

Cheltenham

Country side (amman)



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Now, in 1971 a somewhat similar thing happened when Andrew Kerr organised the first Free Pop Festival at Glastonbury. All who were there were conscious of a tremendous surge of good will and inspiring purpose. Alas, this wave went out again and left a lot of flotsam and jetsam on the shore. The same thing must not happen again. The Organisers of the Festival have already booked another and larger hall at Olympia for next year and are already planning the lay-out. A great wave must come sweeping in, year after year, until even the most despondent must know that the tide has turned.

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The date is already fixed for May 12th and the Festival will continue for ten days. This should be just about round the time of Pentecost and therefore of considerable significance to Arthurians. A suggestion has been put to the Organisers by a Pendragon member that the centre-piece should be a replica of Stonehenge, and that all those groups and Societies such as ours whose interests lie in British mythology, legend and culture, should be grouped round this centre-piece.

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It is obvious to us that a far greater effort is going to be called for next year. We paid £50 for our sixth share of the stall. We paid another £30 for lighting and insurance. The stand we had to improvise (owing to a change in arrangements by the Organisers) cost £20, and the display photographs and banner headings for this display board another £50. Printing and paper for leaflets cost roughly another £20. Next year, if we are to have our own stall and print literature for sale, we must first somehow collect at least £500.

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This Society is not composed of a small group of enthusiasts in Bristol only. Indeed, as quite a few have moved to new jobs, or taken their families out of the city and into the countryside, the Bristol group grows smaller and smaller, and each member -- because of the present economic climate -- is under as much pressure as everyone else. You members in other parts rallied to our aid so nobly and promptly this year you enabled us to get a small toehold in this big adventure that is taking shape. We have a whole year in which to gather strength and momentum, so please will you try to find ways to support us again? We know you will enjoy the Festival if you can manage to come and join us.

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From The Daily Telegraph, Saturday, April 23rd, 1977.

PATHS TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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Christopher Booker sees a positive approach in some of the 'new religions'.

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This week I had a fascinating experience. I spent

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++ an afternoon at Olympia wandering round the so-called
 ++ "Festival of Mind and Body", a "celebration of the new
 ++ age" (which closes tomorrow).

++ The temptation to poke cynical fun at this strange
 ++ assemblage of "freaks and weirdos" under the unlikely set-
 ++ ting of Olympia's vast Victorian canopy is one which a
 ++ number of journalists have found irresistible. The Times
 ++ diarist, for instance, almost fell over himself with ex-
 ++ citement when he was able to light upon "the Bio-Activity
 ++ Translator" which allows plants to talk to you", or the
 ++ stall offering to "photograph your aura for £1," or the
 ++ pleasant young woman "munching some nutty confection" with
 ++ whom he fell into conversation at the (strictly vegetarian)
 ++ snack bar.

++ The stands fall into four main groups. Firstly, there
 ++ are the health-food enthusiasts.

++ Then there are the out-and-out cranks of an ageless
 ++ nature, such as Mr. J. Rutherford of 31 Station Road,
 ++ Harpenden who advertises his "Theory that the passages
 ++ and chambers of the Great Pyramid depict in stone God's
 ++ plan for mankind through the ages."

++ Thirdly there are the commercial stands, showing every-
 ++ thing from Frisbees to ~~karate~~ equipment (most incongruous
 ++ of all is the stall which consists merely of a rather mel-
 ++ ancholy character standing by a large, shiny kidney mach-
 ++ ine bristling with dials.)

++ Lastly there is the mass of stands occupied by more or
 ++ less serious representatives of what if you were being
 ++ rude, you might call "the new religion" taking forms which
 ++ are sometimes Christian, sometimes Eastern (several gurus
 ++ are on offer, via their smiling, bearded photographs) and
 ++ sometimes not particularly either.

