

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

VOL. XXXV (No. 3)

MARCH, 1921

NO. 778

CONTENTS:

	PAGE
<i>Frontispiece. Stonehenge.</i>	
<i>The Affinity of Druidism with Other Religions</i> (With illustrations). DUDLEY WRIGHT	129
<i>The Problem of Eternal Punishment in Jean Jacques Rousseau.</i> JOSEPH I. CHESKIS	141
<i>"Michael Wood": A Study in Mysticism.</i> VINCENT STARRETT	148
<i>Selections from Chu Tzu's Advice on Home Management.</i> Translated by HARDIN T. McCLELLAND	155
<i>Secularized Mystics.</i> THEODORE SCHROEDER	163
<i>The German Constitution of July 31, 1919.</i> EMIL REACH	172
<i>The New Mysticism.</i> GUY BOGART	180
<i>The Wanderlure</i> (Poem). LOUISE MALLINCKRODT KUEFFNER	191

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STONEHENGE, Trilithons (B and C) from the South West.
(From *Stonehenge, Tursachan and Cromlechs*, by Col. Sir Henry James. 1867.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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THE AFFINITY OF DRUIDISM WITH OTHER RELIGIONS.

BY DUDLEY WRIGHT.

THE Druidical religion and philosophy were so like to the Pythagorean system that some writers have arrived at the conclusion that the one was borrowed or adapted from the other, but the borrower is assumed generally to be Pythagoras and not the Druids. Dr. Abraham Rees, in his *Cyclopaedia*, is of opinion that Pythagoras himself learned and adopted some of the opinions of the Bards, and imparted to these some of his own thoughts and discoveries. Milton states that: "the studies of learning in the deepest sciences have been so eminent among us that writers of good antiquity have been persuaded that even the school of Pythagoras and the Persian wisdom took beginning from the philosophy of this island." Borlase, in his *Antiquities of Cornwall*, expresses the belief that long before Greece could boast of her wise men, Britain was famous for learning, philosophy, and wisdom, and that the Greek philosophers were really beholden to our Bards whom they copied in many particulars. In the opinion of Toland, no heathen priesthood ever attained the perfection of the Druidical, which he describes as being "far more exquisite than any other system, as having been much better calculated to beget ignorance and an implicit disposition in the people, no less than to procure power and profit to the priests."

Both the Druidic and Pythagorean alphabets were Etruscan in character. The three Orders of Druidism correspond to the three Orders of Pythagorics, Pythagoreans, and Pythagorists. Each cultivated the study of theosophy, metaphysics, ethics, physics, the magnitude and form of the earth, the motions of the heavens and stars, medicine and magic. Pythagoras enjoined the rule of con-

cealing philosophy from the uninitiated and forbade it to be written down.

The points of resemblance between Druidism and Brahminism are very striking. In ancient times, according to Brahminical lore, a great intercourse existed between India and the countries in the West, and the British Isles are said to have been described in the *Puranas* as *Breta-st'han*, or the "Place of Religious Duty." Faber in his *Cabiri* gives expression to the opinion that the undoubted resemblance which existed between Brahminism and Druidism, originated probably from the Asiatic extraction of the Druids. The various Japhetic tribes which peopled Europe all came out of the widely extended regions of Tartary; and many of them, among whom were doubtless the Celtic Druids, came from the neighborhood of the Indian Caucasus. The Brahmins made it a rule never to reveal to the uninitiated the secret doctrine of their religion and, in like manner, the Druids concealed from strangers and the uninitiated even of their own country, the sacred mysteries of their religion. There was throughout India a veneration for the serpent; among the Druids there was a superstitious reverence for the *Anguinum*, or serpent's egg, and many of their temples were constructed in serpentine form. The Druids regarded it as unlawful to eat ducks, hens, and other winged animals. The Brahmins, of course, looked upon the killing of any live animal as unlawful and abstained from eating anything that had been killed. The Brahmins carried a sacred staff and a consecrated wand or magic rod was carried by every Druid as a sign of his initiation. Brahma is generally represented as holding in his hand a wheel or circle and the circle was regarded by the Druids as a symbol both of the sun and of eternity. Each had a veneration for white horses and for vast pyramidal heaps of stones. The Indian stone temples were, for the most part, uncovered or in the open, like Stonehenge, Abury, and many other sites. Each had solemn rites of initiation; in each religion the priests wore tiaras and white robes, not unlike the Persian Mithra. Just as the Brahmins were the most venerated caste in India, so the Druids were regarded as superior even to the nobility of Britain. Belief in the immortality of the soul was the basic article in each creed, combined in both with the belief in transmigration. Each had severities of discipline and penitential exercises. Maurice is of opinion that "it is impossible to doubt that at some remote period the two orders were united, or, at least, were educated in the same grand school with the Magi of Persia and the seers of Babylon," while Sir W. Jones contends that a race

of Brahmins anciently sat on the throne of Persia. Barrow in Volume II of *Asiatic Researches*, says: "That the Druids were Brahmins is beyond the least shadow of a doubt, but that they were all murdered and their sciences lost, is out of all bounds of probability: it is much more likely that they turned schoolmasters, Freemasons, and fortune-tellers; and, in this way, part of their sciences might easily descend to posterity, as we find they have done."

