

A WITCH'S VIEW OF W

Healing, Survival, Reincarnation Are Among Their Beliefs

SLANDERS against witches were answered by a witch at the Marylebone Spiritualist Association headquarters on Wednesday last week.

Dr. G. B. Gardner is a male witch. The term "witch" was applicable to either sex, he pointed out. Wica, from which it is derived, meant the "wise ones".

A member of one of the few remaining witches' covens in the country and a director of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic on the Isle of Man, popularly known as the Witches' Mill, Dr. Gardner is a distinguished anthropologist who is regarded as an expert on the ancient cult.

"This may be the first time that a public explanation of the beliefs and religion underlying witchcraft has been given, from sympathetic personal contacts with those who hold those beliefs and practise that religion," declared Gardner.

OLD RELIGION

Witchcraft was one of the oldest known religions in the world, dating from the Stone Age, he pointed out.

Although witches had no books of theology and it was impossible to say what their original beliefs had been, it was certain that they believed in a future life and probably in kinship with animals, an idea which antedated Darwin's theories by thousands of years.

Witches also had a tradition of friendship and kindness to animals.

Witches accepted belief in many gods and the fact that each had his worshippers and his own place of reward and punishment in the after-life. They had their own gods and goddesses whose names they kept a strict secret, partly out of a superstitious fear that others might worship them and lure them away from the sect of the Wica.

Possibly also because they made magic by the use of their gods' names and because they used them as a recognition sign. If one

knew the gods' names one belonged to the cult.

Dr. Gardner denied emphatically that the reason for the concealment of the gods' names was that they were devils' names. Some were known in Celtic mythology, although as rather shadowy personages. Witches alone preserved their true nature and attributes.

One of the witches' main articles of faith was reincarnation. The dead went to the domain of the gods, a "summerland" or Spiritualistic paradise, a place of learning and regeneration.

They stayed there until they were purified and fit to be reborn. No one was reborn until they had purged their sins and were fit to be reborn.

Using magic wrongfully was a heavy sin according to the witches' code.

"The Mighty Ones" were regarded as the souls of the Wica who had reincarnated many times and attained the status of demigods who did not need any further lives on earth.

AFTER LIFE

The witch faith inspired its followers to live a good life in the hopes of achieving a favourable place in the afterlife.

Usually witches prayed to be reborn into their own tribe or clan amongst loved ones.

Witches did not conceive of the gods as all powerful. Their gods wished man well, and desired fertility of man, beasts and crops, but to attain it they needed man's help.

Dances and other rites gave that help. Rites were based on sympathetic magic, the idea that like attracted like, and also on the notion that what gave pleasure to man gave pleasure to the gods.

It was quite untrue that witches required new converts to renounce their previous religions. They quite understood someone's worshipping more gods than one.

Witches were often accused of profaning or parodying the religious rites of others, particularly of celebrating a "Black Mass" in which Christian practices were ridiculed and homage paid to the Devil.

What some scholars failed to grasp was that for witches to perform "Black Mass" would be completely futile unless they were good enough Christians to believe in transubstantiation.

NOT CHRISTIANS

The Wica were not Christians at all. There would be no point in their insulting a piece of bread and such a proceeding would be meaningless from the standpoint of both magic and inverted religion.

There was a witch ceremony called the "Cakes and Wine," in which cakes and wine were blessed and eaten. That might be an imitation of the Christian "Agape" or love feast, although it was probably much older.

Anyway, it was quite natural to relax and have a meal after a tiring ritual and to bless the meal if the ritual was religious.

There was no suggestion that the cakes were turned into flesh and blood or anything else. There were no crucifixes, inverted or otherwise, and no mock sermons. There was no praise or homage to the devil nor any evil liturgy. Nothing was said backwards, nor were there any gestures with the left hand, except when both hands were used.

The fact that the coven laughed and prayed in their rites might have given rise to the idea that the witch cult was one of diabolism.

A certain type of puritanical mind assumed that a religious rite in which people actually enjoyed themselves must be of the Devil.