

OBITUARY

For a Neo-Pagan pioneer

by William Keith

It has been learned recently that the Rev. Oleb Botkin, founder and head of the Church of Aphrodite, is deceased. He and his wife, Eulalia Botkin, died several years ago. This has ended off the scene quite possibly the first Neo-Pagan religious leader, at least here in America. The signs of little chapel, the Christian cross atop his little chapel in West Haverland, N.Y., where the writer attended the services there more ago. At that time, in the early 60's, there were three liturgies and four weekly services: Wednesday, Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. Services, January even- ing, and liturgy, Sunday morning - at 10:00 a.m. In the chapel, there was a communion sacra- ment of bread and wine. The sacred than- ks of the sanctuary, and before this during the Rev. Botkin, in precisely west- ern, considered the liturgical worship. He believed in Aphrodite, the "flower goddess," the mother of life and beauty, the creator and mother of all things, the universal power, the univer- salizing, the first beginning of life of the universe. The church was founded in 1962, the candles burning before the altar of Aphrodite. The congregation joined in the sacred words and the prayers sung in a tone of chant, probably a form of the Gregorian chant.

The Rev. Botkin was a modern religious figure in his belief in the Divine Feminine and in a free relationship between the male and the female and spirit of his faith. Although the West Haverland church had only three services, and this was before the church revolution and our most serious crisis, it was a modern church, and it was a Pagan church. We see in his the very same elements of Aphrodite, the mother of life, attitudes and beliefs in modern Pagan religion. His father, Dr. Eugene Botkin, an court physician to the last czar of Russia, his early life therefore was close to the royal court. He prepared for the Russian Orthodox priesthood. At the time of the Bolshevik revolution he and his family had to leave Russia with all speed. It is understandable that in the very nature of the case Rev. Botkin had very little use for communism. But neither was he filled with enthusiasm for democratic institutions. He seemed to think that the only solution to our human ills was some kind of theo- cratic rule through the Aphrodisian relig- ion. Freedom of conscience took second place for him to a strictly liturgical con- science, from childhood on. One of his specific views did not coincide with those of many Neo-Pagans. He did not believe in natural law-ethics. The metaphysical im- portance of eternality of the church was not in his mind. He felt that such of us as he, not in traditional morality. The soul must come into the right relationship with the Goddess if it is to escape extinc- tion. Probably this belief was in line with that of the ancient Greek Pelagians, but many Neo-Pagans now either ignore the question of personal survival of death, or believe deeply in a natural immortality of all souls. The Rev. Botkin was a mono- theist in his doctrine of deity. His in- terpretation of the meaning of love was as unique in its thought - love as the con- cept that is the extreme opposite to strife - that for him the different kinds of love were not of the essence of this virtue. A virtue that transcends the antithesis of pas- sion and peace in a higher synthesis of hu- manity. Rev. Botkin was not compatible with the Pagan sects. He believed that he had no doubts that in his temple of all his parish. To his way of thinking this truth is very simple to simple and self-evident that many people fail to see it be- cause of the simplicity. He has indeed made a contribution to the faith of the Church. — W.K.K. (Name is O.K.)

DESCRIPTION: Botkin and Oleb Botkin were the world's first pioneers of classical Neo-Paganism. Their Church of Aphrodite was founded by Rev. Botkin in 1962. It was with great excitement that I first read of this Church, around 1962. William Seabrook covered the old- est culture in "Notes on Part 4" of his book "Hitchcock", first edition 1960. Seabrook wrote, currently re-issued in paperback, "I have no doubt that the inspiration of the Goddess contributed heavily to my sudden and stunning conversion to the Goddess one afternoon during Spring of 1966, and to the subsequent founding, by myself and John Deery, of HEBRONIA, a Paganist Fellowship dedicated to the Eternal Muse of Wilderness, in Summer of 1967. Seabrook's words until she gave birth to HEBRONIA on Ontario, 1967, and is still a Sacred College within Persepolis. We are certain that the Goddess have enlivened this sacred temple and here of the coming Age of the Divine Myth, and that they feast now among groves and shadows of Elysium, where Aphrodite reigns supreme. We Pagans will join them one day, on some new path they are opening in the ever expanding spiral of the Cosmic Love Dance.

Pay the Goddess and the Goddesses: the Gods grant them eternal life in pursuit of love ever new! Pay their Soul Trees for ever quicken to the adventure of passion, and unfold beautiful flowers of incarnation unendingly! For "all joy want deep eternity," as Rudine and Oleb Botkin, prime Priestess and Priest of Aphrodite, "The Supreme Alive and Beautiful," have taught us anew! EVOKE KODIE! -Patriarch No. 1000 Adams

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PAGE 5