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BLACK MAGIC QUESTIONS

Author on His "Room of Nightmares"

KNOWN AS "BEAST 666"



*MISS NINA HAMNETT (right), the defendant,
and Miss Betty May, one of her witnesses.*

Questions about magical practices in a Sicilian farmhouse where, it was alleged, men and women were instructed to enter their innermost thoughts in a magical diary, were asked in the King's Bench Division yesterday.

Aleister Crowley, the author, sued Miss Nina Hamnett, authoress of a book entitled "Laughing Torso," for alleged libel, claiming that passages in the book imputed that he practised "black magic." This he denied.

Mr. Crowley agreed in court that he had been expelled from Sicily, refused admission to France, and described in certain papers as a "monster of wickedness."

His "Unspeakable Sonnet"

Mr. J. P. Eddy, for Mr. Crowley, said that in 1920 he started a little community at a villa in Cefalu, Sicily to study white magic.

It was an old farmhouse, and Mr. Crowley's bedroom was described as "The Room of Nightmares," because of the fantastic frescoes on the walls.

A passage in Miss Hamnett's 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."

Giving evidence, Mr. Crowley said he inherited between £30,000 and £40,000. He had been interested in black magic since 1897.

The villa at Cefalu was known as the Abbey of Thelema, and in 1920, when he first went there, there were four people. Others came in and out, but there were never more than 11.

In 1922 a young man, Raoul Loveday, came to the villa and stayed there until his death in 1923. His constitution had been weakened by an accident.

While jumping from a college at Oxford he was impaled on a spike, where he hung for over two hours before relief arrived. He lost a lot of blood and he never regained his health.

Mr. Eddy: What did this household at Cefalu do?—Each person had a certain duty connected with the house.

Did they pursue studies?—Some did. Visitors came from all parts of the world to learn what I had to teach.

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

"HAIR DYED RED?"

It is said that drugs were stored in your room and were available for the inmates?—I had a medicine chest containing 24 large bottles of various medicines—the sort of thing that is made especially for explorers.

Was it true there was a rule that people should gash themselves if they used the word "I"?—A foolish fabrication.

It is true privacy was not allowed?—It is not true. It was particularly necessary to respect privacy because of the accommodation.

Were there locks on the doors?—No.

Is it true that men shaved their heads, leaving a symbolic 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. Aleister Crowley

It is said that everyone was instructed to enter their innermost sacred thoughts in a magical diary?—For the purpose of training in self-control certain exercises were given, and it was suggested that it would be convenient, both to the students and the instructor, if they recorded their progress.

"A MAGIC CIRCLE"

Mr. Crowley denied he told Miss Hamnett the things of which he complained in the book. No baby mysteriously disappeared. A goat was kept for milking, but the inhabitants were not frightened by it.

Mr. Eddy then put to Mr. Crowley the following particulars in the defence:—

"Every day, after tea, Mr. Crowley performed a ceremony known as Pentagram. He entered robed into a room decorated with cabalistic signs and seated himself on a throne before a brazier containing a 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 he 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 while resting the point of the sword on his or her forehead.

"He then proceeded to execute ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy, brandishing his sword and leaping the magic circle."

Mr. Eddy: Is that an accurate account of what was done at Cefalu?—It is not accurate.

What is the Pentagram?—It is a ceremony which invokes God to afford the protection of his Archangel.

Mr. Crowley denied that it was an obscene invocation, or that animals were sacrificed and he invited people to drink their blood.

When he was returning to London he met Miss Hamnett in Paris. "She was a kind of clearing-house for the artistic world," he added.

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. (cross-examining): Are you asking for damages because your reputation has suffered?—Yes.

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

Did any paper call you the Monster of Wickedness?—I don't remember which papers.

You have practised magic from the days when you were just down from Cambridge?—Yes.

Mr. Crowley admitted that he assumed the designations of "Beast 666" and "The Master Therion" (the Great Wild Beast).

"CALL ME 'SUNSHINE!'"

Mr. Hilbery: The Great Wild Beast and Beast 666 are out of the Apocalypse?—It only means sunlight; 666 is the number of the Sun. You can call me "Little Sunshine." (Laughter.)

Have you written a number of books, mostly poems?—A number of books and many poems.

Is it true to say that practically all your works are erotic in tendency and grossly indecent in expression?—It would be entirely untrue to say anything of the kind. I have published a collection of 52 hymns to the Blessed Virgin Mary which were highly praised in the Catholic Press.

Have you published material which is too indecent to be read—too indescribably filthy to be read in public?—No. I have contributed certain pathological books entirely unsuited to the general public and only for circulation among students of psycho-pathology.

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

In 1929, in Paris, did they refuse to grant the renewal of your identification cards so that you had to get out of France?—Yes.

“STAVISKY GANG”

They wouldn't have you there?—A discharged employee was blackmailing me, and used his pull with the Stavisky gang, or whatever it was, to get me out.

Mr. Crowley agreed that he was the author of “White Stains.”

Mr. Hilbery: Is that a book of indescribable filth?—It is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease and murder.

You have made a sonnet of unspeakable things, haven't you?—Yes.

“White Stains” is described as “Being the Literary Remains of George Archibald Bishop a Neuropath of the Second Empire”?—Yes. I think only 100 copies were printed and were handed to some expert on the subject in Vienna.

You know it is an obscene book?—I don't know it. Until it got into your hands it never got into any improper hands at all. (Laughter.)

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.