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Persistence in Europe and Its Surround of the Pagan Cleric-Smith Tradition in the Christian Age

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A Thesis in the Field of Foreign Literature, Language, and Culture

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This study examines the continuation in European Christian society of magical-religious traditions previously associated with pagan gods of the forge. What was the importance of the forge god in the pantheons of worship? What were the roles of the blacksmith as a representative of these pagan gods in those diverse societies? How did the arrival of Christianity, both as a faith and in its role as a function of the Roman Empire in decline, redefine that status quo? What elements of the forge gods and their cleric-smith agents were integrated into Christianity? What beliefs and practices endured in the folklore and superstitions of European Middle Age society? How did such beliefs fall into decline in the Age of Industry? Contemporary sources including hagiographies, commentaries, and chronicles supplemented by modern analysis and research support a parallel continuance of the smith's power. The first continuance is in the syncretism of pagan elements of the forge in the Saints of Catholicism, whose appointments as patrons of the smith and related crafts gave them the powers of the forge gods in sanctioned form. The second continuance is in a hodgepodge of curatives, protective charms, and divinatory rituals cobbled together from surviving fragmented pagan worship and cosmology, blended into folk beliefs and Catholic dogma by a largely illiterate and superstitious society. Both avenues of persistence would see a decline with that of the blacksmith's trade in the nineteenth century.

Dedication

For Lawrence P. Kelly, Sr.

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Introduction

There is a well-known English folk ballad, collected by Cecil Sharp in his *One Hundred English Folk Songs*, in which a "coal-black smith" woos a maiden "as white as any milk" (48-9). The colors are a reference to their place in society, the smith being sooty from his work, the maiden being of a status above menial labor. She rejects him, but he is undaunted. Then begins a magical combat:

> Then she became a duck, A duck all on the stream
> And he became a water dog And fetch'd her back again
> Then she became a hare, A hare upon the plain
> And he became a greyhound dog And fetch'd her back again
> Then she became a fly, A fly all in the air
> And he became a spider And fetch'd her to his lair. (49)

In the end the smith is victorious and the maiden agrees to marry him. The name of this song, appropriately enough, is "The Two Magicians." Sharp informs us that the song is well-known in France, and that "the ballad in varying forms is known in Spain, Italy, Romania, Greece, Moravia, Poland and Servia [sic] (xxvi)." We may glean from "The Two Magicians" a common belief in the smith as a skilled wielder of magical powers, a belief that had spread across Europe long before it was immortalized in song.

This concept of the magical smith might seem a bit of whimsy, but has its roots in pagan times. The blacksmith was in those days granted by the forge god of his cosmology powers that allowed the smith to shape the very elements of the world. It was believed in all societies of pre-Christian Europe that the smith was more than a craftsman – indeed, in many ways he was something of a craftsman-priest, of a social strata comparable to druids and even kings. Indeed, there were prohibitions at times to prevent priests and

kings from coming in contact with iron or the ironmonger, so dangerous was the elemental power of the forge.

The blacksmith's societal position would change with the coming of Christianity, whose monotheism would suffer neither the continuance of other gods nor the prominence of their representatives. This period saw the demise of pagan priests and druids, but the blacksmith endured. His technologically advanced metallurgical skill was without argument essential to society. But his standing as one who could command the elements by the influence of the gods would require alteration. The smith, master of the forge, would himself be reforged to accommodate a new, Christian Europe, sanctified and sanctioned under the control of the emerging Christian framework. Their syncretism would prove incomplete, as old beliefs persisted in fragments melded by an ignorant populace into folk magic beliefs that themselves syncretized pagan and Christian elements.

Chapter I

A Brief History Of Iron

Progress in metallurgical development is measured by archaeologists using the Three-Age System as developed by Christian Jürgensen Thomsen in his *Guide To Northern Antiquity* (*Ledetraad til Nordisk Oldkundskab,*1836). This timeline is divided into the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. The Iron Age denotes the point in a society or region at which iron has succeeded bronze or other metals as the prime material fashioned into tools, weapons, and other useful implements. This transition varies from place to place dependent upon scarcity or abundance of raw materials, technological advancements, and trade with societies already possessing experience in blacksmithing. The Iron Age is generally recognized as having begun in Eastern Europe ca. 1200 BCE, with the technological acumen spreading westward via trade and migration. The Etruscans of the Italian peninsula were working in iron as early as 800 BCE, while in Britain the Early Iron Age begins ca. 600 BCE and the Scandinavian Iron Age is generally held by archaeologists to have begun ca. 500 BCE. At the far end of this technological migratory path, George Coffey dates the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in Ireland rather broadly, as occurring "from 900 to about 350 b.c. [sic], at which time iron weapons were probably coming into general use" (12). This Irish anomaly may be due to several factors, including its location at the far end of typical east-to-west European migratory paths, and that it had limited contact with the more technologically advanced Roman Empire.

The superiority of iron implements and weapons to their bronze or copper counterparts may have been the cause in this transitional period for the many myths of magical weapons in European folklore. The legends of the Gae Bolga, Cú Chulainn's deadly spear, and of Arthur's sword Excalibur, may be echoes of encounters from a time when a warrior armed with iron easily defeated a less-well-equipped foe.

John Light, in his "A Dictionary of Blacksmithing Terms", sees the evolution of the blacksmith's craft divided into four distinct periods, the first two of which are relevant to this thesis. "The first period, the bloomery age or great age of hand blacksmithing was the longest, extending from the beginning to the invention of the blast furnace in the 14th century. The second period, shorter but still rather lengthy, was the full-blown or mature period of smithing, during which the blacksmith was the engine that drove industrial society" (85). Light continues by citing Joseph Moxon on the importance of the blacksmith:

> Without the invention of smithing primarily, most other mechanick invention would be at a stand: the instruments, or tools, that are used in them, being either made of iron, or some other matter, form'd by the help of iron.... And they [most other craftsmen and artisans] all have dependence upon the smith's trade and not the smith upon them. (85)

The notion of the blacksmith as "king of crafts" plays an important role in folk tales of the smith, and reinforces much of the folklore and superstition of the blacksmith and his powers in both his pagan and Christian context. These facets of the smith will be explored in detail in a later chapter.

A steady source of raw material was important, then as now. Fortunately for the iron monger, it is a plentiful if not always easily accessible resource. R.J. Forbes observes that "The ores of iron are probably the most widespread ores on earth. No less than 4.2%

of our earth is formed by iron or its compounds!" (380). Yet not all iron would be accessible to the collection and smelting methods of the early Iron Age. The form such compounds might take in a given region influenced adaptation and acceleration of iron technology. Fitting for the subject of this paper, the sources can be broadly divided into the celestial and the chthonic.

The celestial source was meteoric iron. Meteors that survive entry into the atmosphere are composed largely of iron alloys and in prehistoric times were quite plentiful. Forbes notes that it was "fairly widespread" though such a limited resource would be depleted more quickly in populated areas, as in "the Ancient Near East [where] the natural stock of meteorites will have largely disappeared in the course of history" (380). The relatively high nickel content of meteoric iron – 7.5% on average, thrice the maximum of terrestrial ores - is a signature of its celestial origin.

The most readily accessible chthonic source was bog iron, often a type of goethite or limonite. These deposits are found in bogs, swamps and other waterlogged locations and consist largely of goethite and other iron oxide-hydroxides formed through both organic and inorganic processes. Bog iron could be collected without special tools or mining knowledge and so has been exploited since the Early Iron Age, though the slow nature of its composition meant that sources could be quickly depleted and required many years to replenish before another harvest could occur in the same location. The average rate of replenishment in a Danish bog, for example, is ca. 20 years, or "about once each generation".[1]

1. Hurstwic LLC, "Iron Production in the Viking Age" <http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/manufacturing/text/bog_iron.htm> (retrieved April 5, 2015).

The smelting of bog iron is an energy-intensive, low-return process and was typically employed where it is the sole source of native iron. Such was the case in Denmark and other Scandinavian regions, where it was utilized throughout the Viking Age and beyond. Trade with adjacent European regions and even as far south and east as Constantinople eventually established larger, more reliable sources of both high-quality raw materials and finished goods that rendered bog iron obsolete.[2] The practice of bog iron smelting appeared widespread in Scandinavia, with ore regularly processed by non-smiths, but varying levels of skill often lead to poor results (Bowles, et al., 34). Even so, the effort was worth it to seafaring peoples such as the Scandinavians, as bog iron "has many properties useful for shipbuilding, such as a resistance to rust (26)" due largely to its high silica content.

The third and most plentiful source of iron would be underground veins of ore. Forbes (381) notes that hematite, magnetite and other mined ores contain a practical iron content as high as 68%, up to twice that of bog iron. The increase in return for the smelting process was offset by the more difficult harvest of the ore, for mining then as now is a dangerous occupation. Additional processing was also required: Forbes, citing Diodor, notes that "Roasting was…standard practice in the iron mines of Elba" and that "washing and crushing of iron ores did not differ from that of other ores" (384). Forbes goes on to list numerous deposits of hematite, limonite and other iron ores in Egypt, the Middle East and Europe known to have been worked in antiquity.

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2. In a 2009 report on the Web site Phys.Org <http://phys.org/news150373962.html> (retrieved May 12, 2015) the National Physics Laboratory determined that Viking swords in the Wallace Collection "were likely made with crucible steel, which was only available in India and Central Asia" and "confirm for the first time that the material analyzed was brought by the Vikings from the Middle East to the Baltic area".

Once collected in whatever form it may take the iron ore must be smelted, or purified. Pre-Industrial iron smelting was a labor-intensive and energy-hungry process that produced limited results.[3] Continuing with the Viking Age example, a Scandinavian smith of that time would have to amass many tens of kilograms of bog iron and an equal weight of charcoal for a typical smelt, producing enough iron for a knife or small axe head.[4] The bog ore retained the moisture of its environment and so would need to be prepared by roasting it on a fire to drive out the water. The ore and charcoal would then be set aside while the smith prepared the smelter.

A single-use smelter would be constructed of mud, dung and straw, then dried and hardened via a small, internal fire. A brace of hand bellows would be attached to continuously feed air into the smelter. Once all was ready, the smith would require one or two assistants to work the bellows and feed the smelter with alternating layers of ore and fuel for as long as several hours while enduring the smelter's heat and risk of fire. The result would be a porous mass of iron called a "bloom" which would require further attention from the smith's hammer to drive out lingering impurities and forge a single, solid mass of iron that could then be shaped into a tool or weapon.

The scenario described above would have to be repeated many times to produce the needful things of peace and war required by every community. When the scarcity of easily-depleted bog iron stock and lack of skilled or available craftsmen are added to the equation it is apparent why iron was so prized a commodity in pre-Industrial Europe. A

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3. Iron has a meting point of 1538 °C (2800 °F), higher than that of bronze at 950 °C (1,742 °F) and so requiring greater fuel and effort to smelt.

