

RELIGION

Ray Bone, high priestess of the London witch coven, raises sacred sword and asks "Mighty Ones of the East" to protect the ritual circle in which they gather near Chipping Norton. Witches behind her hold up knives.

*English pagans keep
an old cult alive*

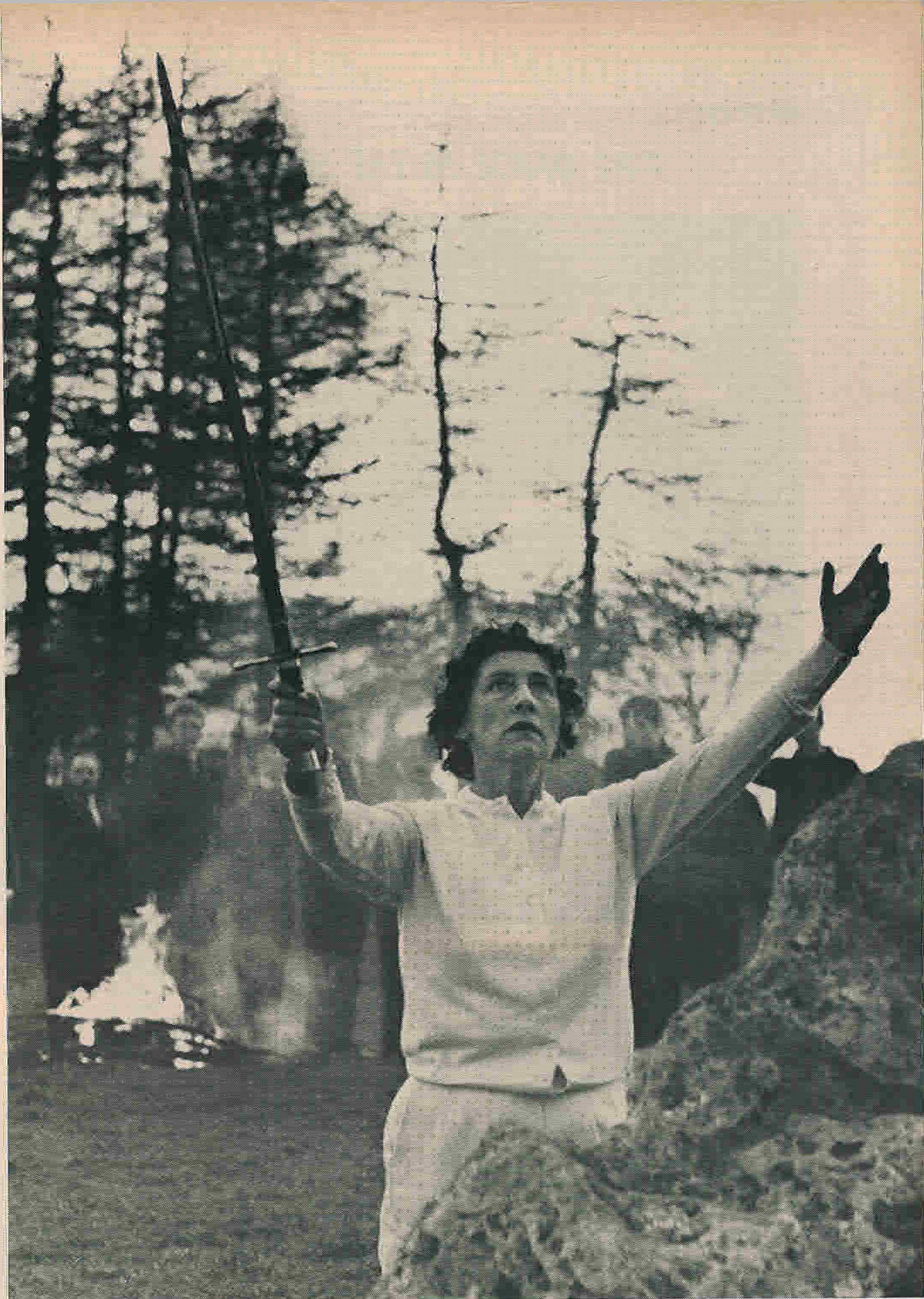
REAL WITCHES AT WORK

All Hallow's Eve has always been a night redolent with mystery and terror, with dark forces abroad in the land and witches stirring up brews of black magic. In 20th Century England such legends are more than children's bedtime stories. There people who call themselves witches—possibly as many as 6,000—meet regularly in small groups to perpetuate pagan rituals that long antedate the country's Christianity. They have, they insist, a vital and growing religion, and they work at it very seriously.

They meet regularly on a lonely moor or in a country cottage or even in a semidetached house in London. The participants—a greengrocer, a housewife, a solicitor, a college professor—look as if they might have been plucked at random from a London street corner. A bonfire is built, and a circle is drawn around it with a sword. One by one the witches move within the circle, men and women taking alternate places. Then they join hands and begin, slowly at first, to walk around the

fire. They break into a trot, then a run. From their throats comes the eerie, centuries-old chant: *Eko Eko Azarak, Eko Eko Zomelak, Eko Eko Ganas, Eko Eko Arada.*

This ritual is an act of worship, not of magic making. The witches' deities are a sun god and a moon goddess, and the worshipers gather in "covens" of 12 presided over by a "high priest" or "high priestess." And, as one candid witch explains in the article beginning on page 60, they see nothing odd or outrageous in what they do believe.



