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Autumn

Living as we do in a modern post-agricultural society, we miss the magic of Autumn. Of course it's pretty, and the trees turning colour never fails to delight, but the very real threat of the oncoming winter does not have the power to thrill it once had.



Traditionally, this was a time of plenty when the harvests were gathered in and the flocks and herds culled ready for the winter shortages. It was hard to keep animals alive in the cold season and only a certain number could be fed. The rest were slaughtered and salted down to last until spring. The fruit was gathered and made into jam, preserves and pickles.

A season associated with so much death has long been commemorated by the Christian Church as the feast of All Saints (All Hallows) and the beginning of the serious part of the year. Indeed in my own profession as a Barrister, the traditional toast of the Western Circuit is "Cras Animarum" i.e. The Morrow of All Souls (November 2nd) when the first Assize of the Western Circuit (Winchester) would begin and all we good fellows would get together again to assist in the administration of Justice.

That too would be a time of death:- up until 1869 a man (or indeed a woman or child) could be hanged for stealing goods worth 6d and more serious penalties still were reserved for serious crimes like murdering a husband (petty treason: burning alive). In the Bloody Assizes of 1685 over 1400 people were sentenced to death in the aftermath of the Monmouth Rebellion.

So, as we look at the modern celebration of Hallowe'en, perhaps we might just spare a thought for the mortality of all things and reflect on what we should do to preserve the divine in us. Then perhaps, we may drink together to "Cras Animarum".