4. In her report for *Expedition*, Elizabeth Hamilton described a recreation by experimental archaeologists that consumed 65 pounds of ore and 200 pounds of charcoal (16). The experiment was a success, producing an excellent bloom, though it should be noted that the recreation was not exact as modern materials were used in construction of the smelter, and an electric blower in place of hand bellows.

set of craftsman's tools such as those found in 1936 CE at Mästermyr in Gotland, Sweden and dated to the Viking Age might take years to compile and would have remained in use for generations. Such scarcity would also encourage reuse of worn or broken iron. A 2012 CE excavation at Füsing, Germany, overseen by Århus University and in which this author participated, revealed both ruined iron ship fittings and clumps of iron slag, from which it was conjectured that on-site ship repair may have included a degree of iron recycling.

The most prudent repurposing of this expensive and, for its time, high-tech commodity would not meet the needs of even a modest society lacking in resources or technology, and so would encourage the growth of trade where it was plentiful and warfare where it was not. Ziniakov points out that for the Atlay Turks of the sixth to tenth centuries CE, "control of Atlay iron production had strategic importance" as "[t]he Atlay represented a major region of ore resources"(13). Over the course of centuries the Turki, then Uigur, Khakas and finally the Kipchak states would wrestle control of the Atlay from its predecessor in order to control an ore-producing region that "was closely linked to the history of the Inner Asian peoples…from western Manchuria to Iraq and Byzantium" (13). Successive waves of trade and war would encourage migration or displacement of people from the region looking to better their fortunes. Iraq and Byzantium, with their respective trade hubs of Baghdad and Constantinople, would see smiths of many places converging and to some extent trading intellectual property.

These western trade hubs for the Atlay were the easternmost for the European, and so would expose the smiths of the West to new concepts and methods and increasing his knowledge base. This in turn strengthened the position of his society in the next

conflict or transaction. But such technical exposure also brought the potential for exposure to foreign beliefs, superstitions and ritual enmeshed in Eastern smith-craft. Such would occasionally blend with those of the West to form new alloys of belief, as will be explored below.

Chapter II

Gods of the Forge

The pantheons in European Antiquity had each its god or goddess of the forge, a craftsman supreme who produced the weapons and wonders upon which the other gods relied in order to execute the duties of their stations. This chapter will provide a review of such deities from across the continent and adjacent regions. While not intended to be a comprehensive list of every European forge god, it will expose trends, similarities and variations on themes of belief. [5]

The forge god perhaps known best to Europeans is Hephaestus, a member of the Hellenistic pantheon. The son of Hera and Zeus, king and queen of the Greek gods, Hephaestus was rejected and cast out of Olympus, falling to Earth as a child where he was raised by Thetis before returning to assume his role as the smith of the gods. He was said to be unattractive for a god, and his expulsion left him lame. Such imperfections are a common trait of the gods and workers of the forge. This physical hampering may have served as some kind of balance against the superior powers and skills they possess. Hephaestus is also a god cast down from the heavens, as are so many possessing of the creative spark or flame, though he is rare in that he regains his place in heaven without the intercession of a third party or having suffered additional punishment in his exile. Others will not share his fortune.

5. Portions of this chapter expand upon prior scholarship as expressed in my 2010 essay, "The Blacksmith as Supernatural Agent in Celtic Society", written for CELT E-135 (Professor Tomás Ó Cathasaigh).

The Romans revered Hephaestus as Vulcan, but also knew the gods of conquered lands and distant trading partners. They knew of the Celtic god Goibniu, "'divine smith of the *Túatha Dé Danann*, creator of weapons'.…In *Lebor Gabála* he is included among Seven chieftains of the *Túatha Dé Danann*" (Blažek 68). Blažek points out the linguistic similarities between the Irish god Goibniu, the Old Welsh *gobail*, ("smithy", "forge") the Breton *gôvel* (same) and even to "the Lithuanian pagan deity of fire called *Gabie* by Jan Łasicki"[6] (Blažek 75), who with these and other examples from Europe, the Levant and Persia makes clear that "The relation of the divine smith to fire is apparent" (76), laying a linguistic foundation for the commonality of beliefs in the aspects of forge gods across many nations in antiquity.

The smith god of a pagan pantheon existed to provide his family and companions the weapons, armor and tools they needed to carry out their divine offices. It was Hephaestus who made for Eros his arrows and for Hermes his winged sandals, but he also made for Artemis and Athena the weapons and armor they employed. Hephaestus even provided the resurrected Pelops with an artificial shoulder (Edith Hamilton 346-7; Schmidt 211).

The Celtic belief that the craft of the blacksmith was divinely inspired, with an important connection between the blacksmith and the *fìli,* a class of poet and seer thought to have supernatural powers, exists in the goddess Brigid. She was "a woman of poetry" and of the healing arts, but also "a woman of smith's work", said to have developed a type of whistle for nocturnal communication (Gregory 2). Brigid was associated with several wells across Ireland which were deemed holy and to possess healing powers, a

6. "called *Gabie* by Jan Łasicki [Lasicius] in his *De Diis Samagitarum Caeterorumque Sarmatarum et falsorum Christianorum*. *Item de Religione Armeniorum*, first published in Basel in 1615" (Blažek 75).

connection that might have influenced later beliefs in the healing powers of the blacksmith's trough water, such as those later collected by Antonio de Medici.[7] It seems appropriate that the priestesses of Brigid were charged with the tending of a sacred, eternal flame as both the goddess and her flame survived the transition to Christianity, syncretized as a saint.

Another story of a smith god healing by his craft can be found in that of king Nuada Airgetlám of Ireland. Having lost his arm in battle at Mag Tuired, he was deposed. But the smith god Goibniu crafted a new arm for him, and he returned to rule another twenty years. The smiths of the Celtic world made many items meant to heal and restore, if imperfectly, for their kings. The twelfth-century CE *Mabinogion,* a collection of Welsh oral tales, includes that of Brân the Blessed and his cauldron which could resurrect the dead.

In the great epic of Finland, the *Kalevala*, the smith Ilmarinen creates the most wondrous of such items. The poem is divided into sections called Runes. A pivotal event occurs in Rune X, where Ilmarinen, hoping to win a bride, forges the magical Sampo, an object of unknown design said to be a kind of mill that produces flour, salt and money. It takes Ilmarinen four days to forge the Sampo, in the interim producing several other items that he deems evil or "ill-tempered" and subsequently breaks into pieces and throws back into the forge (Lönnrot 34-5). Of the *Kalevala*, Wilfrid Bonser tells us that "the wisdom of the Finns was stored in the various songs of which it was composed, and which were committed to memory and repeated by the singers" (246). This is more true for other things than smithing in this poem, though there is a brief passage (Lönnrot 34-5) recounting how Ilmarinen goes about building his smithy and gathering needful things.

7. An example formula by Medici is given in Chapter VI, below.

Some wisdom is also found in his above-mentioned willingness to hold to a high standard and reject imperfect works. Edward Clodd (194-5), in speaking of "Cure-Charms", reminds us of the role of magic in the creation of iron, for when "Wäinämöinen, the hero-minstrel of the *Kalevala*, cut his knee in hewing the wood for the magic boat, he could heal the wound only by learning the mystic words that chant the secret of the birth of iron". Rune IX has Wäinämöinen visit an old man who sings of the origin of iron, then uses this knowledge to heal the wounds of Wäinämöinen by shaming the iron for its evil act and threatening to call upon Ukko, the supreme deity (29-30). The blood is staunched, and the old man sends his son to make medicine:

> Thus at last the blood-stream ended,
> As the magic words were spoken.
> Then the gray-beard, much rejoicing,
> Sent his young son to the smithy,
> There to make a healing balsam,
> From the herbs of tender fibre,
> From the healing plants and flowers,
> From the stalks secreting honey,
> From the roots, and leaves, and blossoms. (30)

Note that the son goes to the smithy to make his healing balm and not to a kitchen, hearth, or other place. No explanation is given in the text for this choice of laboratory, though it may be conjectured that sympathetic magic is at play in that the smithy, a place of power and creation, is used to create both the tool that wounds Wäinämöinen and the balm that heals him.

To the east were the Ossets. As Bonnefoy notes, they were "[a]n islet of Indo-Europeans sheltered in the middle of the mountain chain of the Caucasus, the Ossets are the distant descendents and last representatives of the northern Iranians whom the ancients called Scythians and Samaritans and who, at the dawn of the Middle

Ages…made Europe quake with fear" (Bonnefoy 262). One of their gods was "Kurdalägon, a blacksmith spirit, [who] appears especially in the myths that can be identified throughout the Nart epic. Like the Circassian god Tlepsch, he builds marvelous weapons for heroes, and he 'tempers' in his forge Batraz, the demigod of thunder" (262).

Returning to the Romans, there was also Sucellus, a hammer-bearing god of uncertain origin and purpose. "The name may go back to pre-Roman Celtic times, because it is not Latin and may mean in Gallic 'he who strikes well', which does not mean that the hammer is a deadly weapon….Given the way it was presented, it is not clear how the hammer was used. With its long, leaning staff, a sign of sovereign power, it is a key symbol, almost a talisman, and not a real, deadly instrument as it would be in the hands of Charun, the infernal demon of the Etruscans" (Bonnefoy 222). It is the hammer as a symbol of authority that is of note here. Not all hammer-wielding gods are smiths. A clear example is the Norse god Þórr, whose hammer Mjöllnir is one of combat, and whose many skills and offices do not extend to smith-craft. The forge in Norse and Germanic antiquity was the domain not of a god but of the elemental Dwarfs.

The power within the forge was in the Hellenistic world given to man not by Hephaestus but by Prometheus, a Titan "whose power Zeus always dreaded. A prophet, an inventor, he created the first man….he stole from the sun a spark….he gave this source of divine fire to men who, in his absence, had quickly multiplied" (Schmidt 234). For this and other offences Zeus had him bound by Hephaestus in chains and tormented by an eagle, symbolically placing both the power of creation and mankind itself via its creator under the dominion of the smith-god. Upon his release from torment by Heracles, a liminal man-god hybrid whose role in the Titan's liberation suggests a resolution of the

underlying rift between the gods and mankind, Prometheus was required by Zeus "to wear an iron ring attached to a small bit of rock (Schmidt 234)", a reminder of his prior excesses and so encourage his fealty. He who created Man and instilled in him the creative spark of the forge was again in the control of the gods.

