

May

From a series of monthly meditational essays by Eugene Halliday.

May, our fifth month, the third month of the ancient Roman calendar, takes its name from the Latin Maius, from Maia, the goddess of life's increase and growth.

As in April the earth opens to reveal the life hidden in the dark winter earth, so in the month of May life's hidden mysteries gain fuller expressions and bring forth their exquisitely beautiful forms to the delight of all living creatures.

Everywhere Nature bursts to a new happiness and re-born life smiles at the expanding world.

Probably from the Roman Floralia or Floral Games, which began about the end of April, came our own May-day festivities.

From early times in Britain the first of May has been held as a day of celebration. On this day, during the Middle Ages, everyone, from the King and his courtiers down to the lowest tiller of the soil, joined in the festivities, following the instincts of their surging blood out into the fields and woods. There they gathered flowers and boughs of the hawthorn to decorate the doors and windows of their houses. The hawthorn became known as the May-tree, its blossom the May-blossom. "Going a-Maying" and "Bringing home the May" was the occasion of great delight and pleasure.

The most beautiful girl in the village was crowned "Queen of the May" and seated in a flower-decorated bower to receive the admiration of the revellers.

In every village and town was erected a May-pole, on which were hung garlands of flowers. Around the May-pole all day long the merry-makers danced and sang to the sound of horns and pipes and the tabor's rhythmic beat.

When we remember the origin of the May festivals in the worship of Maia, the goddess of life's increase, we can see why some Christians celebrate May as the month of the Virgin Mary.

To clarify this connection we must remember that Christianity did not begin merely about 2,000 years ago with the birth of Jesus. The Christ of Christians is not merely a human being born at a certain historical moment. He is also a divine eternal being, a universal principle which pre-exists all time's events.

The Christ of Eternity is the Universal Being who inspired the ancient prophets to forecast his appearance in Time. And not only were the prophets inspired, but also the builders of the great mythologies and philosophers of the ancient world.

In a very real sense, wherever there has been any truth in any religion or philosophy, that truth has been derived from the Eternal Truth of Christ. That men before Christ's incarnation did not understand this, cannot alter the fact: All Truth is

Eternal. Ancient mystery religions everywhere reflected in their rites and ceremonies the yearly vegetation cycle, and with it certain universal truths which, correctly understood, show a remarkable correspondence with the Truth of Christ.

Christ's crucifixion, death, descent into the earth, and resurrection have their parallels in the cycle of the earth's vegetative life, which also shows its crucifixion in plant forms, its death, burial and resurrection.

All things in the universe must go through this same cycle, and not only yearly. Each day of our life we suffer some crucifixion some minor death, or bury some cherished idea, and each day we are re-born to a new hope.

Christ did not come into a world totally unprepared for him. The prophets had seen to that, and everywhere men, labouring under the weight of arbitrary authorities, looked for and expected a deliverer.

That when the deliverer came few were able to recognise him is not surprising. The ancient world had seen only two kinds of power, the power of physical force, and the power of egotistic cunning.

Most people therefore expected their deliverer to be a man of obvious might, decked out with all the external trappings of material power. Not easily could they conceive that real deliverance would come only gently, in the voice of love calling men's innermost spirit to a free and loving response.

It is in May, the month of lovers, the month of Maia, the goddess of life's increase, who so much reminds us of Christ's mother, that we most easily see the deliverer of the world as the Son of the God of Love.

Nothing is obviously a work of love as the May-blossom. In the ancient world, this rose-tree, this tree of May, was used as a symbol of enclosing, protecting love. The name hawthorn itself originally meant a protecting enclosure, The love of the Virgin for her child Jesus shows the supreme height of the love of all mothers for their children, and the love of the Creator for His creatures.

Each month of the year has its own message, conveys its own picture of some aspect of the cycle of God's creative activity. But it is in the month of May that we find our hearts leaping with delight at the blossoming evidence of the living presence of the world's Saviour.

Later in the year the flowers will not have quite the same freshness, the same power to surprise us. May's blossoms display a quality that carries our souls spontaneously away from the dark earth, upwards to the sky and the sun.

The roots of plants have a rough, earthly quality. The green stems that shoot upwards already show another quality. The fresh leaves that unfold themselves and spread out to the light and air give further evidence of a force not earth-bound. But the sweet delicacy of the May-blossoms leave us no longer in doubt that we are gazing at the evidence of some new and subtler energy that cannot have its origin in the dark earth.

In the May blossom we see love incarnate, hidden in the winter in Mother Earth's enclosing darkness, now aspiring again upwards to the sun from which came the light delicacy of its form and perfume.

And we know that this incarnate love is one with the love that God the All-Creator pours into all His creatures who will open themselves to receive it, and to breathe it forth again to others.

It is this love which springs up in our hearts in May that called out the peoples of the ancient world into nature's fields and woods. It is still this same love that calls to ourselves, modern as we are, to come out, on foot, on cycles and motor cycles, and in our cars, to roam the country lanes and take delight in Nature's renewing forces, and the blossomed evidence of the ever-recurring resurrection in which all life partakes.

No-one in May can listen to his heart and disbelieve in life's eternal resurrection. The May-blossom affirms it, as it has done, and will do, for every year to come.

In certain parts of the country there used to be a ceremony **in** which numbers of little girls, on Monday morning, went from house to house carrying garlands of flowers in the middle of which was placed a doll, dressed in white, to represent the Virgin Mary. The little girls sang a song the words of which show that there was a clear idea of the relation of Nature's new life with the eternal life of Christ.

"A branch of May we have brought you
And at your door it stands;
It is but a sprout, but it's well-budded out
By the work of our Lord's hands."

Maia, the ancient world's goddess of increasing life, was a prophetic intuition of the mother of the child who was to grow up to become the Saviour who was to spread the Love of God throughout the whole world.

When we see the May-blossom, let us remember her and her Son.