

**THE DENVER POST
DENVER, COLORADO
10 APRIL 1927
(page 91)**

**LATEST "BLACK MAGIC" REVELATIONS ABOUT
NEFARIOUS AMERICAN "LOVE CULTS".**

How the Law is Laying Bare the Unholy Secrets of "Brotherhoods" and "Orders" Flourishing from Greenwich Village to the Golden Gate and Imperiling Our Girls

So-called love cults and black magic—regarded by some readers as too fantastic to be real—not only thrive in America, but they are spreading in ever-widening circles, judging by recent arrests in many parts of the country.

Now, instead of smiling indulgently over "alarmist reports," police authorities, social and economic experts are shaking their heads and declaring that the wave of mysticism—be it paganism, Tantrikism or medieval diablerie—constitutes a very real menace to American homes and American girlhood.

They point out that "Main Street" is hounded on the West by the so-called Sacred Order of the White Brotherhood in California; on the South with voodoo still secretly thriving in parts of Louisiana; on the East by the Nyack, N. Y. cult of Pierre Bernard, self-styled Oom the Omnipotent, and Aleister Crowley's mystic "O. T. O." in Greenwich Village, girl neophytes of which bared their breasts to be seared by a white-hot dagger with the symbolical star and circle; on the North by Albert W. Ryerson's branch of the "O. T. O." and the House of David, both of them in Michigan.

Nearly all modern cults fall naturally into two classes. The first is the practical working-out—or attempt to work out—advanced ideas in sociology, where groups of men and women form colonies for the upbringing of their children along scientific lines. In this connection, it may be stated that even so profound an observer as Judge Ben B. Lindsay, of Denver, has recently described marriage as a "worn-out institution, fit only for the discard." The second type of "cult" is frankly a "throwback" to the Middle Ages, carrying with it all of the superstition of those medieval times—devil-worship, Satanism and paganism.

The medievalists are generally the most radical of all the modern cultists. Stemming from the Black Mass mystics of Central Europe, their American equivalents strive to reproduce ecstasy by means of incantations, the burning and "torturing" of their enemies' waxen or wooden effigies, and, in certain sombre instances, by the shedding, as an oblation, of some animal's blood—that of a "dedicated" goat or kid, and on occasion that of a "sacred" cat or bird.

When police of Oakland, California, raided the exotic quarters of the so-called Sacred Order of the White Brotherhood, they found in the "throne room" a golden coffin and the effigy of a woman with a sword piercing her heart. Incoherent messages and ritualism indicated that only in death could supreme ecstasy be found; and the nearest thing to it was defined as love. Mrs. Gertrude Wright alleged leader of the cult and known to her followers as "Zareda;" Miss Erma Gibbs, twenty-five, known as "Ermengarde;" Miss Caroline Merwin, seventeen, whose sacred name was "Zeralda," together with Louis Alley and his son, Lloyd, so-called "supermen" of the order, were taken into custody on charges of contributing to juvenile delinquency and indulging in immoral practices.

It was relatives of Miss Merwin who caused the investigation. The seventeen-year-old "Zeralda," it was said, had been selected by cult leaders to become the mother of "the perfect child" or "new Messiah." Before detectives had worked an hour on the case, they discovered that the Brotherhood, which mixed Yogi philosophy, astrology, Buddhism, sun-worship, voodooism and kindred occult beliefs, had won converts by the thousands among California's wealthy.

On the roster of the Oakland order alone there were the names of more than 200 persons prominent in business and the arts.

Affairs of the Brotherhood are due for further airing when the five defendants are brought to trial during July.

Voodooism does not flourish exclusively in the South. Sometimes it appears in the North. Two years ago the State of New Jersey sighed in relief. It had—at last—killed the dark snake of voodooism, which had caused half a dozen scandals, threatened to wreck many homes and sent several black magic "kings" to jail.

But the serpent, it turned out, had not been slain; only scotched. Once again it reared its vicious head. But in the arrest of the "Rev." George O. Gaines, black "emperor" of potions and philters and amulets, the authorities got, finally, to the bot-

tom of the tangle and stopped the exploitation of credulous young girls and women.

