

with the worship of the horned god.

The antiquity of this Yuletide masking is proved by the fact that it was denounced in vain by the early Christian church. In England, Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote his *Liber Poenitentialis* in the seventh century AD, in which he declared: "If anyone at the Kalends of January goes about as a stag or a bull; that is, making himself into a wild animal and dressing in the skin of a herd animal, and putting on the heads of beasts; those who in such wise transform themselves into the appearance of a wild animal, penance for three years because this is devilish."

The Kalends of January is New Year's Day, the very time that the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance used originally to be performed. It seems that the clergy, being unable to suppress the old ritual, eventually came to terms with it and, according to Dr Plot, used it as an occasion of collecting money to repair the church and give alms to the poor. However, they moved the date of the dance to the annual wakes, or holiday time. Meanwhile, the country people regarded it (and still do) as a survival of primordial magic.

One of the most time-honoured magical practices connected with animals and birds is that of augury. That is, of observing the actions of living creatures, and deciding whether this portends good fortune or ill. The Romans used to take this very seriously, having a College of Augurs, who observed the omens that appeared on any occasion of national importance. The augur wore a white robe, being regarded as a priest of the gods, and he carried a staff called a *lituus*. This was a long wand with a curved piece bending over at the top.

The augur would pray to the gods and then look at the scene through the curved end of his staff. Whatever animal or bird appeared within his view, observed in this way, would be interpreted as the gods' answer to his prayer, according to the meanings laid down by the College of Augurs.

In general, an animal or bird appearing from the right hand side was regarded as fortunate, but one which came from the left was unlucky. This is the derivation of our word 'sinister'. It is the Latin word meaning 'on the left', which foreboded ill.

Many of our beliefs about animals and birds are derived from this old Roman practice of augury. There are still many



Dusio, a mischievous nature spirit, a kind of cheerful hobgoblin



people who do not like to see a single magpie, for instance, because one magpie on its own is unlucky. There is an old rhyme about the magpie which says:

One for sorrow,  
Two for mirth,  
Three for a wedding,  
Four for a birth,  
Five for silver,  
Six for gold,  
Seven for a secret,  
That's never been told.

Many people, too, are quite afraid of owls, regarding them as uncanny creatures. Personally, I think the owl is a delightful bird and most useful in the way he makes war on rats and mice. Yet the old belief persists that the hooting of an owl, at some unusual time or place, is an evil omen; often it is said to mean news of a death. Probably because it is a bird of the night, with its weird cry and moon-like eyes, the owl is regarded as a bird of witchcraft. Old-fashioned woodcuts, paintings and engravings depicting witches seldom fail to show an owl somewhere in the background. For instance, when Frans Hals painted his portrait of Mallie Babbe, the sorceress of Haarlem, he showed her as a cheerful-looking lady with a tankard in her hand and an owl perched on her shoulder.

However, I doubt whether in real life an owl would often be kept as a witch's familiar. It would hardly make a practical pet and most witches' familiars in this country were (and are) simply pet animals or birds. Their difference from ordinary pets lies in the fact that they are believed to have a special link with their owner and with the spirit world, even to the point of being actually possessed at times by a spirit.

After all, if the idea is once accepted that human beings can act as mediums for spirits to communicate, why should not an animal be a medium also? Certainly, many people can testify that horses and dogs will react strongly to haunted places and demonstrate their awareness of a spirit presence.

The popular expression about 'rats deserting a sinking ship' is based on an old-time sailors' belief. Back in the days of sail, the sailors swore that if a ship was doomed to be wrecked on



her forthcoming voyage, then while she still stood in dock the rats would make their way to the shore across her mooring-ropes, and leave her. Rats and mice were also said to desert a house that was about to be burned down.

There are a number of strange stories on record about unusual behaviour of animals and birds before some natural catastrophe. In October 1923 the people of Tokyo complained of the peculiar restlessness of their dogs. The animals barked and howled with extraordinary noisiness and kept up their disturbed state until early in November. Then they fell silent and all stray dogs seemed to have disappeared — just before the city was struck by a severe earthquake which cost thousands of lives.