Ancient Judea also had its rebellious fire-stealers in the Nephilim, a group of 200 angels of the type known as *Grigori* or Watchers. The *Book Of Enoch* recounts how Semjâzâ convinced his fellow Grigori to form a pact and descend to Earth in order to take human wives. In the process they became teachers and were the origin of many crafts including that of the smith. Chapter VIII of *Enoch* states, "1. And Azâzêl taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals <of the earth> [sic] and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony" (36). That Azâzêl **(עֲזָאזֵל)** as one of the leaders of this angelic group should also be the one to teach smithing to man places him, if not in parallel with the forge gods of polytheism, then certainly in a similar position to that of Prometheus, with whom he shares a similar fate when in Chapter 10 God orders the angel Raphael to "Bind Azâzêl hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness….And place him upon rough and jagged rocks" (39). Azâzêl and Prometheus both suffer for the misuse of the creative force, its placement in the hands of lesser Man and the chaos resultant.

This author notes that such imprisonment and binding is a fate also meted to Loki, the Norse god often described as a Trickster but more appropriately described for this thesis as an embodiment of the unbridled Id of the gods. His creativity both helps and harms his peers and eventually leads to their destruction at Ragnarök. Several of his exploits involve his traffic with the dwarfs, the supernatural smiths of Norse mythology.

Pharaonic Egypt had among its pantheon the god Ptah (), who created the world by thought alone. He is the patron of all craftsmen, specifically smiths and other workers in metal. Ptah is often portrayed as is Hephaestus and other forge gods as lame or deformed, suggesting some degree of cross-cultural pollination in antiquity, and he is also often portrayed as a dwarf. This concept of the diminutive forge god finds a curious echo in the aforementioned tradition of the Dwarfs in German and Scandinavian lore, though no connection to the Egyptian is apparent.

Then there is Svarog, the forge god of the Slavs. Fanny Copeland, citing Kelemina, cites that the "chief divinity of the Slovenes was worshipped under the name of Svarog (Tvarog), Ruler of the Heavens" (636). The Hypatian Codex, a Slavic Russian work compiled in the thirteenth Century CE (Dimnik xii), identifies Svarog not only as a forge god but as Hephaestus under another name. Copeland further states that "Svarog had a son, Svarozic (dim. of Svarog), also called Bozic, i.e. Little God….The Jugoslav term for Christmas ("Bozic"), therefore, goes back to pre-Christian times, and the Divine Infant of that festival was originally a pagan deity, whose very name and feast could be transferred without difficulty to the Christ Child of the new faith" (636). This syncretism of the "Little God" by the Christian church will find its parallels in the many pagan gods across Europe that would be redressed in saintly garb, as will be shown in a later chapter.

The enigmatic Persian god Mithras was not a god of the forge, but "Under the Roman Empire, Mithra became the focus of a mystery cult particularly popular among the Roman soldiery" (Bentley 135). It is worth noting this for two reasons. First, the Mithraic Mysteries cult was contemporary to and in ways a rival of another imported religious sect, Christianity. Second is the Leontocephaline, an intimidating and symbol-

laden image of worship revered by the cult which "has strong solar associations, if it may not be said to be a representation of the sun, and the sun, both as an independent figure and as an hypostasis of Mithras, is a fully divine being in the cult of the Romanized Iranian god, and intimately involved in Mithraic soteriology" (Jackson 33-34). Depictions of this lion-headed, winged figure vary in their symbols. The Leontocephaline discovered at Ostia and bearing a dedication of 190 CE is of interest for the inclusion of the hammer and tongs of Vulcan at its feet. Symbols of other gods of the Roman pantheon are also present, suggesting its absorption of these godly powers and dominion over the gods themselves. That this solar deity should overtly claim the creative powers of the forge is telling of their importance and seems a portent of similar actions by its Christian rival.

From these beliefs we can see that the craft of the smith was in pre-Christian Europe thought divinely inspired. For some, the gods had brought them the knowledge of the craft as a gift, while others may have received stolen goods. Whatever its means of delivery, the craft of the blacksmith was like that of its divine progenitors a creative force that instilled the smith with a temporal authority not possessed by other craftsmen.

Chapter III

The Pagan Cleric-Smith Tradition

In “Blacksmithing in Sonora, Mexico”, David Brugge and James Griffith tell of a blacksmith in that town who in the twentieth century CE also held the offices of trial judge and postman (277). This situation could be dismissed as the product of rural necessity, but it echoes a past European cultural tradition where the smith held a position of authority in his society, beyond his craft yet emanating from it. The smith would have been an ideal candidate for civic leadership even without any supernatural aspect, for as in modern Sonora the pre-European working-class would seek a leader who embodies their class ideal, a master craftsman with talent and a strong work ethic. The addition of his control over the very forces of creation, a power granted to him by the gods for the benefit of the community, would make any smith in good standing with his community an ideal candidate to lead it.

The smith was seen by many cultures as a master of the elements, especially fire, a power granted by a fire or forge deity. Václav Blažek presents etymological evidence linking the name of the Iranian smith Varkãna' with that of Volcãnus, the Roman fire-god. “[T]his theonym has been connected with Old Indic *ulká* 'fire falling from heaven, meteor, firebrand'…. used about the flames of the fire-god Agni” (76). He continues with similar assertions for the Norse god Óðinn, the Celtic Olc Aiche and Germanic Völundr/Wayland (76). These etymological connections support a long-standing belief

across European cultures in the smith as possessing a god-given control over this capricious and dangerous force.

Inspired by the writings of Mircea Eliade on the connection between smith and shaman, Cathy Frierson examines in *All Russia Is Burning!* the place of the smith in traditional Russian village life. She notes: "As a 'master of fire', the blacksmith transformed matter and did so by handling both the flames of transformation and the transforming matter in his hands. This granted him "magico-religious power which could modify the world and which, consequently, did not belong to this world" (24). Citing a 1906 study, she notes "[I]t was believed that lightning did not strike the blacksmith's house.…because of the smith's 'close relationship with fire'….drawing on the report of A Zvonkov, who had explained in 1899 that the blacksmith did hold a special position in the Elatomsk District of Tambov Province….smiths indeed took on the aura of the fire they mastered. Transformation became the blacksmith's special association (24-5)." Here are Zvonkov's findings in detail:

> The blacksmith, standing closer than anyone else to the element of fire, figures in legends as a man who is hateful and invulnerable to the evil spirit. According to one story, he refused to forge a weapon for the devil to use in his battle with God. The devil has countless powers, but he cannot forge, so he turned to the smith; the smith refused and God vowed to the devils never to destroy the soul of the blacksmith. According to other versions, the blacksmith made Ilya's [Elijah's] lightning bolts, and the prophet rewarded him with the same power. It is a sign that lightning and swallows never ignite the smithy. The owl, as "the devil's bird", does not even dare to sit on blacksmith's houses. (25)

While these reports come from a modernizing Russia, they do appear to reflect long-standing beliefs with a possibly antique lineage.

The blacksmith, master of elements and possessed of a creative force, plied his trade via contemporaneous cutting-edge technical knowledge that placed him above the

practitioners of other trades. The perception and skill essential to the smith's work meant he was a learned practitioner with many years' apprenticeship in which he would learn to discern, for example, the properties of iron at variant temperatures determined by its color when extreme heat is applied. European Iron Age societies were largely pre-literate and transmitted their crafts via first-hand experience and repetition of application. The value of such hard-earned knowledge would wary the smith of sharing it with his competition lest he risk both his own business and his unique standing in the community. He would also guard such knowledge for the safety of the community – no smith would wish to empower the enemies of his people. Given the value of their intellectual property in personal and societal affairs, the development of arcane and occulted terms used by practitioners of the craft to express and protect advanced technological concepts in a pre-literate society, and the general impression of a smith in many societies as taciturn and ill-tempered, it is little wonder the smith would gain a reputation for possessing supernatural powers. Such a learned and powerful person would inevitably be seen as worthy of leadership and so be delegated some ritual dominion by the community.

There are parallels to the European cleric-smith tradition in more recent, adjacent cultures to which we might compare. Sir James Frazer, after an 1878 report by O. Lenz, tells in *The New Golden Bough* of the relation between smiths, magicians and kings in West African tribes: "[I]n the Fan tribe the strict distinction between chief and medicine-man does not exist. The chief is also a medicine-man and a smith to boot; for the Fans esteem a smith's craft sacred, and none but chiefs may meddle with it" (56). Yves Bonnefoy concurred, and in "West African Myths of Blacksmiths", observed: "Blacksmiths live symbiotically with the people near whom and for whom they

work….All those who need tools and weapons for the hunt…treat blacksmiths in particular ways, but ways with common characteristics. Each group has its own smiths who play simultaneously a social and a religious role, sometimes of primary importance….Specifics related to the creation myths of the Dogon and others, set the smith and the medicine man apart from the rest of humanity" (127-8). While the peoples of West Africa may treat their smith as such, in parts of East Africa he is largely a pariah, forced to live apart from the community with strong prohibitions on social interaction. "Besides the guilds of resident smiths there are the itinerant tinkers who enjoy the reputation of being powerful magicians….While the Baris of the White Nile look upon these traveling tinkers as outcasts…the Ba Lolo of the Congo hold them in great respect and believe them to be of royal or aristocratic descent" (Eliade 209).

Be they outcast or aristocracy, Mircea Eliade sees this separation from the general society as essential. "[M]etal workers form almost everywhere a group apart; they are mysterious beings who must be isolated from the other members of the community" (209). Their mystery exists at least in part from their possession in pre-literate societies of an advanced knowledge base of metalworking techniques. A physical separation was practical in that it prevented burning down the village in case of an accident, and reduced intrusion on the intense work at hand by the curious or the social.

> [T]he Celestial Smith is the son, the messenger or the collaborator of the Supreme God: he completes the god's work and in most cases does so in his name. The ((civilisation)) brought by the Celestial Smith is not limited to the organisation [sic] of the world, an organisation which might be said to be almost a cosmogony; it is also of a spiritual kind: the Smith as Master continues and completes the work of God by making man capable of understanding the mysteries. (211)[8]

8. All notes in the original.

As a man of strength, intelligence and discipline, all qualities essential to the demanding and dangerous work of the forge, the smith would be a likely candidate for leadership in his community. Add to that his innate supernatural nature as master of the elements and it is but a short distance to his being bestowed some level of religious or magical authority to benefit the community in which he lived. Eliade continues: "We can feel in the religious part played by the smith a replica of the mission of Civilising Hero performed by the celestial smith" (213).

