

CROSS vs. cross



LAST SPRING the Third Reich recognized a third official state religion: a neopagan cult based on Thor, Wotan, Siegfried and the old Nordic gods. It was especially favored by ultranazis and by Chancellor Hitler's blackshirt bodyguards, the *Schutzstaffel* or S.S. corps. The other two official German religions are Catholic and Protestant Evangelical, whose proponents today are deadlocked in combat with the up and coming neopagans.

Last week, in northern backwoods Mecklenburg, the fifteenth-century Chapel of St. Gertrude, at Guestrow, became a "Hall of the Ancestors" or a "Temple of German Blood."

The neopagan temple at once celebrated several "heathen" funerals, thirteen "heathen" baptisms, and nine "heathen" marriages. Ralph W. Barnes cabled the New York *Herald Tribune* from Guestrow: "The reconstructed chapel has been stripped of all Christian symbols. . . . It is simple almost to the point of austerity. . . . A bust of Adolf Hitler, clear-cut against the white wall, might be said to replace the altar. . . . Bold outlines of the nazi swastika replaced the cross in a stained-glass window."

The Guestrow burgomaster, in his formal dedication speech, said he intended to erect a statue of granite or oak depicting a German mother and children—this to be placed in the very center of the neopagan temple. "The burgomaster," said Barnes, "made no secret of the fact that her figure would symbolize fecundity, a cardinal point in the nazi cult."

"Heathen" temples now thrive in many German rural areas and provincial towns; but city dwellers are too blasé to adopt such fantastic rites. Germany is said to contain 5 million neopagans. One of their most important leaders, Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff of World War fame, died recently. Hitler himself, born a Catholic, is reported as lukewarm to the movement. Most of the conservative Protestant Junkers who officer the German regular army are definitely hostile to neopaganism. One of them, General Georg Marx, even dared to write in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* of Berlin: "Achilles is more important than Siegfried, and philosophy more highly esteemed than history."