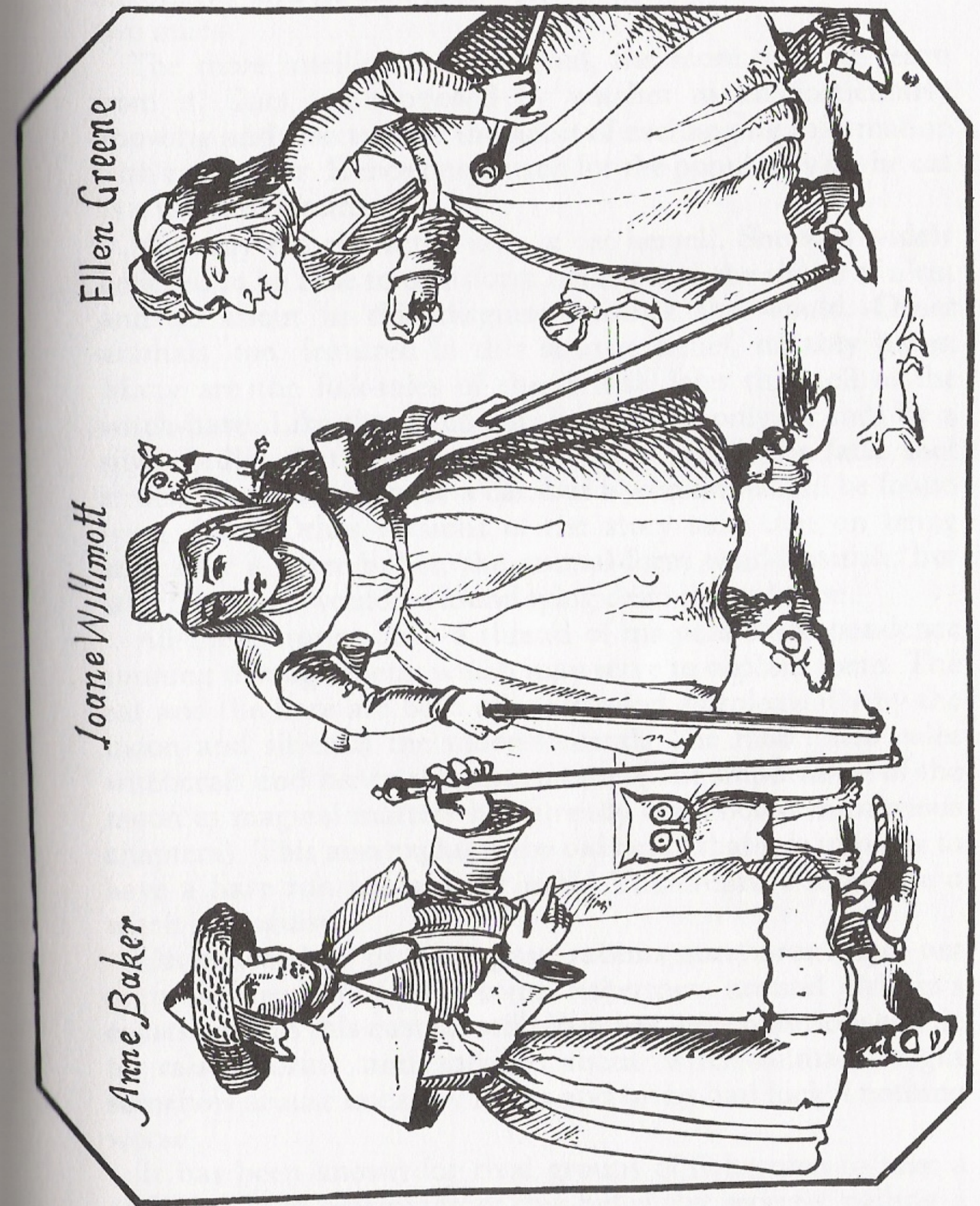
A similar thing happened a year before in Copiapo, Chile; only this time the disturbed animals were cats. Hundreds of them deserted the town and fled to the surrounding countryside. Then an earthquake hit the city, doing extensive damage and making thousands of people homeless.

The story goes, too, that before the terrible volcanic explosion on the island of Krakatoa in 1883, animals, birds and even fish deserted the locality. Animals actually leaped into the sea and swam away, to the amazement of onlookers who saw them doing this days beforehand.

In some strange way, animals and birds were believed to have foreknowledge of what was going to happen. Hence, if human beings could communicate with them, they could share this knowledge. One of the legends about King Solomon says that he was given the gift of understanding the languages of animals and birds and this was one way in which he was able to become the great magician that he is portrayed as in Eastern tales.

Such communion, however, does not have to be literally by a language; it can take place by telepathy. If a person is sufficiently sensitive, they can establish a telepathic *rapport* between themselves and an animal.

The famous jungle fighter of World War Two, Lieutenant-Colonel John Williams, earned his nickname of 'Elephant Bill' on account of his extraordinary power to control elephants. When he was fighting in the jungles of Burma, this ability came in very useful. He could also establish a *rapport* with



Three seventeenth-century witches and their familiars.  
From an old woodcut



dogs. Often he dared not call a dog aloud, in case the enemy heard him. So he just willed the dog to come to him by telephathy and he said that it never failed up to a distance of two miles.

