant or the alleged Craft origin of the Order of the Garter. The explanation of the sexual symbolism of the broomstick may be new to British readers but has already been published in Ms Crowther's 'Ancient Secrets of Witchcraft' published by University Books in the U.S.A. six years ago. Under the circumstances I wish it were possible to be more positive but while this book could be of some use to novices it contains little new or original for those who have been in the Craft for some years and may be attracted, as I was, by the name of the author on the cover. It therefore seems doomed to be a succès d'estime.

Bob Lester

DO YOU NEED HELP? We have been fortunate enough to have been offered the services of a natural sensitive and healer who has kindly agreed to help TC readers with their personal problems and provide psychic readings at a specially reduced rate of £3.00 each. Confidentiality guaranteed. Send donation only for absent healing. Blank postal orders and cash only to Fey Meredith, C/O BCM Box 1633, London WC1N 3XX. U.S. readers please send \$ bills.

LINES & CIRCLES A major exhibition on leys and stone circles by artists and researchers involved in the contemporary Earth Mysteries/ pagan field is to be held at the Waterloo Gallery, LONDON SE1 from Imbolc to Beltane 1982. More details in our next issue.

SACRIFICE Our comments in TC23 on human sacrifice have prompted considerable feedback. It has been claimed that the alleged use of the athame for blood sacrifices has "historical Craft authenticity". We further understand that a medieval grimoire credited to a Hebrew patriarch advocates the use of cat's blood to mark sigils on a ritual knife. If that is the "historical Craft authenticity" referred to then some people have a very weird, and misguided, idea of what witchcraft really is. One of our Australian readers (not the author of the original article cited in our last

issue) chastises us for suggesting that the athame is exclusively a Gardnerian tool. She states that a ritual black handled knife was used by her parent tradition which originated in Sussex. Our Antipodean correspondent also points out that in olden times a dedicated person volunteered to die as a willing sacrifice to save the land or the tribe from disaster. This we do not doubt and note the existence of a long list of "divine victims" including most of our Plantaganet kings. However, we can see no good reason to withdraw our statement made in the last issue that in our opinion there is no role for either human or animal sacrifice to play in the beliefs and/or rituals of the modern pagan movement. To claim otherwise is to suggest that paganism condones and indeed advocates murder and sadism and provides excellent ammunition for our enemies to use against us.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT Mind boggling statement of the year. Your Editor saw outside the local Baptist church a poster claiming "Jesus is Lord of the Harvest." Old Hornie certianly hides under some peculiar psuedonyms!

ECONews U.S. scientists have discovered tiny specks of magnetic material in the brains of dolphins who died naturally and were washed up on Californian beaches. This material, consisting partly of the mineral magnetite, appears to be joined to a number of fine nerve fibres to form a magnetic sensory organ. Growing evidence suggests that animals possess a finely tuned sixth sense capable of detecting the Earth's magnetic field and using this field to navigate. The discovery began in 1975 when bacteria living on the sea bed were found to possess rudimentary magnetic compasses. Since then magnetic material has also been found in the brains of bees and pigeons who are both renowned for their travelling instincts. Attempts to prove that we mere humans possess similiar natural magnets have so far proved negative. Meanwhile two scientists at the University of Montreal in Canada claim that all the bacteria inhabiting our planet are not seperate entities but form a superbug which possesses some kind of intelligence. The boffins claim that each bacteria shares 3 million years of collective history and the ability to transfer genetic information. Recent research on how bacteria resist antibiotics suggests that the superbug or planetary bacterial organism co-ordinates resistance and therefore exhibits a low level of intelligent response to external stimuli. Finally, advanced studies at the University of Minnesota Medical School have proved that our natural biological rhythms can help in the treatment of illness by modern drugs. If you are critically ill the difference between life and death may depend on the time of day when the doctors administer the drugs. The theory behind this conclusion is based on the premise that every living thing on the planet functions in a rhythmic and cyclic pattern which is interdependent on all other organisms. Taken separately these three pieces of information may not seem too exciting if you are not very interested in the current developments in biology. However, if you take the holistic view as we do when analysing the odd scraps of info which come our way then you can find in them startling and conclusive confirmation of the primary pagan belief in the oneness of all life on Mother Earth.

MAKING CONTACT To a newcomer to the pagan scene making contact with likeminded souls can be an almost impossible task. No doubt the eager beginner will encounter ads for 'occult pen clubs' and apply to join. Usually such enterprises charge a fee to join and some then ask the captive member to pay for lists of names and addresses. Contacts made this way can be very successful although we tend to agree with the cynic who said that it helps to be a single female! The main danger from this or any other type of 'open' contact is the risk of encountering Satanists or any other type of undesirable who may use the system to attract recruits to whatever nastiness they are up to. We found this out by experiance when TC used to publish a contact listing in our early issues a few years ago. It does not really matter how carefully you try to vet such lists this kind of contact does happen. If you are not 100% happy about the vibrations of anyone you get involved with cut off immediately and write a letter of complaint to the list organisers. If they are sincere they will investigate the person concerned and take the appropriate action if required. A safer method of making contact is to write to well known authors of books on the Craft via their publishers or to the editors of magazines like TC. If you do this always enclose a stamped, self addressed envelope for your reply. Authors and editors get inundated with letters from enquirers and few of us can afford to reply to them all if return postage is not included. Don't panic if you do not get an answer right away. Most people actively involved in the pagan movement lead very hectic lives and answering letters tends to be a chore which is left for one of the few peaceful moments they get. TC itself makes no claim to be a recruiting agency for covens or pagan groups. Where we can help we will but obviously any assistance is limited by a number of factors. During the years we have built up a comprehensive list of contacts all over the country. Some of these are publically known so the seeker can be given

