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**"BLACK MAGIC" LIBEL ACTION
AGAINST AUTHORESS**

STRANGE HIGH COURT STATEMENTS

Community in Hillside Villa in Sicily

**WEIRDLY DECORATED
"ROOM OF NIGHTMARES."**



Mr. Aleister Crowley

"Black magic" and "white magic" were defined in a remarkable libel action before Mr. Justice Swift and a special jury in the King's Bench Division today.

Aleister Crowley, an author, sued Miss Nina Hamnett, authoress of a book called "Laughing Torso." He alleged that passages in the book imputed that he practised "black magic," which he said was a libel on him. Other defendants were Constable and Co., Ltd., publishers, and Messrs. Charles Whittingham and Briggs, printers.

The defence was a plea of justification.

It was stated that plaintiff who inherited a fortune of between £30,000 and £40,000, founded a community interested in magic in a villa on a lofty hillside in Sicily.

MAN WHO INHERITED BIG FORTUNE.

Mr. Eddy (for plaintiff) said one passage in the book was a piece of mere vulgarity. Some people might think Mr. Crowley had shown a want of restraint in some of his works. It might well be that that was due in some measure to the fact that he was brought up in the strict environment of the Plymouth Brethren sect.

He inherited a large fortune, and was devoted to poetry, art, travel, and mountaineering. He had climbed the Alps and walked across the Sahara. For many years he had been interested in magic, and had always fought against black magic.

Two forms of magic to which Mr. Eddy referred were "white magic" and "black magic" the former, he said, being on the side of the angels, and the latter on the side of the devil and all his works.

"Room of Nightmares."

The magic in which Mr. Crowley believed (continued Mr. Eddy) was that which stressed will power. In 1920 he started a little community at a villa in Cefalu, Sicily, for studying that form of magic. He was joined by a little band who at first numbered only five, and never more than a dozen. There was one room called the "Room of Nightmares," the walls being covered in fantastic frescoes, but it had nothing in the world to do with black magic.

Mr. Crowley, he continued, originally met Miss Hamnett in 1912 or 1913, when she was an art student, and employed her in his studio, and in her book she described many of the people she met.

A passage in the book stated that Mr. Crowley "had a temple called the Temple of Thelema at Cefalu, where he was supposed to practise black magic." One day, the passage continued, 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.

Plaintiff's Evidence.

Mr. Crowley, giving evidence, said he was 58, and was 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.

He had made a study of the religions of the world and had been interested for a long time in magic. The villa at Cefalu was situated on a hillside that rose to a height of 4,000 feet and the villa itself was four or five hundred feet up. 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.

"Last Judgment" Frescoes.

He decorated it with frescoes similar to the sculpture in Notre Dame or the large church at Dijon, representing the Last Judgment. There were fantastic gargoyles of all kinds.

The villa was known as the Abbey of Thelema.

Asked whether the words "room of nightmares" had any relation to the community at Cefalu, witness said they were general principles on which, he maintained, all mankind should base its conduct. The study of those words had occupied the last thirty years of his life. The simplest application to practical conduct was that no man had the right to waste his time on doing things which were mere wishes or desires, but that he should devote himself entirely to his true work in this world. Only indirectly had those principles anything to do with black magic.

Asked to describe the life they led at the villa, witness said each person had certain duties connected with the house. He had a secretary, and sometimes two secretaries, there. There was a magnificent beach from which they could bathe.

Faust and the Devil.

Asked to give examples of black magic, Mr. Crowley said all black magic was based on the utter stupidity of selfishness which cared nothing for the rights of others, and people who practised it were quite unscrupulous as to morals. Black magic was based in many cases in an attempt to commit crime with-

out incurring the penalty of the law. The murder of children was most commonly associated with black magic.

There was, he said the great international legend of Faust, which was connected with "the diabolical art of printing." It was said that Faust had sold his soul to the Devil on the one hand for eternal youth and amusement and on the other for the knowledge of this printing.

Witness declared that he never practised black magic at Cefalu.

Mr. Eddy: Is it true that the community undertook to gash themselves whenever they used the work "I"?

Mr. Crowley laughing: A foolish fabrication.

"Black Magic Suicidal."

"Black magic is suicidal," continued Mr. Crowley. "There are various forms of magic, as there are different forms of prize-fighting and all-in wrestling. I approve of some and disapprove others."

Mr. Eddy: What is the form you disbelieve?

Mr. Crowley: That which is commonly known as black magic, which is not only foul and abominable, but for the most part criminal.

Mr. Eddy: Is the murder of children associated with black magic? Witness: It is most common. Alleged black magicians have been condemned to death. I say black magic is malignant. It is evil in its purpose or means or both.

Witness said there was complete privacy at the abbey, from the very nature of the accommodation. It was not true that all the men had to shave their heads except for one symbolic 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.

Frenzied Dance Denial.

Witness denied that every day after tea he performed a ceremony known as "Pentagram," at which the adult inmates were required to attend while he executed ecstatic dances and lashed himself into a frenzy while brandishing a sword. He never told Miss Hamnett the inhabitants of Cefalu were frightened of him.

No baby (he said) mysteriously disappeared. A goat was kept for milking purposes but the inhabitants were not frightened by it. The inhabitants were all his very good friends.

Cross-examined by Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. (for the publishers and printers), Mr. Crowley said he was asking for damages because his reputation had suffered.

Asked by Mr. Hilbery whether he had been publicly denounced as the worst man in the world, witness replied, "Only by the lowest kind of newspaper."

It was not true (he continued) that from the time of his adolescence he had defied all moral conventions. He agreed he called himself "The Master Therion," which meant "Great Wild Beast."

It would be untrue to say that all the works on which his reputation was founded were erotic in tendency and grossly indecent in expression.

Mr. Hilbery: Have you proclaimed your contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity?—I think that is quite wrong. I have not contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity.

Not Wanted by Mussolini.

Asked whether he was finally expelled from Cefalu by the Fascists, witness said that "like H. G. Wells and other distinguished Englishmen," his presence was not desired by Signor Mussolini.

He admitted he had been attacked by the Hearst papers in America, by "some of the lowest papers in England" and by a low paper in Italy. The decent papers, he said, had all treated him properly.

Jury Refuse to See Book

Mr. Hilbery referred to Mr. Crowley's book. "The Confessions of Alastair Crowley," and remarked: "You say in the book that you were a remarkable child?"—I must have been.

You assert that you had the distinguishing marks of a Buddha at birth?—Yes.

Do you believe that?—Yes. I have got some of them now.

And you continue in your claim to be a master magician?—Yes. I took a degree which conferred that title.

Mr. Crowley denied that his magic and his poems were "a mixture of eroticism and sexual indulgence. or that gratification of his own sexual lusts was one of his principal pursuits.

He agreed that he was the author of "White Stains."

Mr. Hilbery: Is that a book of indescribable filth?

Mr. Crowley: This book is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease and murder.

Judge's Threat.

He later told Mr. Hilbery: "Until it got into your hands it never got into any improper hands at all."

There was laughter at this remark, and Mr. Justice Swift threatened to clear the back of the court.

Mr. Hilbery asked permission to put in the book called "White Stains" as evidence.

Mr. Justice Swift pointed out that of this book the plaintiff had said, "I have made a sonnet of unspeakable filth," and the jury said they did not wish to see the book.

When counsel suggested witness had built up a reputation on books that were indecent, Mr. Crowley said it was legitimate in literature to describe the lowest forms of robbers or murderers or someone who was put to torture. He thought, he added, it had long been laid down that all had nothing to do with morals.

The hearing was adjourned.