European attitudes towards the smith were influenced by the beliefs of those cultures residing, and often incurring, on the borderlands. For example, on the eastern edge of Byzantium were the Atlays, where the smith "enjoyed a high, quasi-shamanic prestige" (Ziniakov 84) well into the early Christian Era. Indeed, the Atlay smith enjoyed at different times a status of both smith-cleric/shaman and smith-king: "[A]mong many peoples of Inner Asia and Southern Siberia, blacksmiths enjoy great prestige….A reflection of this is found in the narration of an Old Turkic legend…. [concerning] rulers of the Turki kaganate, who usually were blacksmiths" (97). Ziniakov, like Eliade, compared smiths to shamans for being "controllers of magic and wizardry", and noted that "special religious rituals" were devised to explain the smith's work in the face of "popular ignorance of the regularities of natural physical manifestation (97).

Looking back at Europe proper, Schnurbein, commenting on Buchholz, finds the shamanic smith in pagan Germany, seeing "the tales about magically gifted blacksmiths as evidence for shamans as craftsmen" (121). In addition, the god Mimir, who counsels Óðinn with occult knowledge, is shown to have a dual aspect. "Mimir, [Buchholz] argues, is in the southern Germanic associated with the blacksmith, and in the northern

Germanic with 'head magic,' the relationship to the tree of the worlds and the mead that grants wisdom (ecstasy) (121)." In his dual nature Mimir is a bridge between the blacksmith and the shaman, implying the former embodies aspects of the later in terms of hidden knowledge and supernatural perception.

Iron, known in antiquity from its meteoric alloys and therefore a gift of the celestial gods, was considered to possess innate power only to be handled by the initiated or the blessed. But these worthies often did so under one or more taboo to prevent contamination of their sacred selves. Frazer lists several taboos in the nations of Hellenistic Europe on the proscription of iron and the sacred, including:

> Roman and Sabine priests might not be shaved with iron but only with bronze razors or shears….As a general rule iron might not be brought into Greek sanctuaries….The men who made the need-fire in Scotland had to divest themselves of all metal…. The old wooden bridge (*Pons Sublicius*) at Rome, which was considered sacred, was made and had to be kept in repair without the use of iron or bronze. (174-175)

Frazer observed that the power of iron to disrupt supernatural energies is indiscriminate, the bane of evil as well as good. Remnants of these ancient beliefs continued into recent times as superstition: "[I]ron may obviously be employed as a charm for banning ghosts and other dangerous spirits….In the north-east of Scotland immediately after a death has taken place, a piece of iron, such as a nail or a knitting-wire, used to be stuck into all the meal, butter, cheese, flesh, and whiskey in the house, 'to prevent death from entering them'" (175-176). Such methods of foiling the diabolic would be frowned upon by early Christianity, and "The use of iron as a means to exorcise demons was forbidden by the Coptic church" (175). Nonetheless, such practices have survived through the Christian Age well up to the present day, a phenomenon to be examined in greater detail in a following chapter.

The blacksmiths of antiquity, initiates of their craft and so possessed of occult knowledge giving them the power to handle iron, did hold positions in their societies higher than other craftsmen, one that in various times and places was comparable to that of the priest or chieftain. Forbes has much to say about the position of the ancient smith:

> The smith of prehistoric Europe occupied an honoured position....In Scandinavia and England the smiths were considered the equals of the bards or priests and no slave could profess their craft without seeking permission to do so. The famous smiths of Wales, who made their own iron, were by the laws of that country allowed to sit near the priest of the household in the king's presence. They had mysterious powers, for were not the maxims of Druids, smiths and wise women dreaded by the Celts? And though we do not know much from direct tradition...the 'super-smiths' of the Kalewala [sic], Kawelipoeg and the myths of the Esthonians, these all tell us something about the lost glory of the prehistoric smith. (68-9)

Lotte Motz, in *The Wise One Of The Mountain*, explains how in Antiquity the blacksmith in the Germanic and Scandinavian regions of Europe held a position of spiritual authority. “In observing the craftsman’s qualities of spiritual leadership in the Norse texts, I came to understand that he was modeled on a ritual functionary, possibly a craftsman-priest” (Motz 7). This regional aspect of the smith would spread far afield during the Viking Era, to be added for example as a character to Icelandic Norse translations of French Romances (Motz 11-12). Yet the smith was already seen across Europe as a person infused with supernatural power. Local traditions varied, polarizing around respectful inclusion within or fearful exclusion from the social body depending on the society in question. Within Europe itself, the place of the smith among the indigenous peoples tended more towards Motz’s craftsman-priest model, with the smith in some places occupying a “high ‘caste’ status, existing in contrast to the king’s more secular status” (Budd and Taylor 140). No matter the degree or station attributed to the

blacksmith, he was esteemed as a master of elemental forces divinely granted by deities such as the Hellenistic Hephaestus/Vulcan.

As for the Celts in the West, Rees and Rees (113) show that blacksmiths were a part of the *nemed* (subject freeman) class, but appear to have occupied a unique position. "The Boyhood Deeds of Finn" mentions a "chief smith", which may also be translated as "king smith". The meaning of this title is unclear. This may indicate a Master Blacksmith, one in rank and ability above his fellows, or a blacksmith in the employ of the King, or both.[9] In the former, the title suggests the existence of one or more schools of the craft with degrees or ranks, much like those of druids and bards. The latter suggests an appointed position of prominence for the superior craftsman. Either case sets the blacksmith (or at least the more accomplished ones) apart from other craftsmen, for whom no such rank or privilege is apparent. But as with the druids this rank could also be of spiritual leadership.

Blacksmiths in the Heroic tales of the Celts were distinct from workers such as braziers largely for their work with iron and its superior weaponry. In the *Cath Maige Tuired*, Lug identifies himself as possessing the talents of both a blacksmith and a brazier (39-41). The distinction is significant. Iron represented an advanced technology to the Celts, inspiring superstition and awe in the uninitiated. Tales of magic weapons in Celtic legend may have arisen in part from the presence of imported arms fashioned of superior iron, easily besting bronze or copper weaponry.

The smith played an important role in the story of the Celtic hero Cú Chulainn. As a youth he was known as Sétanta and was fostered to the king Conchobor. One day the

9. Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás (trans.), "The Boyhood Deeds of Finn". Additional clarification provided in conversation with the translator.

smith Culann invited Conchobor to a feast. Conchobor and his retinue attended but Sétanta was late in arriving. Thinking all were present, the smith set a vicious hound in the yard as a guardian. Sétanta arrived and was attacked by the hound, but killed it with his bare hands. Apologizing to the smith for killing the hound, Sétanta offered to raise a new one for him and to serve in the hound's place as guardian of the house until the pup had grown. Culann agreed to this and renamed the youth Cú Chulainn, or the Hound of Culann (*Táin* 83-84). The youth Sétanta proved his strength by killing the canine servant of the smith, and then his honor by offering to take its place. In return he received the blessing of the king's smith in the form of a name declaring him the servant, protector and strength of the smith himself. It is a Hero's Journey in miniature, with both the king and the craftsman-priest presiding at his transformation from youth to man, to anoint him his mannish name and appoint him the protector of the forge.

A second Celtic legend tells of a forge god responsible for restoring a king to his throne. Nuada Airgetlám, "Nuada of the silver arm", king of the Tuatha Dé Danann, lost an arm at the battle of Mag Tuired. His injury made him unfit to rule by the traditions of his people and so he ceded the kingship to Bres. The new king earned a reputation for cruelty. The smith-god Creidhne fashioned a new arm of silver for Nuada which allowed him to depose Bres and regain his throne.[10] James Frazer relates in *The New Golden Bough* how a king unfit to rule due to infirmary was often sacrificed to break his bond with the land and its people and allow a new king to rise (56-7). That the smith Creidhne had the craft to restore the king to completeness and so to his throne shows him a master

10. Creidhne is said to be a worker of bronze, brass, gold and silver, but not iron. Nonetheless, he is working with the advanced metallurgical technology of his time.

of the creative force and a guardian of the community in restoring their true king and protector.

It is this creative force that is employed in the Finnish epic *Kalevala* by Väinämöinen, "[a]ncient bard and great magician" (Rune 17). Väinämöinen becomes trapped in the corpse of Vipunen, a "song-giant", and uses the opportunity to coerce the giant to teach him "wisdom sayings" by constructing a smithy in his body cavity (245). Here we have a smith so powerful he can rouse a dead giant and wrest from it the secret songs of creation. Wilfrid Bonser observes: "The spirit of Shamanism, overlaid in parts with a thin veneer of Christianity, is the spirit of the Kalevala….Everything was possessed of a spirit, which it was possible to influence by means of magic. In the Kalevala, therefore, the sorcerer takes the place usually held in other epics by the warrior or king" (243).

Renowned smiths were celebrated for creating the armaments of champions, especially swords. Legends tell of swords found by or created especially for a champion, without which they would be unable to complete their quest, rescue or revenge. The smith Wayland has over the centuries been attributed creator of several important swords, including Durandal, the sword of Roland; Curtana, the sword of Ogier the Dane; and Almace, the sword of Archbishop Turpin, all as recounted in *Karlamagnus saga.* In the *Völsunga saga* Wayland is creator of Gram, the sword of Sigmund. The smith can also grant protection. Beowulf (lines 450-455) wears a mail-shirt created by Wayland. It later saves the hero from a crushing attack by Grendel's mother (lines 1500-1510).

Expressed in wide variance throughout many times and regions, the belief in the smith as possessor of supernatural powers was common across Europe and its surround.

The majority of societies embraced him, if sometimes cautiously, as a beneficent community leader. His knowledge of advanced Iron Age technology in largely pre-literate societies made him a valuable resource, while the arcane and occult nature of that knowledge and its practical applications encouraged superstitious beliefs in the general populace of a connection between the smith and the patron forge god(s) of their community. It would be that last point which would cause the smiths of Europe some trouble as the Christian religion came into its primacy.

Chapter IV

From Nicaea to Jelling

The fourth century of the Christian Era in Europe began in a decidedly non-Christian world. The polytheistic faiths which had held dominance for centuries remained widely popular, while fringe cults from distant lands were tolerated or suppressed as seen fit. As Edward Gibbon observed, "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosophers as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful" (1:49). Yet within a century, the religious status quo would be inverted as Christianity began a tide of conversion that would endure beyond the declining Empire and complete its path six centuries later when Harald Bluetooth proclaimed the Danes Christian on the Jelling Runestone. [11]

The Roman Empire of the fourth century had been weakened by decades of strife. The *Pax Romana* had given way to the Imperial Crisis of the third century CE, where an extended period of invasion, plague and internal power struggles had threatened to collapse the Empire and had briefly fractured it into several regional powers during the Tetrarchy of 293-313 CE (Gibbon 1:420; Jones and Pennick 61-4). By the early fourth century CE the looming exhaustion of the Empire from plague, political and civil strife seemed beyond the abilities of the gods of Olympia to rectify. In their need the Romans would embrace a monotheistic sect from the province of Syria Palæstina that might preserve the Empire in essence if not in form. This conversion would be championed by

11. Portions of this chapter expand upon prior scholarship as expressed in the author's 2011 essay, "E Pluribus, Unum: Christianity and its Refinement for Social Moderation in Late Antiquity", written for HUMA E-119 (Professor John Hamilton Ph. D.)

an unexpected shepherd – Emperor Constantine I, canonized as Saint Constantine the Great.