/their details direct.

their details direct. Others seek no publicity so, as TC has a firm policy of not revealing names and addresses without permission, we will only post on letters if the forward postage is enclosed. In some cases we may know of a coven or group in a certain area but as its membership quota is complete we cannot pass on enquirers. Once you have made contact it is wise to be careful in the initial stages. Beware of those who claim to be adepts or read your aura in glowing terms on your first meeting. Avoid those who ask for money in exchange for knowledge or promise you instant initiation or exclusive membership of some inner circle of ascended masters if you will only . It is a little sad that people believe they can only truly regard themselves as a witch or pagan by joining a coven and engaging in group rituals. In fact the sincere person on their own or with a likeminded partner can be just as effective. Seasonal rituals and magical workings can be improvised from either literary sources (which we admit can be an intellectual and spiritual minefield!) or preferably by contact with your inner self. As the Goddess says "If thou seekest and findeth it not within thyself thou shalt never find it without thee." If you open your heart to the Lord and Lady then They will tell you how best you can serve the Ancient Mysteries. Remember that one of the most precious gifts of the Goddess is divine inspiration and who could ask for better or more reliable contacts than the Old Ones?

BLOCKED FOOTPATHS TC 22 ("Hey, You Can't Do That Here") drew attention to the obnoxious practice of landowners blocking public footpaths leading to ancient and other significant sites. Paths leading to seldom visited and little known places are the most at risk and these are exactly the ways active outdoor pagans are likely to want to use. Accordingly it is well to know your legal rights. Anyone can lawfully remove so much of the obstruction, and no more, for them to proceed on their way. Wire cutters are useful and are better than writing screeds of letters to the local County Council which is what "reasonable" people are supposed to do. If you do write however be sure to quote the exact place, what you found and ask them to get it cleared. Most important ask them to tell you when it has been cleared. All rights of way are on a definite R.O.W. map which can be seen, as your right, at Council Offices and as such paths are individually numbered and described in an attached schedule these documents are more exact than Ordnance Survey maps. The Ramblers Association is likely to be of some help & information. Head Office 1-5 Wandsworth Rd., London SW8 26J Tel: 01-582 6878. More insidious than illegal obstruction are attempts to legally close or divert paths so that the public are denied permanently their rights to visit places they want to. Indeed the motivation to get rid of a path might just be because it leads somewhere TC readers want to go! Notices have to be published in local newspapers (often obscurely worded and unhelpful) and on the path itself and indicate where a map can be seen. Only 21 days are given for objections so time and publicity is everything. If you think that access to a site might be at risk in this way and need help quickly on what to do then telephone the R.A. However one of the most helpful organisations is the Peak & Northern Footpath Society, although being based in Manchester it is only able to cover the Peak, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Gtr. Manchester and part of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Staffs and Merseyside areas of the country. They operate a fast and informative alerting network for the areas they cover via their Closures & Diversions Secretary Don Lee of 7, Mossway, Middleton, Manchester Tel: 061-653 4560 who understands the need to preserve the old routes.

D.W. Lee

We hope to feature an article on the growing threat to our national sacred heritage in the Imbolc issue of TC. In the meantime we welcome the above advice and list of useful addresses. Recently it has been said that it does not matter if pagans have sacred sites. To those who understand the spiritual links between landscape and human beings that statement is nonsensical and they will know why we must fight to preserve the sacred places in our countryside. ED.

THE GREAT SECRET You would know the secret of death but how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life? For life and death are one, even as the river and sea are one. In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond and like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams for in them is hidden the gate of eternity. For what is it to die but to stand naked in wind and melt in the Sun? And what is to cease breathing but to free the breath from its restless tides that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered. Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing and when you have reached the mountain top then shall you begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs then shall you truly dance for the owl whose night bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

- from 'The Prophet' by Kahlil Gibran

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FUNNY PEOPLE As a postscript to our leading article this issue, the new born witch hunters do have their amusing aspects. For instance, in Chiletwo Jehovah freaks were charged with disorderly conduct after burning a five foot tall effigy of the Easter Bunny which they told police was a heathen idol. Other extreme Christian groups condemn pop music - or "pagan Druid rock" as they call it - as a gigantic conspiracy by Satan to corrupt America's young people. Recently evangelists have declared war on the popular adult fantasy game 'Dragons & Dungeons' which involves mock battles between players representing wizards, hobbits and mythical beasts. They claim this harmless game is a secret cover for witchcraft and encourages "unnatural sex acts". And these are the people who think pagans are weird!

CELTIC PRIEST FOUND A bronze statue of a Druid has been found in a gravel pit at Erith in Cambridgeshire. The 6" high figure is clad in a double robe with a snake entwined around one arm and a serpent's egg in one hand. This Celtic discovery is now at the British Museum in London awaiting conservation treatment so hopefully it will be on show to the public soon.

We have left the bad news to the end. Unfortunately due to the increase in postage applicable from the 1st January we must reluctantly raise the cover price of TC from the Imbolc issue. Postage charges have risen twice since our present price of 25p was introduced and the cost of printing TC has also increased. This has meant that TC has been running at a loss for some time. We hope that you will continue to give us your support and assure you that a policy remains to provide the varied and above all else intelligent review of pagan matters which has made TC the best journal of its type.

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