Gaines' downfall can be attributed to one thing—and one thing only—namely: the walk which pretty 22-year-old Carmella di Francisco took one afternoon in Jersey City to soothe her tortured nerves. Having lost her boy baby several months before, the young mother was a victim of melancholia, had difficulty in sleeping at night, and was generally run down physically. Suddenly she saw a modest sign, proclaiming that inside was a “spiritualist and healer.” Let Carmella tell what she saw:

“The room was so dimly lighted that each object therein seemed to glow as if with phosphorus. The furniture was rich, there were many tapestries. Dull gold candlesticks held tapers which revealed several religious murals. While I shivered in the atmosphere, a big black man entered and introduced himself to me as the ‘Rev.’” Gaines.

“I told him of my condition; explained that the doctors were unable to give me relief. He laughed. He said that wasn't strange, for it was nothing physical that bothered me. Someone, he said, had ‘put a curse on me,’ and he thought it was my mother-in-law. For \$200 he offered to anoint me with a salve that would neutralize the curse. So I stripped to the waist at his bidding, allowed him to massage an oily substance into my skin.

“When I returned for another ‘treatment,’ my sister, Mary Narducci, was with me. ‘Rev.’ Gaines insisted that she also had been cursed, and he offered to cure her for \$100. She allowed him to rub in the salve in the same manner as I had. But when certain other things occurred, she came to my home and told me. We then visited the police and lodged a complaint against him.”

“Emperor” Gaines was tried, convicted and sentenced to a prison term. His books revealed that many prominent and extremely wealthy women had paid huge sums to be dispossessed of devils or relieved of “curses.” But none save Carmella and her sister would testify to being muled.

Much has been written about the Nyack cult of Pierre Bernard, self-styled “Oom the Omnipotent”—for his Tantrik love colony includes women so rich, so beautiful, so prominent socially that no society page is complete without mention of their names. Bernard is regarded as a sort of man-God before whom they chant:

“Be to me a living guru;

“Be a loving Tantrik guru.”

Almost equally well-known is the mystic "O. T. O.," which for a space was presided over by the brilliant Aleister Crowley in Greenwich Village.

Whether Albert W. Ryerson, middle-aged Detroit book publisher and millionaire, lacked Crowley's fiery magnetism of his genius for leadership, isn't known, but it is true that the Michigan man made a dismal failure of his branch of the O. T. O." After acquiring a large following among Detroit's bohemian colony, he caused his palatial home in aristocratic Grosse Pointe to become headquarters of the "do what thou wilt" and "love is everything" disciples. And Mrs. Ryerson got a divorce.

When the millionaire cult leader got over the shock of that, he proposed to one of the most zealous of disciples. She was a bob-haired, fiery beauty whom Detroit's theatrical folk knew as Bertha Bruce, about twenty years old and as recklessly extravagant as she was beautiful. When Ryerson put his foot down on her lavish spending, she, too, consulted a lawyer and instituted proceedings for a divorce.

An artist's model, Maizie Mitchell, followed the pretty Bertha as mistress of Millionaire Ryerson's mansion. She became "high priestess" of the cult. Three months—ninety days to be exact—and Mrs. Ryerson, 3d, besought her freedom from the bonds of matrimony, charging, among other things, that the publisher publicly whipped her during a meeting of the "O. T. O." followers, and offering her scarred body as proof whereof she spoke.

Although Ryerson denied her allegations and was corroborated by a host of friends, the publicity which the cult had received was sufficient to kill it in Detroit. Shortly thereafter the publisher left on an "extended vacation."

But the "O. T. O." isn't dead, for it still numbers scores of chapters throughout the United States and Canada. It conducts its meetings in secret places, its ritualism is guarded as more precious than gold and its disciples are bound by oath not to divulge the names of their leaders. Besides it there are many other similar cults, some masquerading as "study clubs" and "literary societies."