



The present-day witches would not allow any photographs, and the above artist's conception of an old-time witch has no relation to the real thing.

RESEARCH

INTO

WITCHCRAFT

Justine C. Glass

attends an inaugural meeting

authorities on witchcraft, on which she has written many books, dealt with some of the commoner misconceptions that brought the craft into disrepute, and with the real aims and purposes of the Wise Ones.

She began by reminding us that this is the thirteenth year (the mystic thirteen of the witches, sacred to their Moon goddess because of the thirteen lunar months) since the last Witchcraft Act was repealed.

Before that, our dinner in the pleasantly ordinary atmosphere of the Hotel Rubens would have made us criminals, liable to be fined or imprisoned. In the 17th century, it would have been a hanging matter.

Well, we would not be fined, imprisoned, hanged or burnt as a result of our meeting, but all of us in that room had received a copy of the current issue of *Pentagram*, and we knew that it is issued under the anonymity of a monomark because, although persecution, as a rule, no longer takes the form of physical violence, it is still rampant.

Recently a witch who had been interviewed by the Press was turned out of her shop and two houses. Another was evicted from her flat after mention in a newspaper. Blackmail of witches is not unknown.

PERSECUTION usually arises from ignorance, narrow-mindedness, or fear of the not understood. Much of the fear of witchcraft comes from its confusion with black magic, which in fact has no part in it.

Witches guard themselves against infiltration of undesirable elements into their covens by watching would-be neophytes as carefully as aspirants for admittance to

ON Saturday, October 3rd, I spent one of the most interesting and enjoyable evenings I have had for a long time, at the inaugural dinner and meeting of the Witchcraft Research Association.

The Association's chief aims are objective research into the old tradition of witchcraft, which has been disrupted by the forced isolation of covens during centuries of persecution; to build up the tradition into a coherent whole, and to re-establish the old craft as a constructive influence.

Already a coven has been discovered, the existence of which had not been known to others; ancient spells and invocations—and an unguent used in the past as an aid to clairvoyance, have come to light.

The interest shown in witchcraft in Britain is enormous. *Pentagram*, the news-sheet of the W.R.A., which keeps members in touch with the Association's activities and acts as clearing-house for information, has received hundreds of letters from all over the world and from this country.

Fifty members were at Saturday's dinner; some of them had come from places as far afield as Wolverhampton, Cheltenham, Harwich, Bristol, as well as from London, Brighton and the Home Counties.

Perhaps half of them were witches. After dinner, which began with a grace that was a twelfth-century chant, and ended with an ancient Celtic form of thanks for food, Mrs Doreen Valiente, one of the best-known

The Old Religion

monasteries or convents are watched. Sensation-seekers or the unstable are turned away.

In the case of true, or "white" witches, it is certain that the monstrous practices to which they "confessed" two or three hundred years ago existed only in the imaginations of their interrogators.

Public opinion had to be whipped up against them to prevent outcry against the brutality of their treatment. So they were told that if they confessed to the depravities of which they were accused, they would be given the privilege of being strangled before they were burnt.

And, as Mrs Valiente said, which of us, under those circumstances, wouldn't confess to anything?

On another popular idea, that nude dancing is part of every witch ritual, Mrs Valiente commented: "In this climate?"

She brought with her a robe, typical of those worn in her coven. It was a severe black, tabard-like garment, belted with thick black cord.

Most witches, she said, believe that nudity detracts from their powers. But there may be covens that do consider it necessary. Covens have always been autonomous, making their own decisions.

THIS independence of the covens is one reason why maintenance of the continuity of the tradition of witchcraft has been difficult . . . as well as persecution, the effect of which I have mentioned already.

The tendency was for each group to preserve one particular aspect of the hereditary tradition, so that it became fragmented. Witchcraft, as the author of an article in the current issue of *Pentagram* points out, has suffered from this form of dissociation, particularly because it has no standard literature, or generally accepted form of teaching on which to draw.

If, as Mrs Valiente and the Witchcraft Research Association urge and hope, affiliated and unaffiliated covens pool their knowledge and ritual, the powers and techniques of the craft—for instance, concerning the practice of healing—could be increased, and fascinating forgotten facets of many kinds re-discovered.

TODAY, some covens specialize in healing techniques, scrying (crystal gazing), Astrology, use of the Cone of Power (with which T. C. Lethbridge, the archaeologist, experimented and about which he wrote in *Ghost and Divining Rod*, and which Dr Aubrey Westlake demonstrated to me), and many other valuable and intriguing forms of what is nowadays called

extra-sensory perception. Mrs Valiente told of an investigator into astral travelling who, visiting an isolated part of the country, had to spend the night with a mother and daughter possessing the "gift", and to share their bed.

During the night she woke up. Beside her was the mother, stiff and cold, apparently dead.

She woke the daughter, who took a look at her mother, and said: "She baint dead. She'm just out and about."

The Old Craft was a synthesis of theology and the occult arts; there being nothing antipathetic between true religion and true magic. So it was to be expected that Saturday night's guests were not only interested in witchcraft *per se*, but also in various forms of occult science.

Mr L. Levene, who had travelled 80 miles by motor-cycle to the dinner, cast the horoscope of the W.R.A. on the spot. Taurus rising, Capricorn in a dominant position, the Zodiac's horns in evidence, in connexion with a function in honour of the Horned God, as a witch remarked.

And on the menu was—not beef, it's true, but veal.

MRS Valiente alluded to the Horned God in what I felt was the most inspired part of her excellent speech. He is not the Devil—another popular misconception. He corresponds more or less to Pan, god of Nature.

He is the masculine aspect of the Deity, as his complement, the Moon Goddess, is the feminine—the twin forces personified in some form in every religion or cult.

They are the symbols or images used to enable the limited human mind to make contact with the infinite. The images or symbols evolve as human consciousness evolves, and the living tradition of witchcraft has developed with it.

The Horned God and the Moon Goddess have lost their primitive aspects, as witchcraft, with broadening concepts, works for mental and spiritual fertility instead of material. The Old Religion has a great deal to offer the contemporary world.

Eight words compass the witches' philosophy or Wiccan Rede (*wiccan* = Anglo-Saxon plural of *wicce*: *rede* = counsel or advice): "An it harm none, do what you will." Having quoted this, Mrs Valiente ended her speech with the traditional greeting of the Wise Ones: "Merry meet, merry part."

The next meeting—merry, I hope—of the W.R.A is likely to be around Christmas. In the meantime, anyone interested in its activities can write for information about them to the Editor of *Pentagram*, BM/Eleusis, London, W.C.1.