

WITCHCRAFT IN 1962

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ON four dates in the year, says tradition, witches meet to hold a Great Sabbat. These dates are Halloween (October 31st), Candlemas (February 2nd), May Eve (April 30th) and Lammis (August 1st).

These were the folk-festivals of the old pagan religion of nature worship and magic. Long after Britain was officially Christian, the witches and their followers kept the old religion alive.

In fact, witches still meet on these dates. There are probably more active covens throughout the country now than there have been for many years.

This is partly due to the repeal of the last of the Witchcraft Acts in 1951. Also, more people than ever are dissatisfied with orthodox creeds. They search, sometimes in strange places, for the answers to life's mysteries.

Black covens

They may run into danger. There are "black" covens as well as "white." The "white" covens consider themselves to be the heirs of an ancient tradition. They seek to use occult powers for good.

The "black" covens, of course, make the same claims. However, they are often run by crooks and perverts. These people seek power over their gullible followers, and satisfaction for their own warped minds.

Anyone becoming involved with them may find themselves caught in a net of obscenity, degradation and blackmail.

The genuine traditions of white witchcraft are not only a pleasanter subject. In my opinion, they are also more interesting.

Fairy ring

Take, for instance, the story of the old shepherd at Steyning, in Sussex. He was asked about his practice of performing white witchcraft to protect his flock. He made ritual salutations to the moon from within a "fairy ring."

His blunt comment to the questioner was, "Anyone would be a damn fool if he didn't!"

The "fairy ring" forms a natural magic circle. These round markings on the turf were once thought to be made by the dancing feet of fairies or witches. They are actually caused by a type of fungus which affects the colour of the grass. Some of those on the South Downs are estimated to be hundreds of years old. They have been in ritual use for generations.

Full moon

Witches believe in the powers of the moon. They say the moon has an effect upon the fertility of nature, and also upon the psychic powers of human beings. Their monthly meeting, called the Esbat, is held at full moon.

The powers of the moon are personified as the pagan moon goddess, whom they worship and invoke. She has many names. Hecate, Diana, Aradia and Tanat are some of them.

Witches also invoke the horned god of fertility, who resembles the great god Pan of ancient times. Old-time Churchmen called him the Devil, because of his horns and cloven hoofs. To witches, however, he is a beneficent being, who personifies the joy and vitality of the earth.

Sacred site

Beyond these deities is "the Old Providence," the Father-Mother of Life, the original source of all things, from Whom proceeds the hierarchy of gods and spirits in their many orders. Sometimes, on the night of

the Great Sabbat, all the covens of a district would foregather in some chosen meeting place. This was often a pagan sacred site, such as an old stone circle. Here they would exchange information and perform their rituals.

In recent times the ashes of mysterious fires have been found at the Rollright Stones, in the Cotswolds. Local people are reluctant to talk about it; but there are whispers of witch meetings there.

Similar stories are told of lonely Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. Here there is a place long connected by tradition with witchcraft. It is secretly known as "the Pool of the Moon."

Such traditional connections are sometimes shown by local place-names, such as Coven



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Heath, near Wolverhampton.

Witches believe that natural flame and spring water give off "power." Their outdoor rituals usually involve a small bonfire. If they work indoors they use lighted candles, and a bowl of water over which an incantation is recited to consecrate it.

The magic circle is drawn to concentrate the power witches believe they raise. It is outlined with a ritual knife called an Athame, having magical symbols on its handle.

They believe that dancing round within this circle hand in hand helps to raise power; "deosil" (clockwise) for white magic, and "widdershins" (anti-clockwise) for averse magic and cursing.

Dried herbs

Incense is burned in a censer, on the embers of glowing charcoal. Sometimes witches make their own incense, of aromatic gums mixed with dried herbs plucked at the full moon.

They believe that the perfume of incense acts upon the mind, aiding concentration; also, that it attracts helpful spirits.

White witches use spells and charms for the healing of humans and animals. In olden days there were few doctors for the poor. People went to the white witches, who treated them with herbs.

Today, many of the old-time witches' herbs are processed in modern laboratories to yield valuable medicines. For centuries past, what is now called hypnotism has been known and practised by witches.

The real secrets of witch lore have been jealously guarded. Sometimes traditions have been handed down in families. There is a widespread belief that a witch cannot die until he or she has passed on the knowledge to a successor. Ritual knives and other magical objects are handed on in the same way.

During the last war, white witches met in the New Forest,

Hampshire, for a very special purpose. Britain was in grave danger of an enemy invasion. The witches held their ceremonies to stop Hitler's troops from crossing the Channel.

They believed that if they tried hard enough they could put the idea into the German leaders' minds that an invasion could not succeed. The story was told among them that the same thing had been done centuries before to stop the Spanish Armada landing.

Whether it had any effect, who knows?

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