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**"BLACK MAGIC" LIBEL ACTION**

**AUTHOR AND HIS VILLA IN SICILY**

**"Room of the Nightmares"**

"Black magic" was mentioned in a libel case in the King's Bench Division to-day before Mr. Justice Swift and a special jury.

The plaintiff was Mr. Edward Alexander Crowley, the author, known as Aleister Crowley, and the defendants were Constable & Co., Ltd., the publishers; Charles Whittingham & Griggs, printers, Ltd.; and Miss Nina Hamnett, the authoress.

**Alleged Libel.**

The ground for the action was contained in a passage in Miss Hamnett's book, "Laughing Torso," which read:—

"Crowley had a temple in Cefalu in Sicily. He was supposed to practice Black Magic there, and one day a baby was said to have disappeared mysteriously. There was also a goat there. This all pointed to black magic, so people said, and the inhabitants of the village were frightened of him."

The defence was a plea of justification and that the words were true in substance and in fact, and that the defendant himself gave the information to Miss Hamnett in 1921 or 1922.

Opening the case for the plaintiff, Mr. J. P. Eddy said the book purported to be an account of her own life and an intimate study of her friends and acquaintances.

Plaintiff complained that the book contained references to him which were highly defamatory in that they charged him with the practice of that loathsome thing, "black magic."

The plaintiff, he said, had the reputation for being unconventional, which was perhaps due in some small measure to the fact that he was brought up in the strict environment of the Plymouth Brethren and took the earliest opportunity to show a

spirit of revolt. He inherited a large fortune, and after leaving the university he became an artists, traveller, and explorer.

### **Studied Magic.**

He had walked across China and the Sahara and had lived in an Indian village. He had studied the religions of the world, and since 1897 he had been interested in the study of magic.

Some people thought of magic in a purely restricted sense, but there were many kinds. There was white magic and black magic.

"White magic," Mr. Eddy said, "is on the side of the angels. Black magic is on the side of the devil and all his works"

Black magic, Mr. Eddy said, was dealt with by the Witchcraft Act of 1735.

So far from it being true that Mr. Crowley practised black magic he had been fighting it for years. The magic in which he believed stressed the importance of will and set up the belief that no person would attain to anything worth while until he or she discovered what his or her will was, so that they could know the true purpose of it.

Several years ago, in 1920, the plaintiff started a little order at Cefalu, in Sicily, for the purpose of studying this form of white magic.

### **Mr. Crowley's Evidence.**

Mr. Crowley went into the witness-box and gave his name as Edward Alexander Crowley. He said he was 58 and the author of many books. He had been brought up under Plymouth Brethren influences and had rebelled against the general atmosphere of that sect. He went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and inherited a fortune of between £30,000 and £40,000.

Mr. Eddy—Did that go the way of most things? Was it exhausted eventually?—No.

Mr. Crowley said he had made a study of the religions of the world, and had been interested for a long time in magic. He first met Miss Hamnett two or three years before the war, and employed her to do some painting and decoration.

Mr. Crowley said he took a villa at Cefalu. The building was one storey and had a main room out of which led the other rooms. This large room was originally intended for the use of cattle.

Mr. Eddy—What was your room called?—My room.

How was it decorated?—I decorated it with frescoes similar to the sculpture in Notre Dame or the large church at Dijon, representing the last judgment. They were fantastic gargoyles of all kinds. People said "What nightmares," and they said they would call it "The Room of the Nightmares," and it was inscribed as such. The inscription read, "Chambre des Cauchemars."

Mr. Justice Swift—Which being translated means to say?

Mr. Crowley—The Room of Nightmares.

Mr. Eddy—Are you familiar with these words: "Do what thou wilt. Be the whole of the law. Love is the law, love under will"?—I am.

Had these words any relation to the community of Cefalu?—They are general Principles on which I maintain all mankind should base its conduct. The study of these words has occupied the last thirty years of my life.

Mr. Eddy—Did you study magick at Cefalu?—Yes, to some extent.

Are there different forms of magic?—Yes, you might say you can fight under the Queensberry rules or you can do the other thing, that is the difference.

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery K.C. (for two of the defendants)—Is it the difference between ordinary wrestling and all in wrestling? (Laughter.)

### **Foul and Abominable.**

Mr. Eddy—What form did you disapprove of?—That which is mainly known as black magic which is not only foul and abominable but for the most part criminal.

There was one notable example in a French noble who fought at the side of Joan of Arc. He was said to have practiced black magic, and to have murdered 500 children with the object of making gold by some chemical action.

Mr. Eddy—Is the murder of children often associated with black magic?—Most commonly.

Did you ever practice black magic at Cefalu?—Never.

It is said that inmates of the abbey had to sign a book. Was there a book?—Yes, a visitor's book.

Did the visitors in that book or the otherwise give an undertaking in all things to obey your will?—No.