The more intelligent the animal, the more one can learn from it. Cats are supposed by witches to be particularly knowing and also to have the habit of exchanging information with each other. Hence one reason for the popularity of the cat as a witches' familiar.

Not only did the witch keep a cat herself. She was widely believed to be able to transform herself into the shape of a cat and go about in this disguise whither she would. Other animals, too, featured in this strange belief, notably hares. Many are the folk-tales of the British Isles that tell of the witch-hare. Like the witch-cat, it could be only be shot by a silver bullet; but this was deadly to it and if the fatal shot struck, then not a hare or a cat, but a woman, would be found lying dead. Other versions of the story said that on being struck by a silver bullet, the animal-form would vanish; but later the witch would be found lying dead in her house.

All these stories have a thread of magical correspondence running through them, which may serve to explain them. The cat and the hare are both animals ruled astrologically by the moon and silver is the moon's metal. The moon also rules witchcraft and hence the association. (The importance of the moon in magical matters has already been noted in previous chapters). This also explains the old belief that it is unlucky to have a hare run across your path. The creature might be a witch in disguise.

On board ship, in times past, rabbits and hares might not even be mentioned and some fishermen around Britain's coasts keep to this custom still. Witches were notoriously able to raise storms and talking about witch-animals might somehow arouse uncanny forces and bring bad luck if nothing worse.

It has been known for rival groups of fishermen to take a rather spiteful advantage of this belief, by secretly nailing a rabbit's skin to the mast of their adversaries' boat. Fishermen who found this trick had been done to them would be furious because it meant they dared not put to sea until every scrap of



the ill-omened skin had been removed. As the ill-wishers took care to use as many nails as they could, this ceremonial cleansing would take some time; long enough, probably, to make the boat miss the tide while the others sailed off ahead of them.

In spite of their definite psychic sensitivity, one does not often hear of dogs in connection with witchcraft and magic, except for the sinister phantom dog known as Black Shuck. Stories of Black Shuck are found in the folklore of many English counties; but perhaps his favourite haunting ground is East Anglia, an area with strong associations of witchcraft.

He is described as a huge, coal-black hound with fiery eyes, who pads soundlessly by night along lonely lanes, or is seen after dark among the gravestones in ancient churchyards. He is also known as 'Padfoot', from his habit of following benighted travellers.

Further north, in Yorkshire and Derbyshire, he is known as the Barghest, and regarded as a portent of death. In Norfolk, too, he has this reputation and in Cambridgeshire. However, in other places, notably Essex and Lincolnshire, he is regarded as harmless if treated with respect — and the guardian of the good. There are many stories of travellers on lonely roads at night, who have been saved from robbers and ruffians by the apparition of Black Shuck.

Lincolnshire has many traditions of the phantom black dog. There is often some particular place associated with his appearance, such as a clump of trees or the bank of a stream. He generally appears upon the spectator's left and, unlike other ghostly beings, he does not at all mind crossing water. However, he never crosses a parish boundary. He will silently accompany someone along a lane or through a wood, and then vanish when some boundary-mark is reached.

It should be remembered in this connection that old parish boundaries often go back for centuries and that boundary-marks can figure as indicators of what Alfred Watkins described as 'leys' in his book *The Old Straight Track* (first published by Methuen & Co. London in 1925 and several times reprinted). There is not sufficient space available here to go fully into this subject; but present-day researchers who have followed up Alfred Watkins' discovery have come to the



Some of the names given to witches' familiars, according to Matthew Hopkins, Witch-Finder General



conclusion that leys do not merely consist of indications of trackways across the countryside. They also indicate lines of some mysterious kind of energy-flow, which is connected with the fertility of the land. People who travel along a ley are likely to have psychic experiences, especially at a place where two or more leys cross.

This subject, which is well worth investigation, is treated more fully in *The View Over Atlantis*, by John Michell (Garnstone Press, London, 1972). It is also referred to in *Mysterious Britain*, by Janet and Colin Bord (Garnstone Press, London, 1972).

Returning to the subject of the phantom black dog, it is curious to note his resemblances to the Egyptian Anubis, whom the Greeks associated with Hermes. The latter god was the guardian of roads, boundaries and waymarks; and he was also the *psychopompos*, or conductor of the souls of the dead. Anubis, too, was the guardian-god of the dead. He was depicted in Egyptian art as a god with a dog's head, or simply as a large black dog. When Howard Carter opened the tomb of Tutankhamen, there at the entrance to the burial chamber, where he had kept watch and ward throughout the centuries, was a magnificent statue of Anubis in his form as a black dog.

