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Exposing the "Evil Eye" in Civilized America

**How One Pretty Bride Revealed Strange
Superstitions in Our Great Cities.**



The "Basilisk Stare" of Aleister Crowley, High Priest of the Devil Worshippers." He is said to Possess Hypnotic Power and to Be a Profound Student of the "Evil Eye" and Sorcery. He was Forced Out of England and France After His Cult Was Involved In Scandals.

When a pretty bride recently went into the New York Supreme Court and asked for a separation, charging that her husband believed she possessed the "evil eye" and could bewitch him, a great light was unexpectedly flashed upon an unbelievably widespread condition of superstition and sorcery in American centers of culture and progress.

Authorities and psychologists were astounded. It was generally known, of course, that faith in witchcraft and fear of the evil eye were prevalent among certain uneducated classes in

Europe. There even had been a few scattering instances of superstition in remote towns of the United States. But it was not suspected that it had made much headway in the advanced modern cities of America.

Yet in the enlightened year 1929, and in the civilized city of New York, pretty Mrs. Giuseppina Porcello told Supreme Court Justice Philip J. McCork that her husband believed her eyes could exert an evil power over him.

When the amazed judge heard Mrs. Porcello tell how she was forced by her husband to go to a witch in order to be "exorcised," he granted the separation. In doing so he made this final comment:

"It seems strange in this day that such a matter should be in litigation or that such testimony could be heard from the lips of witnesses in the great modern city of the New World."

But, strange as the case was, investigation later disclosed there had been many others, particularly in the lower courts of New York, wherein witchcraft and the "evil eye" played an important part. These cases usually involved immigrants of the Latin races or their descendants who still retained superstitions and beliefs in magic.

Even more amazing was the revelation that such superstitions persists in the shadows of American temples of learning. In New York, in Chicago and in most of the large cities of the country where there are thousands of persons, mostly of foreign extraction, who firmly believe in the terrors of the evil eye.

In the old Greenwich Village Italian section, located but a brief walk from the New York University, one of America's largest institutions of learning, there is said to be more fear of the evil eye than of the policeman around the corner.

This superstition, investigators found, was brought over from European countries, where the belief that persons can bewitch, injure or even kill with a glance is widely spread.

Only recently reports have come from Europe revealing how firmly witchcraft is implanted in the minds of the peasants. Once concerned the "Witch of Vladimirovac," in Jugo-Slavia, who is now facing charges of murder because her evil eye is believed to have caused the death of a dozen men. Another told of a Vienna judge who dismissed charges of murder against a family of peasant folk for killing an old woman they thought was a witch. The court held they were justified in believing the woman a witch and that she held an evil spell over a member of their family.

These tragic circumstances, which will be further discussed in this article, were ascribed to a lack of education or undeveloped mentalities. The "hex murders" in a small Pennsylvania town not long ago provided a similar example of poor education. But until Mrs. Porcello went into court there was no suspicion that faith in witchcraft was so widespread as it seems to be in America today. The witch, in the United States, was supposed to have passed out of the realm of belief after the Salem persecutions.

Authorities and psychologists alike were jolted when Mrs. Porcello asked for a separation from her husband, charging him with cruelty because, she said, he regarded her, not as his wife, but as a witch.

She told the astonished Supreme Court Justice McCook that her young husband, here nine years from Italy, had accused her of having bewitched him, his family and his house. Four days after their marriage, she testified, Porcello accused her of having bewitched him with her evil eye into marriage.

Coincidentally enough, Mrs. Porcello, otherwise very pretty, had, indeed a cast in the left eye.

"My husband," she said in court, "was continually pointing his finger at me as a person who had an evil eye that cast a spell over him. He said that unless he was freed from the evil influence he would die and I would be to blame."

A month after their marriage, she said, the husband forced her to go to live with a "witch" in Brooklyn in order to be exorcised. Then he took her to a "better witch" in Fourteenth Street and then to a "special witch" who could dispel the evil charm.

The husband insisted that Mrs. Porcello had sought to persuade him of the existence of witches and that he had refused to believe. But Justice McCord, after listening in amazement to all the testimony, made this interesting decision.

"The defendant denied the charge about witchcraft and said it was ridiculous, but he and his brother showed such heat and protested so loudly that they had been disgraced as to satisfy me that the charge could be and apparently was taken seriously by some in the community of persons among whom they live.

"The defendant said that if the woman whom they visited was a witch doctor he did not know it until the plaintiff's affidavits were served on the motion for temporary alimony. The plaintiff's account of the visit, which the defendant describes as a friendly one, is entirely different and quite specific along the lines of the complaint.

