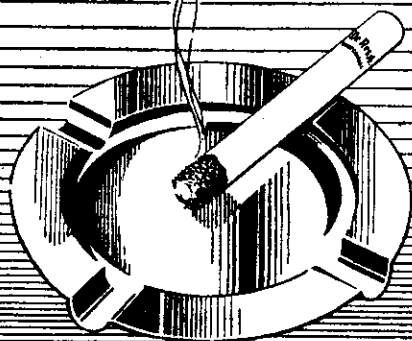


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WITCHCRAFT IS IN THE NEWS

WITCHCRAFT is still in the air—even the local air. It has made two appearances in the cable news recently, as the result of agitation to abolish the Witchcraft Act of 1735 which still stands in British law. It is the subject of an exhaustive new book. And it is the theme of a series of six radio talks starting from 2YA on Monday morning, October 21. In this article, a contributor examines the tradition of legislative scepticism which stands behind the Witchcraft Act. But it needs to be read in the light of the British Home Secretary's statement that there is at present no hope of repealing the Act, because "relaxation of the laws would be dangerous when there was so wide a field for the exploitation of personal loss and bereavement."

Tests to distinguish genuine mediums from fake performers are to be drawn up for consideration by Parliament. . . . General ability to be a medium, through whom the spirits make contact with the living, will be tested by a formula and probably diplomas will be issued to accredited mediums who will be registered for scientific purposes. This is the main purpose for an attack against the two-centuries-old Witchcraft Act. — Cable Item from London.

IF the Bill to achieve this ever becomes law, that Act will be a landmark in the history of witchcraft, and occultism. For the first time practitioners of the spiritualistic art will then be sanctioned by the British Parliament: a complete reversal of an attitude which is older than Parliament itself. The stages in this change of view mark chapters in the birth of the scientific spirit of man; one of the most enthralling, hopeful, and often terrible tales ever told.

A judge of France once began a now classic book on witches thus:—

It is astonishing that there should be found to-day some who do not believe that there are witches. I am not sure that I dare not go so far as to say that it seems more likely than not that such people are of the witches' party: in any case I have no doubt that the rest are unwilling to admit the existence of witches because, perhaps, they are descended from them, and, in defence of their ancestors, would have men firmly believe that there are no witches in the world.

This attitude was the accepted opinion for many hundreds of years. Moreover, the official belief in witchcraft, demons and devilish practices was not expunged from the Statute Books, until as late as 1863. Strange, too, seem the burnings and hangings which went on in those days. In a country the size of New Zealand the quota for deaths

for the heresy of witchcraft would average perhaps five a week—and that went on year after year. Now, when, as Goethe said, "men are able to disprove all things," we wonder how people, who were after all very much the same as ourselves, could treat each other in this way. Then perhaps we remember Buchenwald or Dachau and think it not so strange. A tale of the deception of virtue by itself is one comment on the

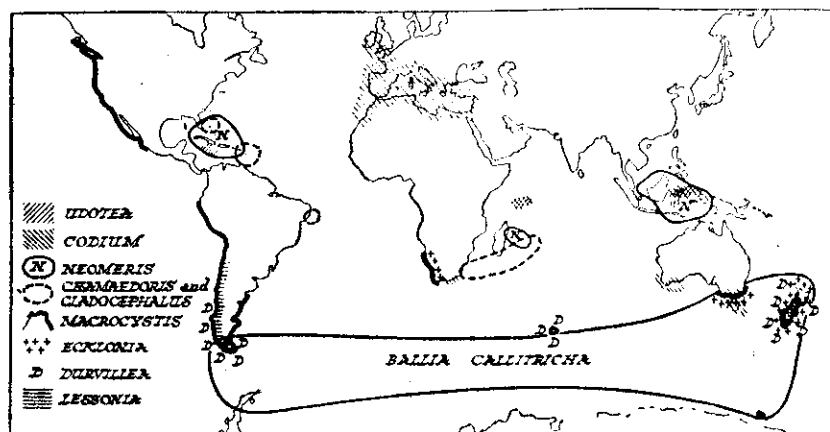
Written for "The Listener"
by J.C.P.

War against Witches and the moral is still pointed two hundred years after the last burning.

Palms and Tea Leaves

However, in some ways we do seem to have grown up. If you have ever pondered over your life-line you might be interested to know that in the days of Henry VIII there was an Act concerning Egyptians (i.e., gypsies) which laid it down that anyone using "great subtilty and crafty means to deceyve the people, Beryng them in hande, that they by Palmestre coulde relle menne and women's fortunes, and so deceyred the people of their money" was to leave the country within 16 days.

Or, perhaps, when friends have dropped in for the afternoon cup of tea you've tried your hand with the tea leaves (Now turn it round three times. That's right . . .), have dabbled in the mysteries of horoscopes and dreams, or made other "fonde and phantasticall Proysesys." Then it is as well you were not alive in 1597 when "All idle persons



This map illustrates the distribution of seaweed to be discussed by Professor Chapman and Dr. K. B. Cumberland in their broadcast from 1YA on Thursday, October 24 at 7.15 p.m. (see page 4)