### **Gashing Denied.**

Mr. Eddy then put certain particulars put forward by the defence to the plaintiff. Is it true that the community undertook to gash themselves whenever they used the word "I"?

Mr. Crowley (laughing)—A foolish fabrication.

It is said that all the men had to shave their heads except for one symbolical curl in the front and that the women had to dye their hair red for six months and black for the rest of the year?

Mr. Crowley again laughed as he replied, "It is a complete invention."

"It is said," Mr. Eddy went on, reading from the particulars—

### **Alleged Ceremony.**

"Every day after tea the plaintiff performed a ceremony known as pentagram. The plaintiff entered, robed, into a room decorated with cabalistic signs and seated himself on a throne before a brazier containing charcoal fire, around which were hung sacrificial knives and swords and surrounded by a magic circle. The adult inmates were required to attend, and when all were assembled the plaintiff rose from his seat, and taking one of the swords from the side of the brazier held it pointing to the altar while he intoned an invocation in a strange language.

"Following this he would walk over to members of his congregation and utter a further incantation whilst resting the point of the sword on his or her forehead. The plaintiff then proceeded to execute various ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy, brandishing his sword and leaping the magic circle."

"Is that accurate?" asked counsel.

Mr. Crowley—It is not accurate.

Was there any throne?—There were chairs.

Were there any sacrificial knives?—No.

Was there an altar?—There were tables.

I understand that an altar is a high table. Do you know a ceremony referred to as pentagram?—I do.

### **Pentagram.**

What is it?—It is a ceremony which invokes Almighty God to afford the protection of His archangels. The strange language referred to is the Hebrew language, and interpreted the words are those at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer.

Did all the inmates attend this pentagram?—They were all free to do so.

## **Sacrifices Denied.**

It is said that you sacrificed animals and invited inmates of the Abbey to drink their blood. Is there any truth in that?—No.

Mr. Crowley denied that he told Miss Hamnett that the inhabitants of Cefalu were frightened of him.

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C., for the defendants, asked Mr. Crowley if he now persisted in his claim that his reputation had been injured by the suggestion that he indulged in coarse and vulgar conversation.

Mr. Crowley—I am persisting if you persist—not otherwise.

Mr. Crowley explained that his suggestion was so trivial in comparison with the suggestion about black magic that it would be a pity to waste the time of the court in discussing it.

From the time of your adolescence have you openly defied all conventions?—No.

You have practised magic from the days when you were just down from Cambridge, haven't you? Have you proclaimed yourself under the title of "Frater Purdurato"?—It was the motto which I adopted when I first joined the order to which I belong.

Did you take to yourself the title of motto of "The Beast 666"?

Mr. Crowley admitted that he had adopted such a designation and that it was taken from the Book of Revelations.

Mr. Hilbery—Do you call yourself "The Master Therion"?—Yes.

Mr. Hilbery—What does "therion" mean translated? Great wild beast.

## **Secret Order.**

"Those titles," asked Mr. Hilbery, "are chosen as being expressions of your practice and outlook on life?"

"It depends on what they mean,"—Mr. Crowley replied. "It only means 'sunlight.' 666 is the number of the sun. You can call me 'little sunshine' " (Laughter.)

Mr. Crowley, in reply to more questions, said he was initiated into the secret order known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898 while he was up at Cambridge.

Mr. Hilbery—Was that a society devoted to magic and the practice of magic?—Yes.

Mr. Crowley said he had written a number of books, short stories, two novels and many poems.

Mr. Hilbery—Nearly all your poems were privately printed?—No, certainly not.

### **Expelled from Cefalu.**

Would it be true to say that all the works on which your reputation is founded are all erotic in tendency and grossly indecent in expression?—It would be entirely untrue to say anything of the kind.

Would it be true to say that of your poems?—I made a collection of 52 hymns to the Blessed Virgin Mary which were highly praised in the Catholic press.

Mr. Hilbery—Is it true that in more than one country you have achieved evil repute—How can I tell? No sensible man thinks anything bad about me. It is only a small gang of persons quite unworthy even of my contempt.

Were you finally expelled from Cefalu by the Fascisti?—Like H. G. Wells and other distinguished Englishmen, my presence was not desired by Signor Mussolini.

"I was expelled by the police authority in Cefalu," he added.

### **Press Attacks.**

In Paris in 1929 they refused to grant or renew your identification card, so you had to get out of France?—Yes, a man was blackmailing me, a discharged employee, and used his pull with the Stavisky gang, or whoever it was, to get them to refuse the permit.

### **Marks of a Buddha.**

Mr. Crowley agreed he had written that he bore the distinguishing marks of a Buddha at birth. "It is true," he added, "I have got some of them now."

Mr. Hilbery—Do you claim to be a master magician?—Yes, I took a degree which conferred that title.

The hearing was adjourned.