"I believe she has sustained her burden of proof and that the charges, under the circumstances, were so cruel as to make it impossible for them to live together any longer."

This case was all the more remarkable because of the otherwise high intelligence of those concerned. But authorities later discovered that fear of the evil eye prevailed among many "intelligent" people in the United States.

In Detroit recently, Ben Evangelista, healing cult founder, and his wife and four children were killed in their home. Police investigating the murder found that Ben's followers, many of them intelligent and wealthy members of the community, believed in "Voodooism," or devil worship. Evangelista was thought to commune with the stars and the wind. Revenge or jealousy or even fear of the evil eye were regarded by police as motives behind the killings—which have not been solved.

A famous cult, in which a number of French and Italian noblemen were said to be involved, was that headed by Aleister Crowley, high priest of the "Devil Worshipers." Crowley, who called himself the "Beast of the Apocalypse," claimed to have occult powers.

He was forced out of England and France after several scandals. In Sicily Raoul Loveday, Oxford poet and member of the cult, died suddenly. His wife, Betty, accused Crowley of being indirectly responsible for the poet's death by "influencing" him with hypnotic power. Crowley, however, was exonerated.

One of the most remarkable cases involving the evil eye already mentioned is now occupying the attention of authorities in Jugo-Slavia. A ninety-two-year-old woman, Anna Pistova, was accused of killing, through the arts of fascination, a dozen men whose wives were tired of them.

The witch long had been known to the police as an herbalist and "wise woman" and harmless. Now they have her fast in a net of evidence as one charged with combining witchcraft with the more practical weapon of poison to kill off husbands for disgruntled wives. Investigation is said to have shown that by casting a spell with her evil eye upon a man she could force him to drink poison.

The authorities of Jugo-Slavia charged that she engaged in this "business" for a number of years. Whenever a young and pretty wife wanted to get rid of an old but wealthy husband she appealed to the witch and her fatal magic.

The mysterious death of Burgomaster Carina of Novoselo last year created an unusual sensation and resulted in the arrest of the witch of Vladimirovac on a charge of murder. The

burgomaster's body, as well as the bodies of other men who had died mysteriously, were exhumed. Carina's widow and five other widows were arrested on charges of conspiring to kill their husbands.

The witch's defense was that she gave only "love potions" to the husbands and it was their fault if they were overdosed. Carina's widow and the other widows insisted they only wanted to "revitalize" their husband's love.

Another extraordinary and tragic case of the evil eye occurred in a village in Hungary. An old woman was beaten to death by members of a family who believed that one of their number was held in the thrall of a spell. Farmer Pittlik fell ill of a mysterious malady, the nature of which baffled the village doctor. The patient began by losing his strength, then his speech and finally his mind.

In a frenzied moment the patient prophesied that at a given hour the witch who had cast a spell over him would appear in his sick room. Strangely enough at about that time, an old hag knocked at the door. The members of Pittlik's family rushed at her, threw themselves upon the unfortunate creature and beat her to death with sticks. When she was dead Pittlik sprang out of bed, completely cured, finding his speech to rejoice over the lifeless body of the so-called sorceress.

Her assailants were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. But the Supreme Court of Budapest ordered a new trial, in consequence of which the sentences were reduced in each case to three months hard labor.

The Supreme Court found that the farmer and his family were justified in their assumption that the old woman was a witch and that the only mistake they made was in killing her!

The terror of the evil eye is one of the oldest of superstitions. Pliny wrote that in Rome laws were enacted against injury to crops by "fascination." In Italy there are thousands of believers in the evil eye. In Naples, the jettatore, as the owner of the evil eye is called, is so feared that at his approach a street is rapidly emptied of men, women and children. In India, China, Turkey and Greece there is a definite belief that the evil eye affects horses and cattle.

The Slavs, also firm believers in the arts of fascination, tell a story of a man who, afflicted with the evil eye, blinded himself so that he might not be the means of injuring his children. In a town in Africa a fascinator called Elzanar is said to have killed by his evil eye no less than 80 people in two years.

To combat the effects of the evil eye many unusual means are resorted to.

Hindoos decorate their children with a profusion of jewels to antagonize the evil eye. Mohammedans suspend articles from the ceiling over the cradle for the same purpose. In Roumania a child or grown up person decorated with red ribbon is supposed to be impervious to this terrible influence, and hence many roumanians wear something scarlet about their bodies.

What is Science's answer to all these superstitions and beliefs? It says, in effect, that the minds of men and women can become so stimulated as to believe anything. It finds that those who work themselves into such a mental and emotional pitch as to fear the "evil eye" and all the other arts or sorcery become the victims of their own irrational beliefs.