++ One cannot escape the fact that the emergence of this
 ++ new "spiritual wave" across the West, in all its myriad
 ++ manifestations, has been one of the most surprising and
 ++ interesting developments of the past decade. Indeed, when
 ++ it began to break the surface (at the time the Sixties
 ++ pop-culture "madness" was at its height, in 1966 and 1967)
 ++ we forget just how unexpected it was.

++ At that time, many of its more headline-worthy forms
 ++ were so blatantly dubious or shallow --the great L S D
 ++ craze, the Instant Mysticism of the Beatles and the dear
 ++ old Maharishi, flower power and hippy bells --that it
 ++ might have been easy to dismiss as just another passing
 ++ fad.

++ But behind the craze for "whole-food" and the smoke of
 ++ a million joss sticks I believe that this sense of what
 ++ many of its adherents describe as "the dawning of the age
 ++ of Aquarius" constitutes part of the most remarkable shift
 ++ in Western consciousness for several hundred years.

++ What do the best of these new movements have in com-
 ++ mon? Firstly a tremendous sense of liberation from the
 ++ sterile deadweight of our collectivist, technological,
 ++ materialist, rationalist culture (it can no longer lay
 ++ claim to the title of "civilisation.")

++ Secondly they share a belief that we all of us initially
 ++ (and particularly under the influence of the dominant
 ++ orthodoxies of the age) tend to look at the world through
 ++ a limited "ego-consciousness" --but that if we learn to

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travel within ourselves, we become aware of a second, much deeper Self within us which in some mysterious way is not only much more individual to us than our little ego-self but is also somehow universal.

Thirdly they have re-found in everyday life a sense of the sacred, of the kind which has long since departed from our trivial, neurotic, rationalist society (not to mention from most established churches).

Now all this bears an uncanny resemblance to the model of man's psyche discovered over 50 years of observation by the great Swiss psychologist Jung, and in any attempt to survey the re-emergence of this view of man in the 20th century West, Jung must obviously have a very important place.

I say "re-emergence" because of course, in its broad outlines, this is a view of man which has been held many times before in history -- by the Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance, by many of the ancient Greek philosophers, by the Eastern religions, by Christian mystics. Indeed, before the institutionalisation of Christianity, it was the very essence of Christ's own message -- which was always directed to individuals, that they should find "the kingdom of heaven within."

But as Jung in his role as 20th century scientist continually emphasised, the battle to discover that "deeper Self" within us is no easy instant thing. It means becoming aware of all those hidden parts of ourselves (what Jung called our "Shadow") which so long as we remain unconscious of them remain to leap out and dominate our behaviour without our even being aware they are doing so.

The fact that this is so difficult means of course that many of the more modish, group-centred cults of recent years (all those Instantly Mystical pop singers, for instance) are really doing nothing more, in Jung's words, than show "a positively morbid avidity to practise Indian Yoga, observe a strict regimen of diet, learn theosophy by heart or mechanically repeat mystic texts from the literature of the whole world" simply because they dare not face themselves.

Equally the hard road to self-knowledge could not be further from those two other major "spiritual growth industries" among the young in recent years -- Evangelical Christianity and Left-wing or Trotskyite Socialism.

Both of these quasi religions are deeply attractive to the confused, insecure young because they seem to offer such a simple path to Instant Salvation -- by adapting to an external stereotype. Both therefore are inevitably collective movements (you cannot be a solitary Evangelical, any more than you can be a solitary Socialist). Like all collective movements, both inevitably project a hostility on to the outside world (we are the elect who have the exclusive answer).

Above all, neither of them allows any real inner growth of the individual personality.

But at Olympia I sensed that, in and among all the superficialities, there were a small number of groups which had grasped the way to self-understanding. What they are offering is not something fashionable, or collective, but nothing less than the chance for ordinary people to transform themselves into extraordinary people, by discovering their true Selves --

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generation to generation because this, again, is the tale of the much-loved child, unaware of the hostility and danger created merely by its own innocence. Again the homely discipline and the final removal to total obscurity. This fairy tale is yet another of the many variations on the death-and-resurrection theme. Long essays could be written on both these and other well-known stories.