It will be seen how all the things associated with Anubis and Hermes — guardianship, death, way-marks, roads, boundaries — come into the stories about Black Shuck. Perhaps he is an archetypal figure from the collective unconscious of mankind?

Another magical animal which seems to haunt not only the English countryside, but the human mind, is the white horse. It is the favourite subject of Britain's famous and unique hill-figures, formed by removing the upper layers of turf and soil to reveal a different coloured earth, usually white chalk, underneath. For an unknown length of time, the country folk kept these figures in existence, by cleaning and renovating them at regular intervals, generally the magical number of every seven years. This 'scouring', as it was called, was accompanied by a folk festival of rustic games, feasting and dancing.

Nowadays, the white horses and other hill figures are recognized for their interest and antiquity and are generally preserved by archaeological associations. It is now known that



Britain's hill figures were made by the same basic technique as the famous Nazca figures in Peru; that is, by digging trenches and removing the top soil, to show lines of different coloured soil underneath. The so-called 'Candlestick of the Andes' is a similar figure, and not a rock-carving, as it is often described.

Britain's most famous white horse hill figure, and generally thought to be the oldest, is the one at Uffington in Berkshire. Cut on the edge of a beautiful green hill, its white chalk outline resembles the horses depicted in Celtic art, rather than the more naturalistic forms of later hill figures of horses. All kinds of speculations have been advanced to account for this and other British hill figures; but no one really knows their origin and meaning.

The legend of the Uffington White Horse says that it is the white horse of St George, because it was here that he fought and slew the dragon. Below the figure of the horse is an artificial mound called Dragon Hill. It is said that grass will grow very little, if at all, upon the summit of this mound, because of the dragon's poisonous blood which sank into the soil.

Nearby, giving a possible indication of the age of this mysterious figure, is a large enclosure surrounded by a prehistoric earthwork. This enclosure is known as Uffington Castle. Local legend says that if you stand in the centre of the horse's eye, turn round three times, and make a wish, that wish will come true, if sincerely willed from the heart.

St George, the champion of the powers of light against the powers of darkness, is frequently depicted in art as riding upon a white horse. Yet the white horse is rather an ambiguous figure in British folklore. In some places, it is considered unlucky to meet a white horse and the ill luck is averted by spitting on the ground. However, I remember being told as a child that it was lucky to meet a white horse "so long as you didn't see its tail"; in other words, the animal had to be coming towards you, not going away from you. In these circumstances, you could make a wish and hopefully it would come true, so long as you did not look again after the horse had passed you. This may be another relic of the practice of augury, or perhaps a memory of the white horse as

a sacred animal in times long past.

Another peculiarity of white horses is that officially they don't exist! However snow-white a horse may be, I am told that horse-breeders will never refer to it as such, but always call it a "light grey". Could this be a relic of some magical taboo?

The magical lore of birds is almost endless and only glimpses of it can be given here. Much of it dates from very ancient times, when our Celtic ancestors held certain birds to be sacred, because they were associated with the gods. The raven, for instance, was the companion of the Celtic god Bran. This may be the reason for the presence of the pet ravens who still live within the precincts of the Tower of London. The magical speaking head of Bran, which continued to discourse although severed from its body, was said to be buried on the site of the Tower of London, with the face towards France, so as to protect Britain from invasion. It remained there until King Arthur had it dug up and removed, saying that he would hold the country by his strength alone. According to Bardic legend, this was one of the three fatal disclosures of Britain.

We know that the Celtic inhabitants of ancient Britain had a custom of carving images of their gods in the form of heads, because many such sacred heads have been found. (See *Pagan Celtic Britain* by Anne Ross: Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, and Columbia University Press, New York, 1967). So this legend may be a folk-memory of the time when a sanctuary of Bran stood upon the site of the Tower of London, until a Christian king did away with it. Yet Bran's sacred ravens are still cared for on the spot, and may be seen calmly surveying the visitors with a superior air, as if they knew all the secrets of the Tower's long and darksome history.

During World War Two the ravens of the Tower were given a special ration of meat, as the raven is a carnivorous bird. Another old legend says that if the ravens ever leave the Tower for good, or their race dies out, it will be fatal to the British royal family.

The cuckoo as the herald of spring was believed also to be able to give omens of people's fate for the coming year. Whatever you were doing when you heard the first cry of the cuckoo would give you an idea of what you would be doing for



the rest of the year. The luckiest thing to be doing was to be standing on green grass; but if you heard the cuckoo first while lying in bed, it meant your health was threatened. Hence people used to go out into the country especially to hear the cuckoo, for luck.