There is also a striking resemblance between Druidism and Judaism. Not only did each religion inculcate a belief in a Supreme Being, but the name given to that Supreme by each is akin. The Jewish name for the Supreme Being, Jehovah, means "The Self-Existent," or, to adopt the term employed by Moses Maimonides, "The Eternal." Among the Druids, Bel was the name given to the Supreme, the meaning of which is "He that is." The name "Ptah," also, it may be pointed out, means, "I am all that has been, is, or shall be." The Hebrews were accustomed to worship the Eternal under the name of Baal. Thus we read in Hosea ii. 15: "And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baal." This was because the Israelites had become idolaters and served other deities under the name of Baalim. Each possessed a priest vested with supreme authority, and had three classes or orders of sacred men. The Jews had their priests or judges, prophets, and scribes, while among the adherents of the Druidical faith there were the Druids, Bards, and Vates. Each measured time by a night and a day. Grove worship was common to both Israelite and Druid, and it is clear from the many references to the oak in the Old Testament that it was regarded as a sacred tree. The same Hebrew word which signifies "oak" also means "an oath," and the root of this word is "mighty" or "strong," the root of the name given to the Deity in many languages. The angel (or messenger) of the Eternal came and sat under the oak at Ophrah when sent to deliver a message to Gideon (Judges vi. 11). A similar instance is recorded in 1 Kings xiii. 14. In Ezekiel vi. 13, and Hosea iv. 13, reference is made to the practice of offering up incense under the oak. It was at the oak of Moreh (Genesis xii. 6, R. V.) that the Eternal appeared to Abram, and it was there that Abram built an altar. Joshua (xxiv. 26) wrote particulars of the covenant in a book of the law of God and took a great stone and set it up under an oak tree, by the sanctuary of the Eternal. Among the Jews the oak was occasionally a burying-place. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried beneath Bethel, under

an oak (Genesis xxxv. 8), and Saul and his sons were buried under an oak (1 Chronicles x. 12). Abraham planted a grove of trees as a retreat of silence and solitude and prayer, but, in later times, the denunciations of heaven were launched against groves, because they were used by idolaters, or the followers of a different religion. The May-day festival was in honor of spring, when the sun entered the sign of Taurus, the bull. Hence, the calves, or bulls adored by the Israelites were golden, because gold was a fitting representation of the benign sun, then beginning to shed his glittering beauties at the approach of Spring. By the ancient Britons, says Faber, in his *Pagan Idolatry*, the bull was not only revered in a very high degree, but he was likewise revered and exhibited by them exactly in the same manner as he was by the Egyptians, the Hindus, and the Greeks. He was the symbol of their great god, Hu, the whole of whose character and attributes prove him to be one with Osiris, Siva and Bacchus, all of which deities were represented by living bulls. The oak also has been held in veneration by all nations and peoples. In Rome an oak garland or crown was called *corona civica*, and was bestowed only upon him who had saved a citizen's life, though in process of time it came to be bestowed upon an official if he spared a Roman citizen when he had power to kill him. In Ovid's time the emperor had always standing before his gates an oak tree, in the midst of two laurels, as an emblem denoting two worthy virtues, required in all emperors and princes; first, such whereby the enemy might be conquered; secondly, such whereby the citizens might be saved. In Sweden, the ancient inhabitants held in reverence and awe the sacred groves and trees, because they regarded them as given by the Supreme as ornaments to his noble creation, as well as to afford protection to the husbandman and cattle against the scorching heat of the midday sun. The Dryopes, who lived near to Thibet, are said to have been named from *drus*, an oak, and *ops*, the voice, and Pococke claims that they are identical with the Druids. Dr. Stukeley calls Abraham "the first Druid," in reference to the oak grove at Beersheba.