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Wasn't it Ouspensky who said that in every functioning group of people there is always a Herod and a Pilate and all the other characters described in the most famous story of all? Anyhow, it was Ouspensky who said that the Crucifixion story "was a drama enacted on the world stage by a group of actors who were word perfect and who never faltered." In the 1940's Talbot Mundy wrote a book called "OM" (now out of print) which was exciting and allegorical. The chief character in this novel was a Thibetan Lama who taught his pupils by turning them into a touring company of actors that travelled through India giving one-night stands in different cities. They acted always the same play but the pupils changed parts each night so that each could learn, from the inside, the character of the part he was playing. And afterwards they discussed the reactions of the audience to each pupil's performance.

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This Society has chosen to study and analyse the stories in the Arthurian cycle of legends. As Sid Birch has pointed out on another page in this issue, there is more than one version of each tale: there is scope here for many different interpretations and scope for much speculation.

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We, in Bristol, are planning ways and means of producing a better and more professional "Pendragon" and for this, again, we need the help and co-operation of our many members. We are quite sure that every Pendragon can write, and that every Pendragon has views and ideas that are worth airing, however controversial or otherwise. We invite articles or letters or reviews of books --anything you care to send us that is relevant to the Arthurian scene. We shall do our best to improve the format.

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NOTICE

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THERE WILL BE NO DIG AT LLANELEN THIS YEAR.

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MERLIN'S ISLE by
Sid Birchby.

There was a poor Northumbrian knight, says Malory, called Balin le Savage. The lady of a certain castle persuaded him "to have a do and joust with a knight hereby that keepeth an island." The two knights fought and slew each other. Before they died, they recognised each other as brothers, and the lady buried them where they fell. On the next day came Merlin, who did many things for which the island was named Merlin's Isle, or the Isle of Marvels.

On Balin's tomb he wrote an epitaph in letters of gold, and he made there a bed "where should never man lie but he went out of his wit." Also he put a new pommel on Balin's sword, with a spell so that no man should be able to grasp it save Lancelot or Galahad his son, and that with it Lancelot should slay his best friend, Sir Gawain. By a further enchantment, the sword was set in a marble stone. For many years it hovered over the water. Then it "swam down the stream to the city of Camelot", where Galahad grasped it. He had already obtained its scabbard, which Merlin had left for him to find on the shore of the island, to which the wizard had built a bridge of iron and steel only half-a-foot broad, which only an honest knight could tread.

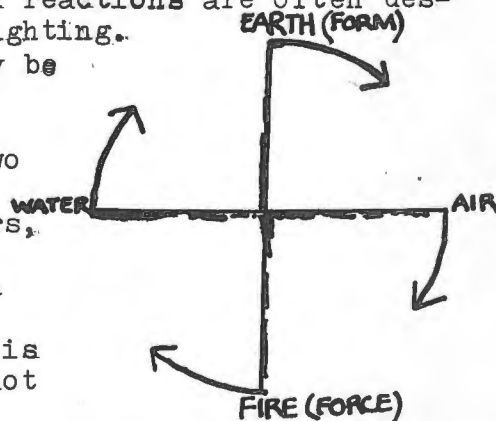
So ends the tale of the two brothers. Like much of the book of Sir Balin, it is rich in imagery, obscure in meaning, and something of a hodge-podge of many legends. Students of Arthurian romance, such as the poet Southey, realised that Malory in 1469 must have drawn his material from a lost source, but it did not come to light until 1869. This was the "Suite de Merlin". Other fragments of it have since been found, the earliest being written in a 13th Century hand. The various texts agree closely with Malory, so that now we know more about his sources and have only to learn what his story really meant.

To study the whole of the Book of Sir Balin would be a long task, but by selecting the final section, that of the two brothers and Merlin's Isle, one seems to see a statement of alchemical theory in the form of an allegory of Merlin as a wizard. For instance, alchemical reactions are often described in terms of two brothers fighting.