The robin and the wren were believed to be sacred birds down to our own day. Anyone who injured them would suffer bad luck for it. There is a charming old saying from Sussex which runs like this:

Robins and wrens  
Are God Almighty's friends.  
Martins and swallows  
Are God Almighty's scholars.

The rhymes may not be very good, but the sentiment is deep and true.

The cock who greets the dawn with his crowing was anciently believed to have the power to disperse evil spirits, who fled at the first cock-crow. Hence the gilded figure of a cock which so often surmounts church steeples and weather vanes. He is there to drive away the evil demons, who were thought of as dwelling invisibly in the air, looking for opportunities to do mischief.

Finally, I like the old rhyme repeated by country people about sowing seeds, which seems to embody the idea that the world of nature is one, and that the birds, like ourselves, are entitled to their share in it:

Four seeds in a hole.  
One for the rook, one for the crow,  
One to rot and one to grow.  
Four seeds in a hole.

## XII

# Traditional Spells

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This collection of traditional spells has been gathered from several different sources. Some of the spells come from old books of magic and folklore; others from manuscript collections. The number of such spells surviving, in print and in manuscript, must be tremendous; but certain broad principles may be discerned, which underlie them all.

Firstly, they are a means of concentrating the mind, by the use of unusual words or actions, upon a certain desired effect. Secondly, they often employ the idea of sympathetic magic — that is, of mimicking the thing one wants to happen, or somehow acting it out symbolically. Thirdly, they make use of the astrological correspondences of things, such as herbs, precious stones, the feathers of birds, or the skins of animals, in the belief that like attracts like.

For instance, things ruled by the Sun, the great light of the heavens, will enable one to become powerful and fortunate; things ruled by Venus, the beautiful evening star and planet of love, will be efficacious in love spells and so on.

There is also the belief that many natural objects have secret magical virtues, and for this reason they are utilized in spells. One can trace this belief from the famous magical treatise called *The Magus*, by Francis Barrett (London, 1801), back to the *Occult Philosophy* of Cornelius Agrippa, the first dated edition of which appeared in 1533, and which had an extensive influence upon magical theory and practice; and back again from Agrippa to the *Natural History* of the Roman writer Pliny, who flourished in the first century AD. Many of the statements made by Barrett were copied from Agrippa, who in turn copied from Pliny.

There exists a very considerable literature of books dealing



with this belief in the secret virtues of things and how such virtues could be employed; a belief summed up by old writers under the heading of natural magic. *In herbis, verbis, et lapidibus, magna vis est*, ran the old Latin tag, meaning 'In herbs, words, and stones, there is great power'.

Naturally, only a small selection of these old spells can be given here. They are of antiquarian interest as representing very old beliefs, whether or not they actually worked. Many of them, unfortunately, involved cruel acts towards living creatures; these I have deliberately excluded. I have tried to select those which seemed comparatively harmless, or at any rate not too objectionable to modern standards; so that if any reader cares to try some of them out, not too much damage is likely to result.

Not having tried these old spells personally, however, I must point out that the responsibility is the reader's and that I quote them only as curios of ancient belief.

Here is some advice upon the making of 'suffumigations' or magical incenses, taken from the works of Cornelius Agrippa:

Fumes made with linseed, flea-bane seed, roots of violets, and parsley, doth make one to foresee things to come, and doth conduce to prophesying.

If of coriander, smallage, henbane and hemlock, be made a fume, spirits will presently come together; hence they are called spirits' herbs.

Also, it is said that a fume made of the root of the reedy herb sagapen, with the juice of hemlock and henbane, and the herb tapsus barbatus, red sanders, and black poppy, makes spirits and strange shapes appear; and if smallage be added to them, the fume chaseth away spirits from any place and destroys their visions.

In like manner, a fume made of calamint, peony, mint, and palma christi, drives away all evil spirits and vain imaginings.

If anyone shall hide gold or silver, or any other precious thing, the Moon being in conjunction with the Sun, and shall fume the hiding-place with coriander, saffron, henbane, smallage and black poppy, of each a like quantity, bruised together, and tempered with the juice of hemlock, that which is so hid shall never be found or taken away; and that spirits shall continually keep it, and if anyone shall endeavour to take it away he shall be hurt by them, and shall fall into a frenzy.

Hermes describes the most powerful fume to be that which is compounded of the seven aromatics, according to the powers of the seven planets — for it receives from Saturn, pepperwort; from Jupiter, nutmeg; from Mars, lignum aloes; from the Sun, mastic; from Venus,

saffron; from Mercury, cinnamon, and from the Moon, myrtle.

If a smooth, shining piece of steel be smeared over with the juice of mugwort, and be made to fume, it will make invoked spirits to be seen in it.'

