

## A strange, solemn rite and wonders in the dark

For two strange timeless nights in almost complete darkness, Wasson and Richardson sat in an underground room with the *curandera*, Eva Mendez. On the first, both partook of the sacred mushrooms, and both saw visions. On the second Richardson refrained; instead he set up flash equipment and, aiming his camera at sounds in the blackness, recorded on film parts of the ceremony.

In a solemn musical chant, Eva Mendez began with an invocation to the mushroom in the name of Christ and the saints. She proclaimed her own good intentions and then, impatiently, entreated the spirits, "I am a mouth looking for you, but you are not paying attention. Come." As the ritual proceeded Wasson lost himself in wondrous flights of fancy which moved him to say afterward, "For the first time the word ecstasy took on real meaning. For the first time it did not mean someone else's state of mind."



**HOLDING** a candle made of virgin beeswax before the smoldering embers of copal, an ancient native incense, Eva Mendez invokes the saints. Children were always in the room though they did not take active part in the ceremony.



**AT THE CLIMAX** of this session, at about 3:30 in the morning, Eva Mendez ministers to her ailing 17-year-old son. As he lies lost in the ecstasy of his visions evoked by the mushrooms, she asks divine help for him. The child