A short note on the theory may be helpful. (See diagram). The four elements are set at the four compass-points. They symbolise the two polarities, Form and Force (Earth and fire) and their two transmuters, Air and Water.

Fire is transmuted into Earth by Water, and not by Air, which merely feeds it. Similarly, Earth is transmuted into Fire by Air, and not by Water, which quenches Fire.

This cycle of alchemical change is shown in the diagram -



The resemblance should be noted to the ancient symbol of the Swastika considered as a force-diagram moving clockwise. The Nazi version moved anti-clockwise, and, perhaps naturally, proved disastrous. Curiously enough, they seem to have adopted it from the 19th-Century neo-paganist Guio von List, who observed that various symbols such as the Swastika occurred in medieval religious art and that the artists had been alchemists.

If we now return to the story of the Isle of Marvels, we see Merlin closely involved with the element of Water, whereas we might expect Fire. When we think of a wizard, we tend to go in for mime terms: Water Merlin with a flash and a bang, waving his wand and acting like a ball of fire! This is what magicians do. In a way, we are right. Fire stands for the force that wizards employ, and a wand is their magical tool. If we strike a match to light a candle, it is clear that fire feeds on what it touches, but can be directed at the end of a torch.

Yet, although Merlin and Fire go together, and we have many tales of his panto tricks, there are others in which Water is his element. He takes Arthur to a lake where the sword Excalibur appears. He falls in love with a water-sprite, who is his downfall. They say in Lancashire that he sleeps under Marton Mere. And he has a magical isle.

Alchemically, Water enters into his affairs because his magic, though powered by Fire, must be brought to earth by means of Water. A variant occurs in a late story: the water-sprite imprisons him, not in a stone symbolising Earth, but in a wall of Air. He had become too adept in controlling the Form of events and it had to be dissolved by means of Air. Just so does Prospero, on his magic isle, dissolve his magical towers and palaces into thin air, leaving not a rack behind, when he foregoes his powers.

The new hilt on Balin's sword is not a symbol of alchemy but of allegiance. In the Old English custom of Oath-hilt, a knight swore fealty by offering a sword, hilt-first, to his lord, who accepted the service by reversing the sword and returning it to be grasped or kissed. This was last done in England (or rather, Wales) in 1969, when the Queen dubbed Charles the Prince of Wales.

By means of his spell, Merlin ensured that the right man would grasp the hilt and then forget all vows to Arthur, possibly taking on whatever new ones were part of the magic. The bed in which sleepers went out of their wit seems to be part of the plot. One meaning of "wit" was memory.

It is tempting to invent a new tale of how Lancelot loses his memory in Merlin's Bed, and grasps the Adventurous Sword when he wakes. Malory leaves so many strands of the story lying loose that it would be easy to do a better job of cobbling than his. Poets, artists and writers have, for all, been doing so for centuries.

Shakespeare's "The Tempest" is a case in point. Prospero's Isle is the mirror of Merlin's, but the characters of the two magicians are not alike. "The Tempest" has no villain, for Prospero does not harm the castaways, although he teases them. Merlin is either good for Galahad or bad for Lancelot, depending on the story we read, almost as if their authors saw him as a symbol of amoral power, capable of being used for either

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good or evil. The major difference between Merlin and Prospero is that the latter chooses to be a white magician and finally to resign his powers, whereas Merlin does not.

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If Shakespeare did have Merlin's Isle in mind when he wrote "The Tempest", this difference may have been one of the points he wished to bring out. There is also the antithesis between the sweet and innocent Miranda, and Guinevere.

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The conflicting traditions of Arthurian romance are part of its charm. In a sense, it does not matter very much whether we ever find the true original source, for the subject leads to sufficiently rich insights wherever it is followed. The quest is enough.

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From Our Correspondence

From Patricia Villiers-Stuart.