(A note is necessary here, to point out that some of these herbs, particularly henbane, hemlock, smallage and black poppy, are poisonous and should be handled with care).

Two very famous books of magical secrets are entitled *Les Secrets Admirables du Grand et du Petit Albert* (generally the two volumes are bound together as one). They have been current in French-speaking countries since time immemorial, and are reputed to be the favourite grimoires of witches in the Channel Islands of Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark.

These treatises are attributed to Albertus Magnus, the famous thirteenth-century churchman and scholar; though he probably had nothing whatever to do with them. One can hardly imagine a sainted bishop (he was officially canonized in 1933) giving what in many cases are magical recipes for very unsaintly purposes. Many different editions of the books exist; from one of them, written in French (no date, but published by Beringos Fratres, Lyon, France), I have translated the following, from the section purporting to give magical secrets in matters of love:

The herb called elecampane (*enula campana*) has great virtues in affairs of love. It has to be gathered while fasting, before sunrise on the eve of St John's Day, in the month of June (in other words, before dawn on midsummer morning, in the night of 23rd-24th June). It must be dried and reduced to powder, with a little ambergris. Then, having carried it for nine days next to your heart, you must endeavour to put a little of it into the food or drink of the person whose love you desire, and the effect will follow.

(The inclusion of ambergris in this love-philtre probably derives from the fact that ambergris was anciently much esteemed as an aphrodisiac. Small quantities, or tinctures of it, used to be put into tea, coffee or chocolate, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for this reason).

Another spell from Albertus Magnus runs as follows:



How to make the apple of love. You must go one Friday morning, before the rise of the sun, into an apple orchard, and gather from a tree the finest apple that you can find. Then you must write with your own blood, upon a little square of white paper, your name and surname and underneath write the name and surname of the person by whom you wish to be loved; and you must try to obtain three of their hairs, which you must join with three hairs of your own, and use these hairs to bind the little piece of paper on which you have written with your blood. Then you must split the apple in two, and take out the pips; and in their place, you must put the little piece of paper bound with the hairs. Then with two little pointed sticks from a branch of green myrtle, you must carefully rejoin the two halves of the apple (that is, fasten the halves together), and put the apple to dry in an oven, until it becomes hard and without moisture, like the dried apples of Lent. You then wrap it in leaves of bay and myrtle, and you must try to place it underneath the head of the bed where the beloved person sleeps, without them knowing it; and they will soon give you proofs of their love.

If anyone was seriously trying to cast this spell, it would probably be a good idea to tie up the completed 'apple of love' in a little piece of net, so that the whole thing would hold together and the sweet-smelling leaves of bay and myrtle would not become scattered. Also, if writing out both names in full in your own blood seemed too heroic a proceeding, just the initials might be substituted; this would have the added advantage of being less of a give-away if the apple happened by some mischance to be found. A woman casting this spell could, of course, use her menstrual blood, which would probably be very potent for this purpose.

Albertus Magnus believed that there are seven herbs which are especially connected with the seven planets, and are therefore particularly potent in magical work, according to those planets' rulerships. These seven special magical herbs he calls *l'offodilius* for Saturn, *la renouee* for the Sun, *la chrinostate* for the Moon, *l'arnoglosse* for Mars, *la quintefeuille* for Mercury, *l'acharon* for Jupiter, and *le pistorion* for Venus.

From my own researches, I believe the present-day names for these plants to be as follows:

Saturn: Daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*).

Sun: Knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*).

Moon: Goosefoot (*Chenopodium album*).

Mars: Plantain (the family *Plantaginaceae*, of which there are several well-known species growing wild in Britain).

Mercury: Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*).

Jupiter: Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*).

Venus: Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*).

It will be noted that all of these are common wild flowers, with the exception of henbane and the wild daffodil (the latter being also known by its beautiful old name, the Lent lily). A word of caution is needed with regard to henbane; this is a poisonous plant and should be handled with care. According to Albertus Magnus, it is a lucky herb for men to carry with them who wish to be fortunate in love and enjoy the favours of women. Probably the herb, having been plucked at the correct time as given below, was then made up into a little packet and carried secretly on his person.

Vervain, the herb of Venus, was used in the same way, as a lucky charm. It bestowed enhanced sexual vigour upon those who carried it with them.

The root of the daffodil was recommended as a herb which would put evil spirits to flight. It should be wrapped in clean white linen, and either carried with one or hung up in the house.

To carry knotgrass was a means of contacting the beneficent powers of the Sun and thereby obtaining the good effects of the zodiacal sign in which the Sun was placed in one's horoscope.