The affinity between Druidism and the religion of the Persians is strongly marked. The Druids held that the Supreme Being was too exalted to be confined within temples made with hands. Their open-air temples were round and in their form of worship they made use of circles to intimate that God was to be found in every direction. Cyrus, in Xenophon, sacrifices to Jupiter, the sun, and the rest of the gods, upon the summits of mountains, "as the Per-

sians were wont to sacrifice." The Persians taught that the celestial expanse was their Jupiter, whom they worshiped in the open air. In like manner to the Druids, the Persians forbade the introduction of images into their temples, for they held that the Supreme was too refined to be represented by any figure, a belief also taught by Mohammed and held firmly by all Moslems to the present day. The Druids were not idol worshippers, and they would not sanction the setting up of any image or statue, although certain stones, rough as taken from the quarry and consecrated according to ritual, are said to have been erected in retired spots to represent Isis, or Ceridwen, British divinities whose merits were eulogized by the Bards. Some of the Persian temples were caverns in rocks, either natural or artificial. They had likewise Puratheia, or open temples, for the celebration of their rites of fire. The Persians also venerated the serpent, which they regarded as a representation of their god Mithras, who, according to their teaching, was born from the rock. The Druids had their sacred fires and the Persians had their holy flame, to which they paid divine honors, and they, like the Druids, lighted festal fires at the return of the consecrated season. The Druids considered their fires to be antidotes against the diseases of cattle, and the Persians extended their powerful influence to the human body, placing their sick within the range of the gentle heat of the fire, in order that they might recover the more quickly. The Druids compelled the Britons at a certain season of the year, to extinguish all their fires and to rekindle them from the sacred fire, a toll being exacted, and, with some trifling variations, a similar custom prevails in Persia to the present day. In the art of divination, both the Druids and Persians are said to have been proficient; both also regarded it as unlawful and a sacrilege to cut the mistletoe with anything but a golden scythe, and the Persians used a knife consecrated and set aside for that special purpose. Both knew the power of excommunication and cast out and expelled from their communion the abandoned and impenitent transgressors of their holy laws. In Mithraic worship there were ceremonial bull fights annually on the first of May, but the Maypole festival was common to all ancient countries and is generally believed to have a phallic origin. Cicero says that none was qualified to be king of Persia who had not first learned the doctrine and science of the Magi. The Persians, even in ages when temples were common in all other countries, had no temples made with human skill, which was the reason, some think, that Xerxes burned and demolished the temples of Greece. Porlase, as did Strabo, saw much similarity between



TOLMEN CORNWALL.

(From *The Celtic Druids* by Godfrey Higgins, F.S.A. 1829.)

the Magi and the Druids; each carried in the hand, during the celebration of sacred rites, a bunch of plants: that of the Magi was the *Hom*, or Barsum, which closely resembled the mistletoe. Dr. Stukeley is of opinion that this parasite is the same as that mentioned in Isaiah vi. 13. It is generally agreed by commentators that the "tiel" tree of the translators should be rendered "oak," or a species of sacred lime, having purple flowers, like those of the vine, growing in bunches, with a fruit of ruddy purple, the size of a juniper berry. It will be noticed that it is winter time with this tree, and Dr. Stukeley maintains that the passage should be translated: "As an oak, whose plant is alive upon it, which, says Isaiah, "shall be eaten," so that here we have the same idea in regard to the all-heal, or mistletoe, as was the case with the Hom.

A similarity also existed, both in belief and practice, between Druidism and the religion of the Phœnicians. Pinkerton, in his *Enquiry Into the History of Scotland*, says that Druidism was palpably Phœnician, and Sammes remarks that "the customs, religion, idols, offices, and dignities of the ancient Britons are all clearly Phœnician."

There are many points of affinity between Druidism and the religion of Greece. The Greeks worshiped their gods upon the tops of mountains. Jupiter, in Homer, commends Hector for the many sacrifices he had offered upon the top of Ida.

"My heart partakes the generous Hector's pain;
Hector, whose zeal whole hecatombs has slain,
Whose grateful fumes the gods received with joy,
From Ida's summit and the towers of Troy."—*Pope*.

They also worshiped in groves of trees, and looked upon the oak as the oldest tree. It was so common to erect altars and temples in groves, and to dedicate them to religious uses, that all sacred places, as we learn from Strabo, even those where no trees were to be seen, were called groves. The solitude of groves was regarded as creative of religious awe and reverence in the minds of the people. Pliny says that in groves the very silence of the place became the object of adoration. Ovid says:

"A darksome grove of oak was spread out near,
Whose gloom oppressive said: "A god dwells here."

The number three was commonly observed in the religious ceremonies of the Greeks. Thus, in Ovid,

"Terque senem flamma, ter aqua, ter sulphure lustrat."

