

HALLOWEEN

Halloween – More Than Just a Bit Of Fun

A few days ago, it was Halloween. Recently, I heard a story about an event on a previous Halloween, it might have been overseas somewhere that it happened, and concerned a mother of youngish children who togged them up in lurid costumes and make up, and led them round ill-lit streets Trick-Or-Treating. They were having a fun time until one of the householders emerged with some apples with something sharp and nasty in them. I don't think anyone was hurt, fortunately, but it rather ruined their evening. My only thought, when I heard the story was: *What else, exactly, did the mother expect?* If you choose to take part in an event concerned specifically with evil – celebrates it, glorifies in it – just what do you expect? What can come out of it except badness, and why might people not do something wicked in response? Vampires, witches, werewolves, devils, zombies: what are those about - something fun and fuzzy? How would the same mother react if real werewolves and zombies roamed her neighbourhood? Of course, most people don't actually believe that there are such things as vampires and werewolves, so any "games" concerned with them are just a "bit of fun". We know that so much of the modern promotion of Halloween is down to the shops, big and small, seeing a very real market, a source for a big profit; but it wasn't always so – why is it now?

Many people – or is it most people? – don't think that there really *really* is such a thing as the devil, or devils, and so it's harmless having a series of events (such as an evening's Trick-Or-Treating, or a Halloween Party) concerned with them; they don't exist in reality – and that, it seems, is no reason whatever not to make them the centre of various activities. Spooky stories and horror films, of course, give people (for some reason) a thrill, a *frisson*, a feeling of ... fear, it might be called, which is just small enough not to seriously disturb them. Stories and films which are concerned with good things, with love, life, and light, have nothing like the same appeal (I've no idea why, after much thought; you would think people would want more goodness in the world, would consider that there was quite enough badness as it is, but somehow it never seems that way. What does that tell us – about people?). It's noticeable that the people who seek to promote witchcraft, today, are keen to re-brand it. Their books and web-sites don't show ugly, nasty old crones (such as the shops' Halloween outfits produce), but smart, "modern" young women, witchcraft sanitised and made *cool*; but most people prefer the unpleasant.

Scholars and critics who describe the Gothick novels of the 18th and early 19th centuries tell us that they, like the age-old "fairy stories" of European mythology, reveal the "dark" side of human experience, the suppressed tendency to commit unpleasant deeds, and the latent urges towards deviant sexuality which (supposedly) lie deep within all of us; but they, and the original authors, don't exactly tell us that these are all, indeed, bad things to be avoided, to be eradicated, not just to be suppressed. Why the interest, or pleasure, in something that you don't actually want to release, or otherwise be present, in our world? (Perhaps they do want badness). How right Jesus was (as usual) when he referred to men preferring darkness to light (John 3:19)..

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