FIRE DANCE TO THE SUN AS IT WAS A MILLENNIUM AGO



In a thousand-year-old rite, the witches dance around bonfire within prehistoric Rollright stone circle that

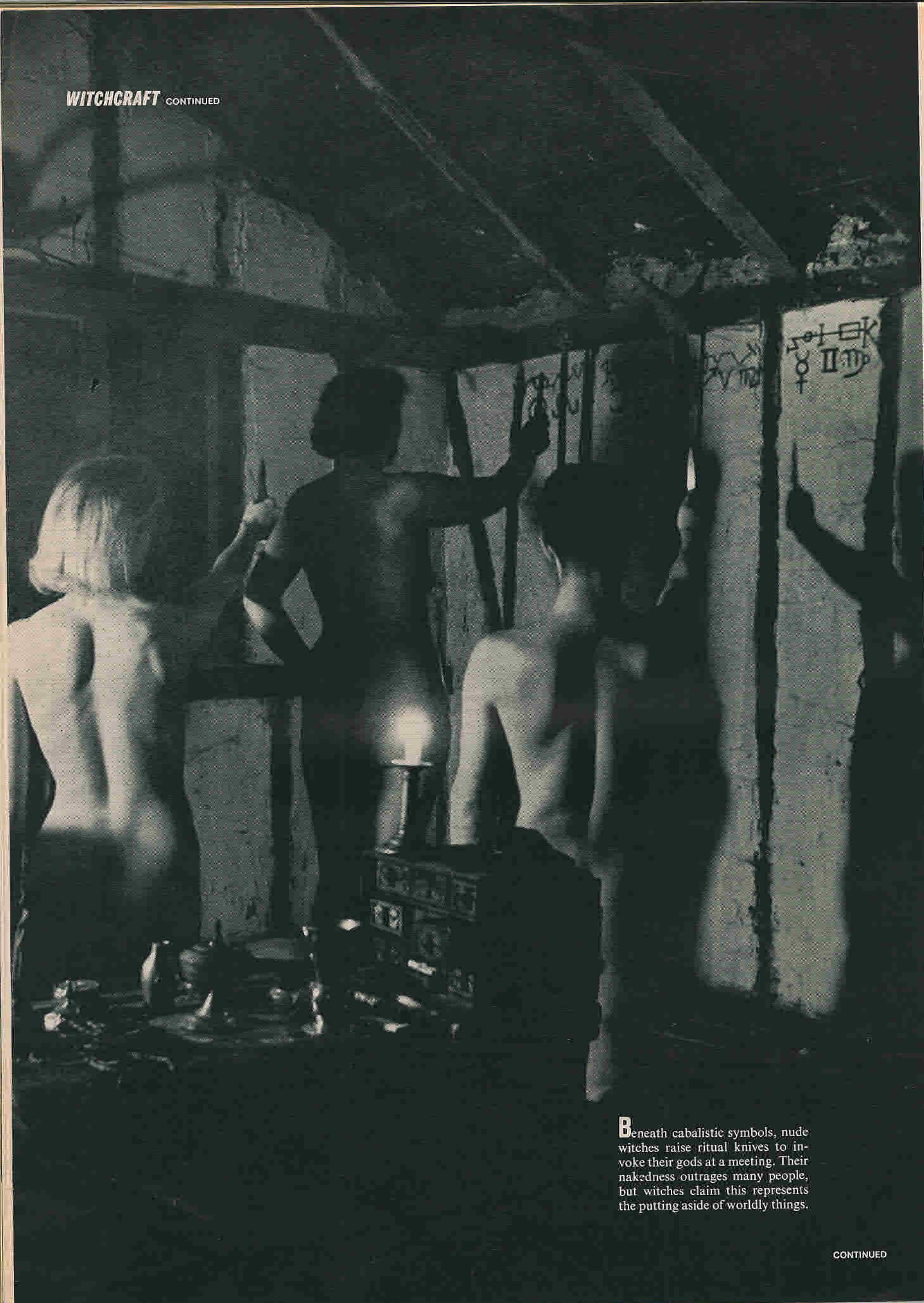
still stands in Oxfordshire. At climax of dance they leap over fire (below) to stimulate the sun as the source of life.



High priestess Artemis stirs salt and water mixture which is used to "purify" the sacred circle in all witchcraft

rites. On the table are incense burner, cord and statue of goddess. At right is herb chest containing incense.





Beneath cabalistic symbols, nude witches raise ritual knives to invoke their gods at a meeting. Their nakedness outrages many people, but witches claim this represents the putting aside of worldly things.

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Mrs. Bone shapes a wax effigy of sick woman she hopes to help through curative "white magic."

