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AUTHOR'S LIBEL ACTION

BLACK AND WHITE MAGIC

Life of Remarkable Community In Sicily

A FANTASTIC BEDROOM

Aleister Crowley, the author, alleged in the King's Bench, London, yesterday, that passages in Miss Nina Hamnett's book, "Laughing Torso," imputed that he practised "Black Magic," and he sued Miss Hamnett, the publishers, and the printers for libel. The defence was a plea of justification.

Mr. Eddy, for Mr. Crowley, said that Mr. Crowley inherited a large fortune, and was devoted to poetry, art, travel, and mountaineering. For many years he had been interested in magic—white magic on the side of the angels and black magic on the side of the devil. The magic in which Mr. Crowley believed was that which stressed the will, and in 1920 he started a little community in Cefalu, Sicily, for the purpose of studying it. It was an old farm-house, and Mr. Crowley's bedroom was described as "the Room of Nightmares" because of the fantastic frescoes on the walls.

"TEMPLE OF THELEMA"

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. This all pointed to black magic, so people said, and the inhabitants of the village were frightened of him."

Mr. Crowley, in evidence, said that when he was young he rebelled against the "general atmosphere of the Plymouth Brethren." He inherited between £30,000 and £40,000. The

villa at Cefalu was on a hillside, faced an immense rock like Gibraltar, and dominated the cathedral city.

"I decorated my room with frescoes similar to religious paintings in the Notre Dame," he said. "There were fantastic gargoyles any odd thing that came into my mind. People said they looked like nightmares."

The villa was known as the Abbey of Thelema. There were up to eleven in the household, the guiding principle of which was good manners. The study of the words: "Do what thou wilt shall be the will of the law. Love is law, love under will," had occupied the last thirty years of his life. "There is no end to what they mean," said Mr. Crowley.

Later Mr. Crowley declared: "Black magic is suicidal. There are various forms of prize-fighting and all-in wrestling. I approve some forms of magic 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.

BLACK AND MALIGNANT

Mr. Eddy—Is murder of children associated with black magic?—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.

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

Is it true that men shaved their heads leaving a symbolical curl in front and that the women dyed their hair red for six months and then black for the rest of the year?—It is not correct.

Mr. Crowley denied that he told Miss Hamnett the things of which he complained in the book. No baby 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.

Counsel—For many years you have been publicly denounced as the worst man in the world?—Only by the lowest kind of newspapers.

Did any paper call you the monster of wickedness?—I don't remember what papers.

Have you from the time of your adolescence openly defied all moral convictions?—No.

And proclaimed your contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity.

Mr. Crowley agreed that he was at Cambridge from 1895 to 1898 and there became interested in magic.

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

The hearing was adjourned.