



In recent years there has been a positive yearning in many hearts to return to a more natural way of living, and to protect nature - in all her forms - against the ravages of human greed and exploitation. Very much of this has been based on sound economic and ecological reasoning. Yet often one feels that these reasons are only rationalisations of a motive more difficult to express but far more profound. A feeling that beyond considerations of human self-interest, or even compassion for other creatures, there is something in nature that is intrinsically sacred.

As a Madrian, I find this a quite natural attitude. Matriarchal religion is closely bound up with nature. It is not a question of nature-worship (as is sometimes suggested by those who wish to see nothing but "primitive" superstition in our matriarchal past), but a recognition that nature is not only a creation of God, but has a special "purity" in that it has fallen less far from the primordial unity with Her than has mankind.

In the Scriptures of the Goddess we read very frequently that all physical things are the outward expression of Spirit. In their perfect state, they correspond to themis the Divine Order or Pattern. For example, in The Way of Simplicity, we read: "All nature is a vast and subtle music, to which the innocent soul is close attuned", but evil can disrupt the music of themis: "The profane assay to sever themselves from this music, fixing new laws of gain and self-advantage against the law of universal love." From the point of view of the earth plane, it is only humanity which can do this. Animals, stars and flowers all move within the natural harmony of themis. Physical nature is not perfect (animals prey on one another, plants may be parasitic, disease and death exist), but at its own level, it is a shadow of the primordial Perfection of God "from whence we came and whence we must return". Only Maid must make an act of will in order to conform to themis: "No tree may blossom out of season, nor any flower greet springtime with austerity, but a maid lacking inward control is broken from the rhythm." That is because only maid has the power of choice between good and evil, between harmony and discord.

The present age is wholly profane in having cut itself off as far as possible from the rhythm of nature, building an artificial urban lifestyle which is insensitive to the subtle currents of the seasons and the moon. Ignoring the complex pattern of rights and duties which characterise man's true relation with nature and substituting for it the evil and ignorant doctrine of "might is right", which allows humanity to plunder the earth without returning anything until it becomes a desert, to torture and brutalise our sisters of the animal realm without mercy and to exploit them as though they were insensate pieces of machinery.

All this is tied up with the doctrine that nature is a mere "accident", a chance arrangement of physical matter without meaning or spiritual significance. As soon as one realises that nature is the expression of Spirit, the essential blasphemy of the exploitative attitude becomes apparent. To truly experience nature is to revere her, and through her to revere She who has created her. Faced with the majesty of untamed nature, whether in the stars or in a forest, the human heart is overwhelmed with a feeling of wholeness and holiness - a feeling that here is something complete and as it should be - an earthly reflection of the awesome Perfectness of the Divine.

But it is not only in rare "mystical" moments of nature-experience that the holiness of nature can be with us. Time and again, I have noticed how as a person practices the seasonal rituals handed down from the dawn of time, and meditates upon their inner significance, slowly she becomes at one with the seasonal rhythm. Her work, her thought and her devotion change with every turning of the cycle. Her inner life is not the same in autumn as it is in spring, but follows the pattern of themis. This is how we were meant to be.

I believe that it is this spiritual transparency of nature which so many modern hearts are yearning for amid the desert of technological/commercial materialism. I believe that ecology and the "natural life" movement are truly a spiritual quest; a pilgrimage back to the true homeland of the human soul. Yet there is a danger. So long as the spiritual significance is not recognised, but is hidden under "sensible" justifications in terms of health, conservation of resources, etc. there is nothing to prevent "common-sense" compromises with

materialism which will leave the situation almost as bad as before. It also leaves us open to the charge (so intimidating in this "practical" age) that wherever we cannot find utilitarian justifications for our beliefs, we are mere sentimentalists.

No, respect for nature must be based on the hard spiritual facts of life. We must show that it is the materialists, with their crass scientism, their irrational fear of the supernatural, living in their self-made sterilised universe - it is they who are the dreamers. When they jackboot over nature in their frenzied scramble for every last penny, they do not know it is their own souls they are bruising. Only those who can see the spiritual Reality behind nature can be called realists.

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