Constantine attributed his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 CE) to the Christian god, whose blessing came in a vision of the Chi Rho (☧). The victorious Emperor Constantine would issue the Edict of Milan the following year, decriminalizing the practice of all religions within the Empire including Christianity - not surprising when one takes into account his mother, Helena, was a Christian and so at risk of arrest. In 325 CE Constantine called a council of Christian leaders to meet in the eastern city of Nicaea. Among its accomplishments were the rejection of the Arian heresy; setting the method for determining when Easter would be celebrated; and the composition of the Nicene Creed. The Emperor himself attended as an observer, and though not a participant in any voting his presence gave the new orthodoxy of the Church of Rome the stamp and heft of Imperial approval.

With the issuance of the Edict of Milan and his shepherding of the Nicene Council, Constantine found himself in the position of championing a belief whose adherents had been outlawed and executed less than a century earlier. The primary objection to Christianity in the Empire at that time had not been one of blasphemy but of sedition. Romans were largely free to worship whatever gods they pleased. R.E.A Palmer notes that "Romans expected the deity to act on their behalf or not to act at all....If he failed too often or acted too badly, he was abandoned for another" (Cavendish 18: 2419). This practical approach encouraged Romans to adopt or abandon rites of worship as it suited them. The one requirement made upon the Romans was that they make public sacrifice to the state religion, the Imperial cult of the deified Emperors, for to do so was a

public oath of fealty. Christians, adamant in their monotheistic beliefs, resisted participation. They were for a time allowed to pay the Fiscus Iudaicus tax as did the Jews and so be exempted, but abandoned it after the persecutions of Nero (Cavendish 4: 470). Here was the "mischievous superstition" spoken of by Tacitus in his *Annals* (XV.44), not one of blasphemy but of a breaking of the sacred trust, a refusal to publicly pledge allegiance to Rome or to accept the fiscal penalty of such refusal. Christians had in their adherence to their faith become enemies of the State, a condition not resolved until Constantine's decree.

Introducing this once-outlawed belief to the Roman masses would take more than an edict of tolerance. Persuasive encouragement would be required. A variant on the Roman practice of religious syncretism known as the Interpretatio Romana would prove essential. Making sympathetic comparisons between the deities of conqueror and conquered was common practice for the Empire, as it strengthened cultural ties which in turn aided the acceptance of political dominion. Peter Blair notes in his *Roman Britain and Early England* that "(I)t is exceedingly common to find classical gods closely associated...with native deities" (138). One example is the temple at Bath in Britannia, dedicated to Sulis Minerva, a composite of Roman and local deities with common traits. The practice served to bind the peoples of the Empire by establishing common ground via common worship. A person from Rome could, for example, travel in Gaul and understand something of local religious custom via these Roman analogues.

As the new faith spread its proponents would rely on the similar method of Interpretatio Christiana (Christian reinterpretation). Clerics would find ways to reinterpret the beliefs and rituals of a pagan theology into a Christian context, in doing so easing the

path of conversion by drawing parallels between the old and new systems of belief. What once had united the Empire in polytheism would serve again to bring unity under monotheistic Christianity.

This method was not always successful, and a recently-converted Christian might fall back on old ways. A Greek papyrus in the collection of the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, meant to be worn for personal protection, is identical in style and application to those employed by pagans but for its Christian prayers replacing those to pagan deities.[12] Such adaptations are evident elsewhere in Europe. In Scandinavia, Signe Horn Fuglesang noted that:

> Cross pendants have been found in all parts of Scandinavia....in Birka.... [a] grave contained both a cross and a Thor's hammer....Similarly, a grave in Taskula, Finland, had a pendant cross and a miniature axe (Kivikoski, 1965, p. 32). Such combinations of pagan and Christian amulets correspond to the occurrence of cross pendants in graves showing pagan ritual, and probably reflect individual vagaries in the period of transition to Christianity. (18)

The Theodosian Decrees of 393 CE withdrew all state support for non-Christian faiths. Pagan holy sites and customs would be eradicated in the years of and following Theodosius' reign. The Olympic Games were last held in 393 CE, and the Pythian Games at Delphi in 424 CE. Temples and Academies were destroyed by zealous mobs, often with tacit or even official sanction. One that avoided this fate was the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens. It was converted in the seventh century CE to a Christian church, one of many Christianized holy sites preserved through absorption and syncretism. The frenzy of the Christian mob was not limited to buildings and books. Many pagan clerics

12. “Ancient Last Supper charm found in John Rylands Library”. BBC Religion, 9/2/2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-29028009> (Retrieved 5/3/2015).

and philosophers would share the fate of the Neo-Platonic scholar Hypatia of Alexandria, murdered in 415 CE by Christian fanatics.

Faced with continuous state-sanctioned violence, the remnants of pagan belief in Roman territory were by the end of the fifth century CE driven underground, out of the cities and amongst the rural, rustic folk known in Latin as *pagani*, from which the pejorative "pagan" derives. Conversion of those European pagans outside the boundaries of the Empire would continue for several centuries more. Saint Patrick would bring Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, and Pope Gregory I would send a mission to Britannia in 596 CE. Other regions, especially to the north and east, would take longer. The Danes would nominally convert under Harald Bluetooth at the end of the first millennium, as attested by the inscription on his Jelling Stone, but worship of the old Norse gods would continue in the region well into the thirteenth century CE.

During the time of European conversion the Church would take a more dominant role in the temporal aspects of society in place of the crumbling Empire, providing moral, social and political structure through its edicts, influence and threat of excommunication. The challenges of this spiritual hegemony resulted in aspects of the Faith being altered over time to better serve the changing political and social agendas of the Church. It is little surprise to learn that the Holy See would recycle and reinvent several of the old gods to serve the new supreme being. This is as true for the forge gods as well, who would come back to serve Rome among the host of the Saints.

Chapter V

Saints of Iron

Western Europe had by the Middle Ages been transformed from a far-reaching if occasionally unstable Roman Empire to an ever-changing patchwork of feudal states. The stabilizing trans-national force in this turbulent time was the common faith of Roman Catholicism. It continued its spread into the borderlands of Eire and Scandinavia, in the process eliminating the polytheistic faiths common in the Empire, denouncing some aspects of those faiths and absorbing others into a Christian context. The gods of the forge would know both fates, with some being reinvented as the beatific servants of Christ known as saints.

There was a belief in the early Church that Joseph, the terrestrial father of Jesus and first of the saints, was a blacksmith. Mary Helms informs us of "his identification as a smith in early medieval Western Europe (approximately the fourth through the eleventh centuries)" (451). She continues:

> Evidence that Joseph was to at least some extent understood to be a smith in early medieval Europe appears briefly and rather in passing in at least three sets of texts: exegetical commentary (in Latin) by ecclesiastical writers based on, or obviously related to, Matthew 13.55 (occasionally Mark 6.3); explicit identification of Joseph as smith by two famous Spanish bishops, Leander of Seville and his brother, Isidore; various Anglo-Saxon texts from England, including the famous Lindisfarne Gospels. (456)

Joseph's craft identified him as a potential cleric-smith in possession of the creative force. "Hilary [of Poitiers] says [in his "Commentary on Matthew"] that Jesus was the son of an artisan who conquers iron with fire (*ferrum igne vincentis*), melts away

(‘*decoquentis'* as in melting away metals) all worldly (sinful) ways, and forms the mass (‘*massam'* a lump of something, especially of metal) into things useful for humans" (456). Such a terrestrial lineage might seem appropriate for a Son of God sent to purify the world of its sins. Yet by the start of the fifteenth century CE several influential commentators were insisting that Joseph was a carpenter and not a smith (458). Helms points out “the suggested early medieval view of the extraordinary smith as a mysterious outsider who lives and works on the edge of acceptable society and associates with unsavory characters who populate the spiritually unredeemed wilderness” (462). Certainly it would be inappropriate to have the Virgin Mother paired with someone “who lives and works on the edge of acceptable society and associates with unsavory characters”, or to have a Savior with such a lineage – though Jesus would in time mix freely with harlots and tax collectors. There is also the conflict in Joseph embodying a “personage whose work reflected the salvational process of purification (460)” and so inadvertently calling into question the need to have a divine avatar such as Jesus when ordinary men already personified such powers. In the end, Helms says the change was made because “woodworkers were inherently less mysterious entities and thus could be more readily co-opted or ‘domesticated’ into the service of promoting the greater liminality and divinity of the central person of Jesus” (466).

Joseph had been reduced to a supporting character and stripped of his implied powers of creation. But a need remained to adapt the creative power of the forge into a Christian context. This would be no easy task, for as Helms observes, smiths “virtually always and everywhere were perceived as ambiguous or liminal figures standing betwixt and between cosmological realms” (459). The resolution to this conundrum was a “wheat

and chaff" approach by the Church in deciding what elements of the cleric-smith would be embraced and which were to be demonized or discarded.

The temporal or practical nature of the smith was incorporated by practitioners of monasticism. Theophilus Presbyter, in his *De Diversis Artibus* ("On Divers Arts") gives instruction for numerous crafts including metalworking to be practiced by his Benedictine brethren. While hardly a textbook for ironmongers, it does confirm that by the twelfth century CE smithing was among the many trades adopted by the monks as much for practical reasons of self-sufficiency as self-discipline. But though there were smiths among them, the Brothers of the various monastic orders could hardly be seen as a caste of cleric-smiths, and those that were trained at the forge were unlikely to leave their cloisters and take up the civic duties of their pagan predecessors.

As the Church of Rome ascended in power during the first millennium CE it established the college of saints, those Christians who had died as martyrs, lived as paragons of virtue, or both. They served both as examples for others to strive to equal, as well as intermediaries by whose veneration one might establish a rapport and ask for intercession on important matters (Brown 56-64). Saints also acted as patrons for numerous reasons, including professions. Over time a small clutch of saints developed who for one reason or another were appointed as patrons of the blacksmith. Hagiographies of Dunstan, Clement, and others were peppered with working-class origin stories and tales of besting the Devil, creating saint-smiths, earthly agents whose powers of creation and transformation were bestowed upon them by the Divine (Kelly & Rogers 47, 64, 82, 91 et al.). Their example was especially important to the mundane smith of

Christianity as he wrestled with the primal forces of Creation, for the Devil was also possessed of such powers and was ever set to tempt or thwart him.

