

The Cauldron

A WITCHCRAFT NEWSLETTER

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From the first issue of *The Cauldron* magazine

OUR AIMS.

Twelve years ago, in February 1964, Gerald Gardner, who was responsible for the present interest in witchcraft, died aged 80. In the same year an organisation called 'The Witchcraft Research Association' was formed to bring together in mutual understanding the different sections of Craft and improve the public image of witchcraft. The W.R.A unfortunately faded away before it could achieve its aims and its demise was a great loss to those of us who thought its existence was of value. *The Cauldron* is in no way a replacement for the W.R.A., or a carbon-copy, but we do share its aims and hopes and are confident with your support, we can help to further these, if only on a limited scale. We have no axes to grind no evangelical message to give, no ulterior motives, no desire for personal fame or acclaim but merely a sincere desire to improve the image of the Craft and create co-operation between witches, pagans, covens, groups and all followers of witchcraft and the Old Religions.

We would like to provide an open, unbiased forum for exchange of views, ideas and discussion but – above all – mutual understanding, tolerance and creativity on all levels.

M.H.

WHY THE CAULDRON

We chose the name 'The Cauldron' for the newsletter as the symbolism connected with this vessel is of great importance within the Old Faith.

The cauldron is basically a symbol of the womb of the Great Mother and represents cosmic space in which all life has beginning and the Spirit of Light which manifests through all things in the Universe. Another aspect of the cauldron is the horn of plenty spilling forth the fruits of the harvest from Mother Earth.

In Christian symbolism the cauldron has been transformed into the Grail – the cup or platter used at the last supper. This Christian chalice can heal all sickness, restore fertility to barren land and create from the aether abundant food stuffs. It is in fact an exact copy of the original pagan vessel of fecundity.

On the physical plane the material representation of the spiritual cauldron was kept at Avalon – present day Glastonbury – [allegedly] guarded by nine maidens or priestesses of the Mother. [Many seers, such as Dion Fortune, have suggested] its resting place nowadays is marked by the Chalice Well at the base of the Tor and it was there in ancient times that the pagan mysteries of the Moon were performed by followers of the Old Religion of this country.

The cauldron was also a source of inspiration and wisdom – as in the myth of Ceridwen, the Celtic Goddess – and of immortality – see the tale of Bran the Blessed.

The cauldron is the most overlooked symbol of the Old Ways and it is due time that its mysteries were explored and revealed.

SHAPE-SHIFTING.

One of the strangest powers claimed by old time witches was the ability to 'fith-fath' or shape shift – change form at will. Ann Armstrong, one of the Northampton witches indicted in 1673, claimed that her

friend, Ann Baites, had demonstrated shape-shifting to her and transformed herself into a cat, hound and a bee. Possibly she donned animal masks to achieve these changes, especially as it occurred in the context of a ritual dance, but the belief that witches did have this power to assume animal form is deeply rooted in our racial subconscious. Evidence of this belief can be found in the popular folk song ‘The Two Magicians’ or ‘The Coal Black Smith’. The version of this rhyme given below is a modern one adapted by the poet Robert Graves, but is authentic in all aspects.

*‘O I shall go into a hare, with sorrow and sighing and mickle care.
And I shall go in the Devil’s name, Aye, ‘til I be fetched hame.
Hare take heed of a bitch greyhound, for here come I in Our Lady’s name,
All to fetch thee hame.’*

‘Cunning and art he did not lack, but aye her whistle would fetch him back.’

*‘Yet I shall go into a trout, with sorrow and sighing and mickle doubt,
And show thee many a merry game, Ere that I be fetched hame.
Trout take heed of an otter lank, will harry thee close from bank to bank,
For here come I in our Lady’s name, All to fetch thee hame.’*

‘Cunning and art he did not lack, but aye her whistle would fetch him back.’

*‘Yet I shall go into a bee, with mickle dread and horror of thee,
And flit to hive in the Devil’s name, Ere that I be fetched hame again.
Bee, take heed of a swallow hen, will harry thee close, both butt and ben,
For here I come in Our Lady’s name, All but I fetch thee hame.’*

‘Cunning and art he did not lack, but aye her whistle would fetch him back.’

*‘Yet I shall go into a mouse, and haste me to the miller’s house,
There in his corn to have good game, Ere that I be fetched hame.
Mouse, take heed of a white tib-cat, that never was baulked of mouse or rat,
For I’ll crack thee bones in Our Lady’s name, thus shalt thou be fetched hame.’*

‘Cunning and art he did not lack, but aye her whistle would fetch him back.’

Robert Graves

The obvious comparisons with the myth of Ceridwen and her magic cauldron can be made from this song. The term ‘fetched hame’ refers to the process of changing back from animal to human. The term ‘fetch’ was used in the Craft to describe the animal form adopted, or sometimes the familiar or imp. ‘Our Lady’ could possibly mean the Virgin Mary for Christian names were believed to be able to nullify the spells of witches (there is no truth in this of course!) but more likely it refers to the Moon Goddess. Silver – the metal of the Moon – moulded into bullets was believed to be the only thing which could kill a were-animal. ‘The Devil’ is Old Hornie or the witch master under whose direction the animal mimic dance was performed.

So we can see that ‘The Two Magicians’ is a folk song with Craft connotations, especially ones associated with the ancient art of shape-shifting.

M.H