Goosefoot, the herb of the Moon, was believed to be a charm to sharpen one's eyesight; because, says Albertus Magnus, our powers of sight are much influenced by the Moon. He may well really have meant clairvoyant sight, because psychic powers are certainly affected by the Moon.

The plantain likewise would be effective in compounding spells relative to the things ruled by the planet Mars; that is, courage, vigour, victory in struggle, enterprise and so on. It is interesting to note in this connection that the plantain herb is known as 'the Englishman's foot', because it is believed to have followed the English wherever they went, throughout the British Empire. This belief is in keeping with the old rulership of the plantain as given by Albertus Magnus.

Cinquefoil, the herb of Mercury, takes its name from the fact that it has five leaflets, and hence somewhat resembles the human hand. Albertus Magnus tells us that if a person carries



cinquefoil with them, it will make them clever, and will help them to obtain any favours that they may ask of others.

Albertus Magnus (or whoever really wrote *Les Secrets Admirables du Grand et du Petit Albert*) has some unusual advice about gathering these magical herbs. Most magical practitioners believe that herbs are more potent when gathered at full moon; but Albertus Magnus says that the seven special herbs described above should be gathered from the twenty-third day of the moon until the thirtieth, 'en commencent par Mercure', which it seems to me must mean that you should gather them during the dark of the moon on the day of Mercury, which is Wednesday. (The days of the moon are counted from new moon, which is the first day. Their number may vary from month to month). As you pluck the herb, you should name its virtues and the use you intend to make of it. Then take the herb, and lay it upon wheat or barley, until the time that you want to use it.

Coming now to traditional countryside spells, we may start with the ancient skills of charming away warts. One old spell tells the sufferer from these troublesome blemishes to go out shortly after the day of the full moon, but while moonlight still lingers, and pick up by moonlight as many small pebbles as they have warts. Touch each wart with a pebble and then tie up the pebbles in a little bundle or bag, made out of a piece of clean rag. Take this out to some lonely place and throw it away over your left shoulder. Come away without looking behind you; and from that day your warts will begin to disappear. The best place to throw away the charmed pebbles is supposed to be a crossroads where three or four ways meet. Anyone who finds such a package should beware, because if they open it, the warts will be transferred to them.

Another version of this spell tells us to take a cinder from the ashes of an open fire and rub each wart with it (a *cold* cinder, of course, is meant, so the charm would probably have been usually done first thing in the morning). Then tie up the cinder in a packet and throw it over your left shoulder at some lonely crossroads, as above, and the warts will leave you. This charm, too, is best worked in the waning moon, which is the time for banishing unwanted things.

One thing is absolutely essential, however, and that is that

you must tell no one about it, until the spell has worked and the warts are gone. Nor must you keep looking at the warts to see if the magic is working. On the contrary, you must do your best to dismiss it from your mind, as this gives it the best chance to succeed.

The genuineness of the power to charm warts has been attested to by no less a person than Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam (1561-1626). In his book *Sylva Sylvarum, or a Natural History in Ten Centuries*, he wrote as follows:

The taking away of warts, by rubbing them with somewhat that afterward is put to waste and consume, is a common experiment; and I do apprehend it the rather, because of mine own experience. I had from my childhood a wart upon one of my fingers; afterwards; when I was about sixteen years old, being then at Paris, there grew upon both my hands a number of warts (at least an hundred), in a month's space; the English Ambassador's lady, who was a woman far from superstition, told me one day she would help me away with my warts; whereupon she got a piece of lard with the skin on, and rubbed the warts all over with the fat side, and amongst the rest, that wart which I had from my childhood; then she nailed the piece of lard with the fat toward the sun, upon a post of her chamber window, which was to the south. The success was, that within five weeks' space all the warts went quite away and that wart which I had so long endured for company; but at the rest I did little marvel, because they came in a short time and might go away in a short time again, but the going of that which had stayed so long doth yet stick with me. They say the like is done by rubbing of warts with a green elder stick, and then burying the stick to rot in muck.

In olden days, nightmares were believed to be caused by evil spirits or black magic. A remedy against such terrors was to hang a large stone with a natural hole through it, on the wall over the head of the sufferer's bed. A large old-fashioned iron or steel key would serve the same purpose. Sometimes both of these things were hung up together. This was also believed to be a way of protecting horses and cattle from bewitchment and uncanny influences. Hence such keys, with a holed stone tied to them, were often to be seen hanging up in stables or cowsheds.

The belief that both people and animals could be adversely affected, either by ill-willing or by the fairies, is reflected in the old Yorkshire rhyme, repeated by country folk half in jest and half in earnest:



From witches and wizards,  
 And long-tailed buzzards,  
 And creeping things that run in hedge-bottoms,  
 Good Lord, deliver us.