The Oxford University Press translation of Isaiah 54:16 in the Hebrew Bible quotes the Christian God as having created a celestial being whose creations in turn protect Israel: "See it is I who have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy." These and other texts portray the transformative power of the smith as a divine providence. But it was also understood that this power might move in an infernal direction, always a danger in the hands of imperfect man. The smith's forge then as now might seem a diabolic place to the uninformed. Its darkened interior, a place of smoke and flame, might seem a gateway to Hell, while the taciturn and short-tempered men inside seemed able to command the very elements in occult ways. Little wonder some equated the realm of the smith with those of the magician or demon, and attributed its inhabitant with likewise powers. The belief that a smith's power could be misused was noted in "The Breastplate of Saint Patrick", an eighth-century CE Christian prayer included in the *Liber Hymnorum*, in which the petitioner seeks the intercession of the saint:

> against black laws of paganism
> against false laws of heresy
> against deceit of idolatry
> against spells of women and smiths and druids[13]
> against all knowledge that is forbidden the human soul. (51)

Here the blacksmith is in good company, denounced with all remnants of the Celtic Pagan belief system and social structure. He is feared as much as the druids, the "spells of women", and anything else that might threaten the patriarchal and monotheistic Christian power base.

13. This line of the prayer draws comparison to observations by Forbes cited on Page 30, above.

Such a negative aspect of the blacksmith would require balance, some positive assertion of his power as a servant of the Christian god. We find that in the mythology surrounding the patron of blacksmith and other workers in metal: Saint Clement, known in life as Pope Clement I. Jacobus De Voragine's hagiography of Clement in *The Golden Legend* (323-332) presents a fanciful biography that does little to explain Clement's connection to smith craft other than to attribute his death by drowning to the iron anchor tied to his neck. Yet his sanction held great import to the point that in England Saint Clement's Day (November 23rd) became a time of ritual and pageantry. F.E. Sawyer attributes this importance to "a curious legend" (313). In summary: King Alfred held a banquet in 871 CE for his tradesmen, at which he proclaimed the tailor "king of the trades". The smith, furious and offended, disappeared. On November 23rd the King and all his craftsmen were in need of the smith but the smith had not returned. They attempted to work the forge themselves but made a mess of it. Suddenly, the smith returned in the company of Saint Clement. King Alfred, chastened, humbled himself to the Saint and proclaimed the smith as king of the trades (313-15).

Variations of this legend abound, but with the constant of the smith removing himself from society after an insult, leaving the other craftsmen to bumble and fail in his smithy, only to return in the company of Saint Clement, who chastises the others for their folly and whose very presence asserts the blacksmith's supremacy with spiritual authority. It seems curious that a saint should need to intercede in such a mundane debate until one considers the spiritual authority of the blacksmith as craftsman-priest in the temporal world and the need to reassert that authority to head off the chaos resulting from its absence. The presence of the saint serves to Christianize that power and authority, an

act essential in its transition from its prior pagan context. The smith is appointed both by king and saint, the latter a proxy for the forge gods of old.

The events of "Old Clem Day" are many and center around a pageant and a banquet. Of specific interest to this thesis is the ritual denigration of the smith's former, pagan patrons. Sawyer recounts the observances of one Mr. Thompson, of the ceremony as it survived into the Victorian age:

> In all cases it is usual for the oldest blacksmith to take the chair and the youngest the vice chair. The first toast is: 'Here's to old Vulcan as bold as a lion, A large shop and no iron, A big hearth and no coal, And a large pair of bellowses [sic] full of holes'. Then follows the song, 'Here's To The Jolly Blacksmith'. (316)

The above ritual paints Vulcan (and, by extension, all like him) as boastful yet powerless. It is a rejection of the pre-Christian forge gods. The song which follows this satire, "The Jolly Blacksmith", has as its fourth and final verse the following toast:

> Here's a health to King George and likewise his Queen
> And all the Royal Family wherever they re seen
> Which makes his bright hammer to rise and to fall. (316)

The smiths proclaim their ability to wield their hammers as originating from their sovereign, who rules by divine right of the Christian god and in turn gives blessing on the smith to work his craft.

While Clement vouchsafed the smith, it fell to Saint Dunstan (ca. 909-988 CE) to protect the forge of creation and battle the forces of evil. Like Clement, Dunstan was a real man. He was known to have worked as a silversmith and blacksmith after taking holy orders and becoming a monk in Glastonbury, England. Later, appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury, he was an advisor to and occasional critic of several kings.

The legend of Dunstan and the Devil may have been bolstered in both his true-life choice of professions and his strength in speaking truth to power. Edward Flight's version of the tale is typical: Dunstan receives a surprise visit from the Devil, who means to play some trick on the Saint, whereupon he fools him in kind and wrests a promise from the Devil never to return:

> Dunstan the saying called to mind,
> 'The devil through his paw behind
> Alone shall penal torture find
> From iron, lead, or steel.'
> Achilles thus had been eternal
> Thanks to his baptism infernal
> But for his mortal heel
> And so the saint, by wisdom guided
> To fix old Clootie's hoof decided
> With horse-shoe of real metal
> And iron nails quite unmistakable. (16-17)

Dunstan proceeded to shod the Devil's hooves, causing him great pain, only removing them after the fiend promised to avoid all houses that displayed the horse-shoe. From then on:

> The horse-shoe now saves keel, and roof
> From visits of this rover's hoof
> …The name of Smith he cannot bear. (21-22)

Here Dunstan is powerful in two ways, for in addition to his power over the Devil given to him by divine Providence he also has the ability to create powerful charms in the form of the horse-shoe. Dunstan the smith has wielded the creative force to craft a symbol of his mastery over forge and fiend.

Dunstan is not the only Christian forge-saint known for unorthodox symbols. The Irish venerate Saint Brigit, who in 480 CE founded a convent at Kildare. That the nuns of that convent tended a sacred flame, and that the convent was founded on the site of a temple to the Celtic goddess called Brigid whose adherents also tended a sacred flame is highly suggestive a syncretic intent. The flame as creative force would have lent itself well to the power of Saint Brigit as a patron of blacksmiths.

There is also Saint Giles (c. 650 – c. 710 CE), one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. Giles is a patron of both blacksmiths and the disabled, a pairing which draws comparison to the aforementioned pagan notion of the crippled forge god. Giles became popular in the Middle Ages for the belief that his intercession against the Black Death of 1346–53 CE was particularly effective (De Voragine 226-7).

St. Eloi is also an important patron of smiths, farriers and horses. Wilson notes his long-standing importance in France: "[T]here was a practice that endured through the Great War known as The Baptism of the Horses. In north-eastern France and Normandy, more attention was paid to the legend that St. Eloi was a blacksmith. At Arras, Abbeville and Douai before the Revolution, the horses were blessed by the priest with 'hammers of St. Eloi', which were also used to cure animals" (95).

We see the powers of the old gods in these Christian saints, who intercede in the name of God for those who would petition them with prayer. Yet in the past as now, even the faithful can grow impatient or fear for the efficacy of saintly intervention. As will be shown in the next chapter, the people of Europe would find many ways to tap the old magic in an effort to hedge their bets.

Chapter VI

This Charming Smith

The Scottish border town of Gretna Green has been a popular place for marriages since the mid-eighteenth century CE. Eloping English couples would rush to the blacksmith of Gretna Green, where this "anvil priest" as he became known would officiate over his anvil in a legally-recognized ceremony. Many chapels and ministers now supplement the smith's office, where most continue his tradition of officiating over an anvil. Gretna Green has made an impression beyond the UK, for the Germans will say of match-makers, "Er ist der Schmied von Gretna Green" (Cavendish 19: 2616).

Be it for wedding or welding, the smithy was a place of transmutation, with the smith as agent of creation, his works greater than the sum of their parts. This power was known to the people of pre-Industrial societies, and the smith was often called upon to serve them as a healer, a maker of charms, and, on occasion, a dealer in retribution.

Such traits were a continuation of ancient beliefs, even if only a dim memory to smith or client. "The smith has always been a magician of signal importance among primitive peoples", asserts M.C. Randolph, who also points out that "The Northern smiths, like those of ancient Greece, forged and ground the deadly, irresistible weapons….decked with runes or ogham concealing powerful, malignant charms" (185-6). These iron weapons were often employed for "defense against evil spirits and the elfin races…unable to resist iron" (187). In *Beowulf* (lines 1677-1698) the runes on a sword used by the hero to slay Grendel's mother reveal it as a creation of the Nephilim, those

defiant of the Hebrew god described in the apocryphal Book Of Enoch. Lesser blades such as the ninth-century CE Sæbø sword of Norway and the tenth-century Seax of Beagnoth, found near London, bear runic inscriptions on their blades which are not known to be malignant, instead being personal marks or good luck charms.

Of the Celtic smith in particular, Randolph calls him "a man of learning and a man of magic, a wizard of sorts, having more than a slight resemblance to the druids" (188). The smith would see this high position diminish in the Christian age, but something of his powers of old would endure in the permanence of his craft and his creations long after the druids were erased from memory.

Pre-Enlightenment Europe was a place of consensus belief in the supernatural, of elements and agents which could be called upon via divers practices to effect reality for the benefit of the practitioner. It was not uncommon to encounter situations where science and the supernatural walked hand in hand, with the later often taking the lead in their conjoined effort. Stephen Mitchell points out the overlapping borders between religion, medicine and magic in a Danish text dating from 1467, "one described by its editors as a teacher's manual", possibly for a cathedral school:

> [A]mong the many highly diverse entries…are included charms against fever in oneself, disease, fever in others, and toothache and two charms against theft. The first of the theft charms is especially interesting as it invokes the powers of both hell and heaven (*in nomine dyaboli*[…] *in nomine domini ihesu Christi*). (49)

Preceding this text by several centuries are soapstone molds such as the one discovered at Hedeby which contain castings for both Christian crosses and hammers of Þórr (Fuglesang 18). While the metal smith may have been serving two groups of customers, it is possible that both might be purchased and worn by the same person

hedging his bets in a time of transitional belief. And Michael Thykier reports on a talismanic rune stick discovered in Odense, Denmark in 2015 CE bearing an appeal in Latin for good health, [14] proving the Scandinavian Christians were still willing to employ old techniques to petition their new god.

