



I am a witch. This is a statement of fact which in this second half of the sophisticated twentieth century still seems to generate mixed emotions throughout the world. I have been called "the most evil woman in the world." But evil, like beauty, is often in the mind and eye of the beholder. Yet many people see me as something of a fairy godmother, a woman who has a secret remedy for all the aches and pains of body and spirit as well as for complex emotional problems. I have also been called "a legend," which seems a rather delightful thing to be.

A witch is a practitioner of witchcraft—the ancient pre-Christian occult religion which in Europe was called *wicca*, an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "the craft of the wise." The word "witch" has very bad connotations due to some remarkably

bad reporting of history. Witches have always been good at getting a bad press. In the United States, witchcraft is still either linked to an incident in Salem or mixed up with Hollywood versions. Both are about as accurate as thinking Gomer Pyle represents the typical American serviceman. Salem was a tricky bit of "historical" reporting, but then America is a young country and needs a bit more experience writing up major events. Those Salem witches were interesting people. I doubt if they were evil, but they did own some choice bits of land around Salem. Governor Endicott was busy getting a new charter at the time, but he also had a keen eye on some land owned by Mrs. Nurse. It happened to adjoin his own tracts, and the subsequent acquisition of this land improved both his property and his exchequer. A witch's property was always nicely carved up by either the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A crossroads where three rivers meet, in a wild and desolate, witch-ridden part of Staffordshire, England, was the birthplace of Sybil Leek. Her father's lineage included staunch occultists. Her grandmother used to ice her pastries with astrological signs and her mother's Irish ancestry can be traced all the way back to A.D. 1134. Her heritage as a witch is the oldest in history.

church or a local landowner. Witch-hunting was very profitable business. Pity that although many witches in history were very good businesswomen, they did not have sufficient know-how to hold on to their possessions. The twentieth-century witch has learned a lot from her ancestors.

Occasionally someone remembers that a man called William Shakespeare created a few witch characters, but many choose to forget that Mr. Shakespeare lived at a time when witchcraft was extensively practiced as the Old Religion. Good Mr. Shakespeare took a few local characters and exaggerated them with true and legitimate literary genius. Hollywood glamorized a witch, called her Samantha, and with true modern magic spirited her via a box with a glass front to every household in America. It is just as hard to live up to the image of Shakespeare's hag-witches as it is to dear little Samantha. I never did learn how to twitch my nose and then sit back to wait for things to happen. The trouble comes from the confusion between witchcraft (the Old Religion) and Black Magic, which is certainly *not* a religion but a debased art. Both subjects attract popular attention, with Black Magic probably presenting the most dramatic attractions to a world reared on horror stories and wars. I suppose any subject having an

aura of mystery about it must attract attention. It becomes as much a challenge to the inquiring mind as science itself, which also deals with the unknown and often unclarified data.

Witchcraft, as any religion, involves the acceptance of certain tenets which are based on faith and acceptance of a Supreme Being, a God without a name. From this Supreme Being comes life, and by a process of many incarnations, ascending a spiral of spiritual development, we are drawn back into the life force.

Of course popular mythology would have it that we witches are a licentious lot, forever running around half naked under the light of the moon making weird mad-dog noises, with the Devil as a perpetual playmate ready to help us in all sorts of nefarious goings-on. It's nice material for a movie but far removed from the real thing. I have no feelings one way or the other about running around naked. People probably clutter themselves up with too many clothes anyway, and witches are really very practical people. In my old home in the New Forest, it would take a tougher character than I to run around naked among all those gorse bushes. I usually wear long, loose, robe-like dresses, and see no reason to change when I attend one of our religious meetings, or "Sabbats." I believe there are modern covens these

days who prefer to perform their rites in the nude. But then, there are many people who join nudist colonies; at least they have the good sense to choose areas with warm climates such as California. As for the Devil, I never met him myself, but I am gregarious enough to be polite to most people; so if I meet a man with little horns on his head and a peculiar taste in footwear, I'm not going to worry. You can't be sure who the Devil is these days. He might be a TV or movie producer in disguise.

It seems to me that the orthodox religions always know more about the Devil than I do and can describe him in detail, and if I hadn't a nice type of mind I'd begin to wonder what company *they* keep when the moon rides high in the sky and good witches are doing simple little incantations and asking for spiritual guidance.

Of course we witches are said to be involved in Magic and *that's* something to conjure with. It is simply the art of producing a desired effect or result through the use of various techniques as incantations and presumably assuring human control of supernatural agencies or the forces of nature. Witches being simple people close to nature do indeed believe wholeheartedly in Magic, which is all around us. There is alchemy in love—the mysterious feeling which no one is ever quite sure about but which contains all kinds of magical

ingredients. There is the magic which drives illness from bodies in pain, there is the magic of a great name, of music, of spring. Magic is a joyous exceptional experience which leads to a sense of well-being, and there is nothing we witches love more. So we strive to bring this about by the use of our particular religion, by keeping close to nature, by seeking harmony in ourselves and our environment, and, yes, some of us are capable of passing on the magic we know. How do we do it? By developing our minds to a point where we see or feel no barriers of time and space, when the horizons become limitless. Then we are able to experience the conquest of self, and influence others.

The occult content of our religion causes suspicion, yet occultism simply seeks knowledge beyond the range of ordinary perceptions. Science is competing strongly with witches these days, but we do have a few thousand years more experience.

The basic approaches to spiritual illumination and freedom are ageless. Magi have appeared in every generation to create methods suitable to meet the needs of the day. Some regard psychiatrists and psychologists as the witch doctors of our bright new age. They teach freedom by helping a man to understand himself. Dr. Timothy Leary is said to be the Prophet of the Psychedelic Age. He fails because he relies on drugs rather

than philosophy.

Yoga, Zen Buddhism, the Magi of Chaldea, the hierophants of Greece, the Gnostic Brotherhood, the Kabbalists of Israel, and Witchcraft, all have their methods of achieving spiritual enlightenment and in all cases it is a slow process. Each must find the path which is best for him, and he may find others traveling along the same way who can help him. Sometimes the traveler may be diverted to a point of feeling lost, but in my personal experience I have found that no matter what path is taken we all have one destination—Truth—and in seeking out that destination, we are drawn nearer by the fine thread which is our link with the Deity.

It has not been easy for a witch. Because of my beliefs, I have suffered, but what I have found in witchcraft I could never throw away lightly. I have lost many opportunities because I could not offer an orthodox religion. I have been homeless. Many people who have consulted me see a fairly serene woman, and I cannot tell you how often I have heard them say, "Oh of course, you would not understand, you've never suffered, you're one of the lucky ones." I mix a sense of humor with a small smile rather than contradict them.

I have met members of dozens of different religions as well as agnostics and humanists; from each I have

learned much. We must be open to the spiritual concepts of, say, India and China. Those old basic truths are not for the exclusive use of any special sects. We are all seeking the meaning of life, and the receptivity of witches to other religions helps to bridge the artificial gaps created by dogma.

Before I left England the British Broadcasting Corporation did a special program based on my life and ended it with me standing trial against the judgment of theologians, doctors, and scientists—not a novel experience for any witch. The jury decided against witchcraft. However, I was acquitted. The theologians were darlings but the doctors fought it out violently, ready for a taste of blood. Erudition gave way to temper and then they were lost, for bad temper achieves nothing. Not long after, I came to America.

In my diary, I have recorded my involvement with an Old Religion. The story begins in England and comes to America.

Across the world and in many different cultures, the Old Religion has worked for me, has led me to freedom, to ancient truths, and to laughter. It has not been a bad way to live.

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