DRAGON POWER STRIKES AGAIN ?

I was most interested by Marke Pawson's article in "Pendragon" Vol.10. No.2 entitled "Dragon Power". In the introduction it says it is "An account of the way in which apparently random reference to several different books seemed to connect people and events in history and mythology and the places associated with them in a rather surprising way." Is the following an example of just a touch of the old dragon at work ?

In the article Bligh Bond's "The Gate of Remembrance" is quoted from to tell the story, originally given in automatic writing to Bond, of one who called himself Phocis the Mariner. Phocis apparently came to England with the Phoenicians, their captain being Phaedrus. They brought with them a prince, who afterwards married a local princess Yseuguilt or Isolde. And this prince built a temple here "such as was of old in Judah".

In my mind this account sparked off a distant memory. Not quite far distant, only to my own youth. I was stage-struck in those days and became involved in a proposed performance of "The Waste Land". T.S. Eliot himself used to come to rehearsals. I regret to say it never really got off the ground. It's first and only ground being a top room somewhere in the vicinity of Covent Garden. However, later on, when I became interested in the symbolism of the Tarot cards, I remembered some of the lines we used to chant:

Madame Sosostiris, famous clairvoyante
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she
Is your card, the drowned Phoecean Sailor.
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look !)

and wondered about the Phoecean sailor. I couldn't seem to find any reference to him in the Tarot. What had T.S. Eliot intended ? That he had intended Tarot cards was obvious by his further mentioning the Wheel and the Hanged Man. I wrote to him to enquire. The reply was somewhat negative. He

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didn't know, couldn't remember.

Had the poet been reading Bligh Bond or was it just an example of the poetic mechanism filtering names, sounds, ideas in and out of time. A process so little understood by all but the very best scientific minds, although keenly appreciated by every visitor to a fortune teller at a Fair.

Following up recent articles concerning Bogomils from Bulgaria and Thracian Horsemen, Roger Rehm sends us the following note:

A Soviet construction engineer has deciphered an ancient Basque inscription which may prove the theory that the northern Spanish people originated in the Caucasuses, according to Pravda, the Communist party newspaper.

Pravda said the engineer had applied his knowledge of ancient Georgian to read the inscription on a plate excavated in the Basque city of Bilbao.

It read: "Our lot is bitter and hard. In the year 4100 (3479 years ago) there was a sudden earthquake. The wise Rio reminded his compatriots that this had happened before and that the country of the Iberians had plunged into an abyss and that is why they ought to leave this area and follow the sun. He managed to gather several hundred thousand people and they left towards the sunset. They found a new homeland there."

Scholars have long been struck by a similarity between the language and culture of the Basque and Caucasian peoples.

They have suggested the Northern Spanish people, whose language resembles no other in Europe, could have been descended from the Caucasian Iberians, the ancestors of present-day Georgians.

Scholars are working on the theory that Basque legends of a migration from the east following "a great battle between fire, earth and water," and Georgian legends that the "earth fell through", could refer to the same historical event.

From Professor Borst.

I have first met the Welsh Triads, and have naturally been fascinated. These should be valuable in penetrating pre-history. For instance they say that one of the "inalienable rights" is the gathering of acorns in unenclosed land. This is clearly pre-agricultural. I had come to the conclusion that acorns must have preceded wheat from references in Africa, and the sacred oak groves associated with Druids.

The early priests were so diligent in burning pagan religious books that we have nothing left, but laws are different, and apparently they have survived. This should be a significant line of investigation.

D. A. G. O. L. I. N. G. *****

To all those active members who are able to start on a new project NOW:-

Will you, please, go out into the highways and byways of your neighbourhood and discover as many drawings as you can -- on ancient gateways, in city walls, on armorial bearings of local families, possibly in the vicinity of churches dedicated to St. Michael or St. George.

If you have not already guessed the object of this exercise we will explain it to you when you send in your reports to us, preferably with photographs and/or drawings.