The old gods were recast in the folktales of the Christian Age as sinister figures or diabolical tricksters. The smith, with his magical nature and often residing at highway crossroads,[15] put himself in a more likely position to encounter the old gods as they roamed the hinterlands. One example is a tale from Scandinavia:

> One evening in the year 1208, a horseman rode up to the house of a blacksmith named Thord Vettir...and asked for lodging overnight and shoeing for his horse. The smith assented, and early the next morning began the work, chatting meanwhile with his guest. "Where were you last night?" he inquired of the latter. "In Medaldal," was the reply. "And where were you the night before?" asked the smith. "In Jardal," answered the stranger. "You must be a tremendous liar," said the smith, with great frankness....When he was ready to continue journeying and had mounted his steed, the smith inquired his name. "Have you ever heard of Odin?" was the rejoinder. "I have heard his name," said the smith. "Then you may see him now," remarked the horseman, "and, if you do not believe what I have told you, look how I leap my horse over the fence." Thereupon he spurred the animal and rode straight at the courtyard fence, which was seven ells high. (Lawrence 43)

Óðinn's traffic with the blacksmith would not end there. He would be called upon to work through forge and iron to heal his supplicants well into the Industrial Age. Sabine Baring-Gould passes on a story sent to him by one Reverend Heanley of Upton Grey

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14. "800-year-old rune stick unearthed during excavation of Danish city". ScienceNordic.com, 4/30/2015. <http://sciencenordic.com/800-year-old-rune-stick-unearthed-during-excavation-danish-city> (Retrieved 8/13/2015)

15. Lawrence observes: "In Germany blacksmith's forges were often situated on highways remote from settlements, and were the resort of travelers and teamsters, who stopped either to have a horse shod, or to obtain veterinary advice. Quite naturally these smithies, like the modern crossroads variety stores, became little centres of sociability and gossip, and even of conviviality. Moreover, questionable characters sometimes frequented these places, and hence their reputation was not always savory. But the blacksmith himself, by virtue of his calling, was looked upon with respect" (50).

Vicarage, Winchfield, England, concerning an elderly woman who in 1858 refused medicine for her ailment. Stating that she "knowed on a soight better cure for the ague than yon mucky stuff", she displayed "three horseshoes nailed there with a hammer placed crosswise upon them." When questioned, she replied it was a "chawm," explaining its operation:

> I tak's t' mell (hammer) I' moy left haun and I mashys they shoon throice, and Oi sez, sez Oi:
> Feyther, Son, an' Holy Ghoast,
> Naale the devil to this poast!
> Throice I stroikes with holy crook,
> Won for God an' won for Wod, an' one for [text missing - "Loki"?] (sic)
> Theen, laad, whin the old un comes to shak him he wean't nivver git past you; you'ull fin' him saafe as t church steeple. (Baring-Gould 39-40)

This example is notable for two reasons. First, it is an example of the persistence in rural England of belief in the smith's curative powers well into the nineteenth century, making use of both his tools and his creations, namely the iron hammer and horseshoe, respectively. Equally compelling is the text of the "chawm", for as Baring-Gould points out (40) it equates the smith's hammer – here possibly a proxy for Thor's hammer – with a Christian "holy crook", and calls upon the Christian god and those of the pagan Vikings with equal passion in the same breath.

Iron, transformed by the power of the smith, held a power of its own. Edward Clodd collected in Ireland and Scotland beliefs in the power of iron such that to speak of it was protection from ill will. "The fishermen of the West Coast of Ireland never talk of rats as such, but use the name 'old iron'" (92). Ill omens and bad luck could be countered by the use or even the naming of "cold iron", that is, iron purified from ore and fashioned into an object by a smith. He recites an account from the East Coast of Scotland, where pigs are considered bad luck by local fishermen, and even to name them is an ill omen:

> The minister, in the course of the service, had occasion to read the story of the Gadarene demoniacs, in which the verse occurs, “Now there was there, nigh unto the mountains, a great herd of swine feeding.” Scarcely had he uttered the unlucky word than he was interrupted with a wild yell of “Cauld Iron!” a talismanic phrase which the natives believe possesses the power to checkmate the baneful influence of “swine”. It is the Scottish equivalent of touching wood. (94)

Looking to Denmark, Clodd cites Brand in the protection of unbaptized children: “[A]mong Danish women precaution against evil spirits took the form of putting garlic, bread, salt, or some steel instrument, as amulets about the house before laying the newborn babe in the cradle” (70). A similar caution was practiced in Wales:

> [I]t was believed that the Fairies feared iron and that an unbaptized baby was in danger of being snatched away by evil spirits and replaced by a peevish fairy offspring. These two beliefs lie at the heart of the custom of placing a poker or iron tongs across the cradle of an unbaptized baby as a protective charm. (Gwyndaf 98)

Stephen Wilson adds: "Iron often had apotropaic power. It was used, for example, to give protection against the fairies in the Highlands of Scotland; while in modern Greece, 'one touches iron when one sees a priest in order to ward off the bad luck he brings'" (421).

The smith himself might be called upon to address a variety of ills. Much as the barber might double as surgeon, so too were there smiths who were known to supplement their income by providing medical services. Venetia Newall reports that, in pre-Renaissance Italy, “smiths practiced medicine: [one] story places one in the role of dentist. Later still smiths were known to cauterize wounds” (Cavendish 19: 2620). Morrice McCrae notes that in the eighteenth century CE, “Traditionally in Scotland, blacksmiths were also expected to be skilled in the treatment of the broken bones of human patients” (3) – that is, in addition to those of his animal patients in his role as a

farrier. “In Minho [a former province of Portugal]…'before the Second World War, blacksmiths were held to have a special ability to cure wounds'" (Wilson 335).

The smith would also supply magical services typically reserved to so-called hedge magicians and cunning men. There were often optimal conditions in which to conduct an operation, including the "witching hour" of midnight. Hand and Hand note that:

> The forging of chains at midnight for pregnant women to wear on their bodies to forestall stillbirth in Serbia, and the forging of coffin nails into chains to be worn against gout in Saxony, attest the special favour of the midnight hour for folk medical activities involving blacksmiths. In the last-named instance, the act was best carried out at midnight on Good Friday by a smith in the naked state. (148)

Newall, again, notes that “In England, blacksmiths were often blood-charmers. This was a kind of magical ‘first aid’, used to stop bleeding in days when doctors were few and unskillful” (Cavendish 19: 2620). He goes on to describe a nocturnal ritual involving seven smiths and a symbolic striking of a child upon the anvil.

Steve Roud, after Bigge, recounts such a ritual from Northumberland in 1860, noting it is one “already known in the seventeenth century, as recorded in Ralph Thoresby’s *Diary* in 1691”:

> Heart-grown, or Bewitched – a term applied to a sickly puny child, who does not grow. Such a child must be brought to a blacksmith of the seventh generation; this must be done before sunrise. The child is laid naked on the anvil, the smith raises the sledge hammer as if he were going to strike hot iron, but lets it come gently on the child’s body. This is done three times, and the child always thrives after this. (39)

Wilson tells of a similar treatment enduing to recent days:

> [A] ritual called 'hammering the spleen'...was practised in central and northern France in modern times. This took place at night; the patient was placed on the blacksmith's anvil, naked or with the midriff bared. The forge was lit and, when the fire was red, the blacksmith wielded his

> biggest hammer, striking the forge with two blows and stopping the third just above the patient's body. (344)

James Mooney tells of another blacksmith cure from Ireland, one also requiring an element of lineage common to magical traditions of inherited skill:

> Boils, however swollen and painful, may be cured by a blacksmith who is the seventh son of a blacksmith. It is only necessary that he shall open and shut his tongs three times in front of the boil, without touching it. The seventh son has generally great power over disease. (160)

Such ritual have been in use for centuries. Wilson relates a comment from a Welsh curative ritual for children dated to the 1590s CE: "'We nowadays have no objection to pulling children through fires...or to turn them on the anvil of the smith'" (274).

Preventive therapy was also offered by the smith. Wilson again:

> In the Corréze [in south-western France], according to a report from the 1890s, 'a woman would go to the blacksmith on the three last nights of the full moon before delivery was anticipated, and he would stretch her out on his anvil pretending to strike her with his hammer and making terrible noises as he did so'. (167)

It is impossible to know how many smiths offered magical services. Not every smith was a "cunning man", and vice versa. But in the centuries prior to the Industrial Age there were folk across Europe looking for the easy resolution to difficult problems that magic seemed to offer, and there were smiths willing to offer it, if only for what seemed easy money. Such magical practices were potentially quite lucrative. Alison Rowlands recounts one example from Renaissance Germany. "[I]t was a good way of earning money: in 1582 Georg Kissling, cunning man and blacksmith of Ergersheim, claimed that he had earned 10 gulden for protecting a peasant's livestock against witches and six gulden for healing a woman's diseased thigh" (69). Owen Davies tells of several nineteenth-century CE smiths in the south of England who engaged in charm magic. One

smith from Shropshire had quite a collection – Davies records no fewer than four unique formulae from this source alone (20-27). Often these charms were a mish-mash of corrupted Latin fragments and half-forgotten pagan theology. The average village smith would not be learned in Latin or Greek and so have little more understanding of the text than his clients. Concerning "The Latin charm from Cornwall", Davies notes, "The Latin can be translated, but would have been meaningless to those who were using it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, just as with gibberish charms, it was precisely because of its incomprehensibility that it was deemed to have magical virtue" (21). The perceived magical nature of the smith, combined with the self-assurance and community standing attributed to the King of Crafts, infused his magical operations with the required gravitas.

A grasping smith could be persuaded to use his powers for sinister purpose, as in the case of the so-called "Curse of the Anvil". Douglas Hyde, in his *Religious Songs of Connacht*, explains the process:

> ... if a person desires to put a curse upon another person he goes to the smith and asks him to turn the anvil on his enemy, so that a melting and every kind of misfortune may come upon him. He would offer money to the smith for doing that, and if the smith was a bad man, he would accept the money "and he would put," says Conor Maguire, "' the cor chip,' that is the horn of the anvil, facing backwards, and he would request the devil to do his utmost for putting evil and ill-luck upon the other man." There was no curse so noxious as this….The people say that this "Smith's curse" was the worst curse of all, and that it was so venomous "that it was seldom and very seldom it was done." (2.285-7)

The risk to the smith in this act was as dear as that for the accursed. Magic for good or ill was considered sorcery and those caught were tried for witchcraft. William Monter, in a survey of recorded witchcraft accusations in Normandy for the years 1560-

1660 CE, shows the proportion of men to women ranging from 1.5/1 to 10.5/1. Of those men, the largest occupations represented were shepherds, the clergy, and blacksmiths. Monter points out that, like the shepherds, "blacksmiths were frequently involved in illicit forms of veterinary medicine; they were usually charged with bewitching (and/or magically curing) the most valuable animals of all, horses" (582). These serious charges carried a death sentence, though Morton reports some appealed successfully and were banished (582).

