

gaps and broadens the scope of what it means to be Pagan in America.

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Alan Pert, *Red Cactus: The Life of Anna Kingsford* (Watsons Bay, Australia: Books and Writers, 2006), ix + 233 pp, AUS \$39.95 (paper).

Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) cut a wide swath during her short life. One of the first female British physicians (having received a medical degree in Paris), she owned a newspaper, promoted progressive views on women's dress, diet, and health, and espoused vegetarianism and animal rights. "As I am against the orthodox priest, I am against the orthodox 'doctor'," she wrote at one point (p. 86). Elsewhere, according to a friend, "she had recently come to the conclusion that the proper and natural food for man was uncooked, therefore mainly fruit and nuts" (p. 46). The same friend, Florence Fenwick Miller, praised both Kingsford's physical beauty and her intellect and force of mind, comparing her variously to Cleopatra, Mary Queen of Scots, the martyred philosopher Hypatia, and "Aspasia the friend and counsellor of Pericles" (p. 47).

Having married a theological student who gained a parish position in Shropshire, Kingsford converted to Roman Catholicism in order to escape the duties of a rural vicar's wife, produced one son, and thereafter used her husband primarily to forward her mail while following her callings in more metropolitan locales.

The chief male companion of her adult life was one Edward Maitland, himself a flamboyant mystic, a bit of a would-be Svengali, and until now Kingsford's only biographer. In this new work, Alan Pert (music librarian at the University of Sydney) rightly mourns the fact that no sooner had Kingsford died from tuberculosis than he burnt all her letters and diaries, not to mention documents connected with her presidency of the British Theosophical Society. More concerned with her own brand of esoteric Christianity than with H.P. Blavatsky's mahatmas and ascended masters, she eventually withdrew after various conflicts with Blavatsky's partisans.

Some scholars of Western esotericism credit Kingsford's leadership with renewing interest in Gnostic Christianity; she is also credited with opening the way for the Societas Rosicruciana and subsequently the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. That aspect of her life (beyond the political infighting of the Theosophical Society) is played down in *Red Cactus*, however, in favor of her women's rights and anti-vivisection campaigning. Pert spends very little space on her hermetic and mystical writings. Thus, for the researcher in Western esotericism or the history of contemporary Paganism, *Red Cactus* will be a secondary source at best, setting Kingsford within her milieu of Victorian social causes.

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