This rhyme was supposed to be a protection against all uncanny things, and also against the evil eye. (So too was the practice of carrying a small piece of rowan wood, or mountain ash, in one's purse or pocket. See Chapter III, where the magical virtues of rowan wood have already been mentioned). Presumably the buzzard was regarded as ill-omened because it is a bird of prey.

A popular, but rather more serious and even frightening spell, was one to obtain an apparition of one's future husband, wife or lover. One version of this spell tells the man or woman who wishes thus to obtain a glimpse of the future, to sit alone late on Christmas Eve, between two large mirrors. That is, they must be facing one mirror and have another mirror somewhere behind them. They must have a lighted candle on either side of them and no other lights in the room. Then they must watch until they can see twelve reflected candles, and when this happens, the image of the future lover will appear in the mirror.

It seems evident that auto-hypnosis could play a significant part in this and induce a condition of light trance in which innate clairvoyant power might well produce some manifestation.

Another spell for the same purpose had to be worked when one first saw the new moon after Midsummer's Day (24th June). This was usually worked by girls, though of course a man could do it and vary the words of the spell accordingly. The operator had to go out in the evening twilight to a stile, lean her back upon it and look up at the crescent moon. Then she repeated the words of the charm:

All hail, new moon, all hail to thee!  
 I prithee, good moon, reveal to me  
 This night who shall my true love be;  
 Who he is, and what he wears,  
 And what he does all months and years.

She would then see a phantom form of her future lover. If nothing appeared, however, the spell had not necessarily

failed. She must go to bed without telling anyone of it and she might then see the future lover in a dream.

A third spell of this kind is likewise essentially a piece of moon-magic; because it is worked at the full moon and uses willow, the moon's own tree. Again, this is given as a feminine spell, but a man could use it if he wished. The woman had to go secretly to a willow tree and cut a wand of willow. As always, she must tell no one about it, or the spell would be broken. Then at midnight when the moon was full, she had to slip out of the house without being seen, holding the wand in her left hand. She had to run three times round the house, saying each time, "He that is to be my love, come and catch the other end!" At the third circuit, an apparition of the future lover would appear and seem to take the other end of the outstretched wand.

If it was impossible to run three times round the house, on account of the way it was built, then she must make three circuits as best she could, round the lawn or a nearby field. If she saw nothing, then she should return indoors and hide the willow wand beneath the head of her bed. Something significant would then be communicated to her by a dream.

It is not generally realized that the original purpose of distributing small pieces of wedding cake to friends of the bride and groom after the ceremony, was not only for them to wish good luck to the newly-weds while eating the cake, but also to work a spell. To put a piece of wedding cake under one's pillow, was a way to dream of one's future husband or wife. First, however, you had to borrow a wedding-ring, preferably from someone who was happily married, and pass the little piece of cake through it. Then wrap the cake in clean paper and put it beneath the pillow.

There is a very old belief that onions and garlic will absorb evil influences. For this reason, old-fashioned housewives would never use for food any onions that had been peeled and then left overnight; because they feared that such onions would contain infection or ill luck, which would somehow fall upon the person who ate them.

However, this belief lent itself to spells for banishing evil. If someone had a run of bad luck, and ascribed it to evil spirits or



ill-wishing, they could perform the following ritual. Get three small onions, peel them and hang them up separately in convenient places in the house — say, one in the living-room, one in the bedroom and one in the kitchen. The hanging should be done by threading a large needle or bodkin with a piece of red thread and passing it through the onion, then tying the thread to make a loop.

Leave the onions hanging up for seven nights. Then take them down and place each one on a square of clean paper. Sprinkle them well with salt and then wrap them up in the squares of paper and burn them upon a good, bright fire, making sure that they are completely consumed. This will destroy the evil influence.

In the old days, when every house had a large kitchen fire, this was easy. Today, however, many people do not have open fires; but they can still work this spell by throwing the onions into a running stream, or into the sea when the tide is going out. Or they could do the same as is recommended in the wart-charming spells, namely, take the packets to a lonely crossroads, throw them over your left shoulder and come away without looking behind you.

There has always been something magical about the craft of the blacksmith. If you can find a skilled, working smith (and there are still some about today), ask him to take a horseshoe nail and hammer it into a ring for you. You will then have a magical ring more efficacious than any expensive piece of shop-bought jewellery. It will bring you good luck and ward off evil.

The list of traditional charms and spells could be continued almost indefinitely. One principle, however, emerges clearly. That is, that what matters in casting a spell is the amount of personal effort, faith and belief that the person concerned puts into it.

There is a certain old proverb that is true, both for good luck and bad:

*There is no one luckier than he who thinks himself so.*



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