It was customary for the Greeks on some occasions to dance round the altars while they sang the sacred hymns, which consisted of three stanzas or parts, the first of which, called *strophe*, was sung in turning from east to west: the other, named *antistrophe*, in returning from west to east: then they stood before the altar and sang the *epode*, which was the last part of the song. The Greeks practised divination by the entrails of animals slain. If the entrails were whole and sound, had their natural place, color, and proportion, then all was well: but if any part was decayed, or wanting, if anything was out of order or not according to nature, evil was portended. The palpitation of the entrails was a very unfortunate omen. Pythagoras, the soothsayer, is said to have foretold the death of Alexander because his victims liver had no lobes. Among the Greeks the oak of Dodona was the seat of the oldest Hellenic oracle, whose priests sent forth their declarations on its leaves.

The Egyptians worshiped the sun, and the serpent was sacred among them, as representing the eternal existence of the Deity. At the temple of Isis at Dendera there is a representation of a procession of men and women bringing to Isis, and Osiris, who stands behind her, globes surrounded with bulls, horns, and mitred snakes. The Egyptians had a Tauric festival and even went so far as to embalm cattle. They were firm believers in the doctrine of metempsychosis. They also offered up both human and animal sacrifices.

If not Druidism, it was a religion of a very similar character which was followed by the inhabitants of a considerable part of Italy. The Sabin country lies about twenty miles to the north of Rome, on the west side of the Tiber. On the top of the mountain Soracte in that country were the grove temples and carn of Apollo. Hirpins was the name given to the race of people inhabiting that district, and they held annually a sacrifice, similar in every respect to that of the Druids. It is referred to in Dryden's version of Virgil's *Aeneid*:

“O Patron of Soracte's high abodes,
 Phœbus, the ruling pow'r among the gods
 Whom first we serve, whole woods of unctuous pine
 Burnt on thy heap, and to thy glory shine;
 By thee protected, with our naked soles
 Thro' flames unsinged we pass, and trend the kindl'd coals.
 Give me, propitious pow'r to wash away
 The stain of this dishonourable day.”

The priests of Moloch also walked through the fires they lighted in honor of their god.

John Keeson in *The Cross and the Dragon* relates how the Franciscan missionaries, when they reached the court of the Prince of Batou, situated on the Volga, had first to pass through two fires in order to destroy any malign influences they might have brought with them. Two lances erected by the side of these fires supported a stretched cord, from which depended several pieces of rag; and,



STONEHENGE

(From *Stonehenge, Tursachan and Cromlechs*, by Col. Sir Henry James. 1867.)

beneath this cord, to be purified, had to pass men, beasts, and gods. Two females, one on each side, sprinkled them with water at the same time, reciting certain words in performing the act.

It was the custom among many ancient peoples to erect a stone in commemoration or remembrance of any benefit received at the hands of the Supreme. Such practice was particularly observed among the Jews. Jacob, after his wonderful vision, "rose up early

in the morning and took the stone that he had put for his pillow and set it up as a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it" (Genesis xxxviii. 18). He did the same when he entered into a covenant with Laban (xxxii. 45), and when he is said to have talked with God at Bethel (xxxv. 14). Joshua built at Gilgal (a word which means "a circle"), a temple composed of twelve stones, and when he had assembled the children of Israel within this temple he told them that when their children should ask them the meaning of the stones they were to make answer that it was the acknowledgment of the power of the Eternal. The custom of venerating baetyla, or consecrated stones, and worshiping under oaks was diffused over both hemispheres in the remotest periods. The existence of stone monuments, whose antiquity is undoubted by archeologists, is proof that learning and culture existed in Britain long prior to the Roman invasion, before even the foundation of Rome. Stone circles are common in America, in the province of Coimbatore in India, and over all northern Europe, as well as in several of the islands of the Mediterranean. Sir John Chardin says that he saw in Media a circle of stones which the traditions of the people living near, in singular conformity with Grecian and Celtic customs, ascribed to Caous, or giants, who wishing once to hold a council respecting some matter, brought each his official seat and left it, when the meeting broke up, as a wonder to men. The explorations of the Ordnance Survey of 1869 proved the existence in Palestine and Arabia of circles "nearly identical in character with those which in England and Scotland are commonly called Druidical circles." In Germany, as in England, the oak was long regarded as a sacred tree; solemn assemblies were held beneath it, and decrees were often dated *sub quercibus* or *sub annosa quercu*. Scandinavian folk lore ascribed man's origin to the oak or ash, a myth also prevalent among the Romans. The Arcadians believed their ancestors were oaks before they became men.