The powers of the smith extended beyond his person, actions or creations. The water of the blacksmith's trough, used to quench hot iron, was especially prized for its magical, curative properties.[16] The smith's water had a wide variety of applications. "More specific procedure to prevent [complications after childbirth] in seventeenth-century Spain included drinking water…in which the blacksmith had cooled iron" (Wilson 182). Valentina Fornaciai, in her *Toliette, Perfumes and Make-Up at the Medici Court*, collects several medicinal formulae composed by Antonio de Medici (1576–1621). A typical recipe requiring the smith's water is as follows:

> Take purified mercury 5 pounds 6 ounces, common salt 1 pound 4 ounces. Green copper 2 pounds 8 ounces. Hungarian vitriol 1 pound 4 ounces. Grind together and put in a new iron pan and fill with blacksmith's water and bring slowly to the boil, stirring with a wooden spatula, and everything will bind together to form a metallic paste. Make medals which will become hard in the open air and wear them around the neck, they are good for warding off the plague. (73)

The ingredients of this charm, the alchemical knowledge required to create it, and the fact that Papal decrees such as the decretal *Spondent Pariter* (John XXII, 1317 CE)

16. Despite the insistence of numerous electronic sources, the second-century CE Greek physician Soranus of Ephesus did not recommended using blacksmith's trough water as a spermicide. A review of the chapter in his book *On Gynecology* concerning contraception makes no reference to a smith's trough water as an ingredient in any application. This author suspects the misquote was originally made intentionally for humorous effect on a Web site, then allowed to spread without subsequent verification.

discouraged the open practice of alchemy strongly suggest such curatives were rarely available to the working classes of Medieval and Renaissance Europe. For the *hoi polloi* use of the smith's water was more direct, it being applied topically or ingested for a variety of ailments. Roud tells of the water being drunk by children to relieve consumption (39).

There have been modern attempts to isolate some temporal explanation behind the supernatural belief in forge water as a curative. Isolated from organic contamination, the water would be repeatedly exposed to hot iron as the smith thrust his work in the trough. This would have the dual effect of killing any microbes in the water while infusing it with traces of iron and other minerals. Such clean mineral water would have its effects on persons suffering the afflictions common in Medieval European societies, where medicine and hygiene practices alike were scarce and suspect.

These benefits extend into the modern day, their efficacy suggesting science behind the sorcery. Donal Deeney MRCGP, a general practitioner in Ireland, in a 2002 CE letter reprinted in 2008 CE on the Web site of the BMJ, tells of his own experience concerning the curative effects forge water has on cutaneous warts. He cites multiple sources when stating, "Forge water, the water the Black Smith [sic] uses to cool hot irons, has being [sic] used by The Irish as a "Wart Cure" for centuries." Deeny recites his own experience being cured of warts as a youth by "dipping my hands in Forge water", then goes on to tell of his own experiment as a GP, using water from "a Farrier School in Kildare Town….5 patients used the forge water. In 4 out of the five [sic] cases, all their warts disappeared within 3 months….It worked for both plantar and hand warts." Deeney goes on to speculate: "It may be the water, high in iron concentration, is effective." This

promising if somewhat anecdotal report serves to support conjecture of as-yet unidentified science behind the belief, yet in less enlightened times such curative success would only support a supernatural explanation.

Widespread consensus in a spirit world plaguing and curing mankind of warts and toothaches would diminish with the onset of the Industrial Age, as populations shifted to urban centers and the establishment of a more rational, scientific worldview set the educated urbanite apart from and above the allegedly superstitious rural bumpkin. Change would come slowly, but it would come. Yet though the new urbanites left much of their old ways and beliefs in the villages behind them, they did so on the same highways where Óðinn rode, and would be surprised on their arrival that something of the old gods awaited them.

Chapter VII

Fires of Industry

As Europe entered the nineteenth century CE the blacksmith maintained a prominent position in society, both as a master craftsman who contributed needful creations in iron to the community, and by embodying the vestiges of ancient beliefs that found their expression in scripture and folklore. Yet by the end of that century his prominence in both cases would be greatly diminished. The advent of the Industrial Age would change the European culture in which the smith had endured in one form or another since antiquity, to one where his powers diminished and were rarely required.

Improvements in the iron trade from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries CE hinted at the great leap to come. Henry Court of England introduced two such advances: the puddling furnace, patented in 1784, produced larger amounts of bar iron, while his 1783 patent for an iron rolling mill greatly increased daily production. These advances meant an increase in energy needs, which would be met in the form of coke, a refined form of mined coal. An increase in energy supply would itself encourage innovations throughout the eighteenth century CE by Abraham Darby I, John Wilkins and others that would improve quality and return in the production process.

These advances were also applied to the production of steel in its various forms, but it was not until 1857 CE, when Henry Bessemer demonstrated his Bessemer Converter, that the inexpensive production of steel in mass quantities made it the

preferred metal. Steel prices dropped to a fraction of their former cost, initiating the move away from wrought iron for many applications.

It was the mass production of inexpensive steel that began the blacksmith's decline, with the machinist's workshop replacing the anvil and forge to churn out tools, implements and hardware of identical strength and design. Production became piecemeal, with an employee assigned to a single, specific task in the assembly process. This eliminated the need for skilled labor. Initially there was still a need for the King of Crafts, but as Marcia Evans tells in this example the respite was a temporary one:

> One change which did take place during the period 1750-1850 was the growth of the coaching trade. Roads had improved and more people wanted to travel. Inns served not just the passengers on the coaches but also the horses. Therefore there were many more opportunities for farriers to set up. Once the railways came this need diminished and numbers of forges dwindled. This, allied to the mass production of many of the implements used on the farms and in the kitchens meant that the role of the blacksmith was reduced to that of repairer rather than that of craftsman. (7)

Steel was an unfriendly metal for the smith to work with. *Smiths' Work*, a textbook printed in 1911 CE, devotes its final chapter solely to the working of steel, noting in several places the chance of ruin when conducting certain operations, and the lack of agreement amongst smith as to certain techniques (144-55). Store-bought steel tools and fastenings could be bought faster than a smith might deliver them, and often lasted longer. Demand soon shifted to mass-produced offerings, encouraging rapid growth in the mill towns and machine shops, with the traditional smith reduced to an occasional repairman (Evans 7).

Methods of learning were introduced to support the needs of the new industries. Ever more rare were the apprenticeships where one or two assistants learned from a

single master smith, gradually replaced with formal education from a vocational or engineering school. These were places of scientific advancement, with no room for the leftover superstitions of country tradesmen. All was measurement, not magic, intuition and experience pushed aside for a by-the-book method. The smoke and gloom of the smithy were exhausted by the cold glare of the incandescent electric light, and piecemeal work reduced the creative process to a soulless sub-task. The art of the craft was lost, and the artists replaced with an identical, mechanical result, removing the personality from the process.

The new schools took a dim view of their autodidactic predecessors. This was quite evident in the new veterinary sciences, whose proponents saw the healing arts of the farriers not as a supernaturally-imbued art but as a dangerous guessing game. Marcia Evans reprints an unsigned and undated[17] article from a journal, *The Farrier*, where the unknown author looks unfavorably upon the traditional farrier's practices:

> Till lately, with a few exceptions, it was in the hands of low people, completely ignorant of the very basis of their vocation, the anatomy of the horse. And except in some simple cases, they knew little of the real nature of the diseases, to which the animal is subject. Their recipes were, in general, of the charm and spell sort, rather than the fruits of scientific skill. A cowleach brought in the following bill against his employer: viz. *To bleeding your cow, so much: to giving a drink to your cow, so much.. [sic] to nointing* [sic] *your cow over till she died, so much.* In short, our horse and cattle doctors were a set of low illiterate quacks. (42) [Italics in original]

The article goes on to paint grooms and coachmen with the same dirty brush, before praising the Royal Veterinary College, saying that by their efforts "Farriery will

17. While the piece is undated, it references the advances of the "Veterinary College", which would be the Royal Veterinary College, London, established in 1791 CE. Given this and that the range of Evans's study concludes at 1900 CE, it is almost certain the piece was written in the nineteenth century CE.

also be rendered a reputable as well as a gainful profession. Instead, therefore, of its being confined to people of the lower ranks and of mean talents" (42).

A kind of culture shock was inevitable in those new urbanites transplanted from field to factory. Something of an antidote to the brutality of industry was found in the Romantic movement. This artistic celebration of the natural and the pastoral, imbued as it was with transcendental expression, presented an escapist, agrarian nostalgia for those overwhelmed by stark and grimy reality. Romanticism readily embraced pagan motifs in its yearning for a time before industry. Whether from an embrace of natural beauty or a rejection of even the remotely mechanical Romanticism gave little time to the affairs of Hephaestus or his agents upon the earth. New odes were written to Zeus, Aphrodite and Artemis by the Romantics, but few of the neo-pagan poets would praise the imperfect god of the forge.

The relation of the smith in his community had by the start of the twentieth century CE been reduced from an essential craftsman present in every city, town and village, one upon whom all others were dependant, to something of a quaint holdover from a fading age. His persona lessened in supernatural terms, the power of the forge overshadowed. Fewer and fewer looked to the smith – when they could find one – for cures or curses, and his officiating in public was reduced to spectacles such as anvil firings and other entertainments disassociated from past function, or reduced to acceptable explanations such as frightening the Christian Devil. Practices associated with the Church, such as the annual feast days in honor of Saints Clement and Dunstan, would also endure and be rolled into the half-pagan merriments of smithing social groups with

their honor of “Old Clem”. The long-diminished reign of the cleric-smith had finally ended in the fires of industry.

Conclusion

The blacksmith of pagan Europe held an important position in his community, not only as a master craftsman who supplied essential tools and weapons but also as one who wielded supernatural powers of creation bestowed by the forge god of his societal pantheon. Societal responses to this power varied but typically placed the smith above other craftsmen and afforded him a place closer to that of kings and priests.

The coming of Christianity and the suppression of the old gods caused a reinterpretation of the power of the forge and its master. This change took dual form: the syncretism practiced by the Christian church, and the folk magic beliefs of European society. The Church absorbed the powers of the old forge gods by declaring certain saints as patrons of blacksmiths. Clement, Dunstan, Eloi and others would be seen to wield the smith's power by divine sanction, regulating its use and divorcing it from both its pagan heritage and suspicions of diabolical association. Profane beliefs would emerge from a combination of superstition and fragmented or corrupted echoes of pagan belief to assign the blacksmith curative and protective powers that were expressed in the creation of charmed objects and in ritual. Occasionally these ritual would combine pagan and Christian beliefs.

Christian patronage of the saints endures to this day, but much of the known folk beliefs and magic were lost in the Industrial Age, when need of the smith in everyday life was eliminated.

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