'WE WITCHES ARE SIMPLE PEOPLE'

Mrs. Ray Bone, a housewife and manager of a home for the aged, is also a high priestess. Here she gives the witch's view on her craft.

by RAY BONE

To find the origin of witchcraft we must go back a long way in time, thousands of years before Christianity, back to the old religion—a pagan religion. You ask if we are pagans, and the answer is: "Yes, we are!" I have no doubt that some people will say "Pagan! Surely this means 'heathen—unenlightened.'" This is the meaning given in the dictionary, but the word is derived from the Latin *paganus*—meaning a country district. So pagan simply means "of the countryside."

The word "witch" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "*wicca*," meaning "wise one" or "sorcerer." The *wiccan* were the priesthood of the old religion which worshiped the sun god and moon goddess. Inseparably connected with the moon goddess has been the cat, symbol of the feminine aspect of the divine.

Wherever the witch cult existed, its followers met four times a year

to celebrate the mysteries of their faith. These were the four great Sabbats—Candlemas, May Eve, Lammas and Halloween (or Samhain, it was called then, meaning "summer ends"). This division of the year emphasizes the breeding seasons for some wild and domestic animals.

In the old days the "coven" of witches had their weekly meetings known as Esbats. They were partly business and partly religious. The witches were the advisers to the ordinary people. They were healers, skilled in the use of herbs and the distilling of potions. At the great Sabbats, when everyone got together, a feast was held to celebrate the gifts of the gods.

It was popularly believed that witches rode to these meetings on flying broomsticks, although I think that the only flying through the air done by witches was in their imaginations. There are many recipes for "flying ointments" which have come down through the ages, and quite obviously the contents of some of these, such as aconite and belladonna, when rubbed into the skin, would induce trance states, hallucinations and a feeling of flying. Broomsticks were certainly used in some fertility

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'WE DON'T TAKE EVERYBODY WHO WANTS TO COME IN'

WITCHCRAFT CONTINUED

rites. Witches danced round astride their broomsticks, leaping high from time to time, on the theory that if they leaped high the crops would grow high.

It must be remembered that Christianity was brought to England by foreigners. Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury, came from Rome, and in the Seventh Century the church was organized in England by Theodore of Tarsus, with the aid of Hadrian the African. William the Conqueror was a Christian, but his Normans were mainly of the old religion. Even the priests in those days often served both pagan deities and the Christian God. In 1282 the Priest of Inverkeithing led the fertility dance round the churchyard.

In the 13th Century "witchcraft" was declared to be heretical, but it was not until the 14th Century that the two religions really came to grips. The battle raged through the 16th and 17th cen-

turies, the pagans fighting a gallant fight but a losing one. The last witchcraft laws were repealed only in 1951.

And now, let us talk about the witches of the 20th Century. What sort of people are they?

Well, we are just ordinary people going about our own particular jobs. We are reasonably intelligent. We have doctors, teachers, businessmen, farmers, nurses, theatrical people, office workers and housewives among us. Most of us have studied comparative religion. We do not try to convert others, but we do encourage people who have a leaning towards our craft. We do not take everybody who wants to come in.

It is difficult to estimate numbers as not all covens are known to one another, but the interest appears to be growing. I think one reason is that people are failing to find the spiritual satisfaction they desire in organized religions.

Why are we witches? The reason, I suppose, is that we know

that this is the right path for us. The craft is a fertility cult: we worship the life source. Our god, still the old horned god, represents to us both life and death. We do not fear him because we believe in reincarnation.

We normally meet once every lunar month, and we still observe the four great Sabbats.

Candlemas was originally the feast of lights, which was observed on Feb. 1 with a fire ceremonial and was connected with the return of the goddess from the underworld and the rebirth of nature in spring.

May Eve, or Beltane, was a fire festival and was held to stimulate the sun as a life-giving agent at the beginning of summer.

At Halloween herdsmen repeated the Beltane rites to usher in the winter.

Yule became equated with the winter solstice, the turn of the year, the rebirth of the sun and the renewal of fertility.

I think it is generally known that we are naked in our rites. This has given rise to disapproval, although it seems obvious to me that people can be just as immoral with their clothes on as with them

off. Female witches always wear a necklace, a symbol of rebirth, and the high priestess wears a wide silver bracelet with her witch name engraved upon it.

In our circle, the altar is placed from east to west. We perform our rites; we dance; we chant. Afterwards we sit and chat.

We try to help those who are in trouble or have problems which they cannot solve for themselves. Many people write seeking our help. All letters requesting help are answered. Frequently we simply refer people to marriage counselors. In this age of science—doctors, psychiatrists, veterinary surgeons, legal aid, patent medicines and computers—one might think there was no place left for the witch. But the sun still rises in the morning and sets in the evening; at night the moon watches over us. Season succeeds season, and there is new life in crops, animals and mankind. And if the sun no longer rose and set, if there were no sun, of what use would science be? The life source would no longer be there.

We 20th Century witches are happy in our knowledge; we are simple people with simple beliefs. We know that come what may, "another sun will rise tomorrow."



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