Whenever possible the tops of hills were chosen by the Druids for their services and worship; their temples of initiation and the scenes of the performance of their secret and sacred rites being in caves. Mountain worship is referred to frequently in the Old Testament as being a patriarchal practice just as afterward it was adopted by non-Israelitish nations. The Persians also worshiped on mountain tops. When Philip II made war against the Spartans he sacrificed on the mountains of Olympus and Eva. Cyrus sacrificed to the gods on the mountain just before his death. So, in China, 2300 years before the Christian era, sacrifices were offered

to the Supreme and Chan-Ti on the four great mountains with the four Yo. Cicero tells us that when Xerxes made his expedition into Greece, the Magi commanded that all the Grecian temples should be destroyed "because the Grecians were so impious as to enclose those gods within walls who ought to have all things around them open and free—their temples being the universal world."

The principal deity of the Germans was Mercury; they sacrificed human victims, they had open temples, they consecrated groves and venerated oaks, and computed by nights instead of by days, and this last-named practice was common to all the northern nations of Europe.

It has been a practice from time immemorial to build temples in the form of crosses. The *crux ansata* of the Egyptians was the hieroglyphic of life. A serpent joined to the cross symbolizes the immortality of the soul.

The close affinity between the doctrines of the newly-established Christian faith, as taught by the early missionaries, and the beliefs of Druidism, will warrant the assertions of several writers that the followers of the Bardic faith were so struck with the similarity of the doctrines of the new religion that they were without difficulty persuaded to embrace Christianity. It was a question really of merging of beliefs, rather than an entire change of faith. O'Donovan in his *Annals of the Four Masters* says: "Nothing is clearer than that Patrick engrafted Christianity on the pagan superstition with so much skill that he won the people over to the Christian religion before they understood the exact difference between the two systems of belief, and much of this half-pagan, half-Christian religion will be found, not only in the Irish stories of the Middle Ages, but in the superstitions of the peasantry of the present day." The cross, as a symbol, was known to and revered by the Druids, and their mode of consecrating an oak-tree was, first to fasten a cross beam upon it if the two main horizontal arms were not sufficiently prominent. Upon this right branch they cut in the bark, in fair characters, the word "Hesus"; upon the middle or upright stem, the word "Taramis"; and upon the left branch, the word "Belenus." Over all, and above the branching out of the arms, they inscribed the word "Thau" (see Ezekiel ix. 4), and, according to Schedius, "This tree so inscribed, they made their Kebla in the grove cathedral, or summer church, toward which they direct their faces in the offices of religion, as to the ambre-stone or the cove in the temple of Abury, like as the Christians do to any symbol or picture at the altar." St. Columb, when in Deacon's Orders, is said to have placed him-

self under the instruction of an aged Bard, named Gemman. A miracle wrought by St. Bridgit in the production of butter is given as the cause of her Druidical master becoming a Christian. Richards, in his *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, published in 1794, says in the preface: "The patriarchal religion of ancient Britain, called Druidism, but by the Welsh most commonly *Barddas*, Bardism, although they speak of *Derwyddentaeth*, Druidism, is no more inimical to Christianity than the religion of Noah, Job, or Abraham; it has never, as some imagine, been quite extinct in Britain; the Welsh Bards have, through all ages down to the present, kept it alive. There is in my possession a manuscript synopsis of it by Llewellyn Sim, a Bard, written in the year 1560; its beliefs are corroborated by innumerable notices and allusions in our Bardic manuscripts of every age up to Taliesin in the sixth century, whose poems exhibit a complete system of Druidism. By these (undoubted authentic) writings it will appear that the ancient British Christianity was strongly tinctured with Druidism. The old Welsh Bards kept up a perpetual war with the Church of Rome and therefore experienced much persecution. Narrow understandings might conceive that they were the less Christians for having been Druids. The doctrine of the metempsychosis is that which, of all others, most clearly vindicated the ways of God to man. It is safely countenanced by many passages in the New Testament and was believed by many of the primitive Christians and the Essenes among the Jews." Dr. Stukely boldly asserted that Druidism and Christianity were identical. It is clear that Christianity assimilated Druidism to a great extent, but it is difficult to say how much the newer faith was indebted to the older religion. There is no evidence that the Druidical Britons gave other than a welcome, and, it may be, a hearty welcome to the exponents of the newer creed: in fact, Christian historians state that the Britons embraced the new teachings with more alacrity than any other nation. There is, indeed, a legend to the effect that Edwin was persuaded to embrace the Christian faith by Corfe, the chief of the Druids. At that time, also, it must be remembered, the Christian religion had not developed many of the corruptions and sacerdotal elements which afflicted it in later times.