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(page 10)**

AUTHOR-MAGICIAN'S LIBEL SUIT

Cross-Examination

COUNSEL AND PRESS ATTACKS

The hearing was resumed before Mr. Justice Swift and a special jury in the King's Bench Division yesterday of a libel action by Aleister Crowley, the author, against Miss Nina Hamnett, authoress of a book entitled "Laughing Torso," which, he alleged, imputed that he practised "black magic." Other defendants were Constable and Co., Ltd., publishers, and Charles Whittingham and Briggs, printers. The defence was a plea of justification.

At the material time Mr. Crowley had a villa on the mountain-side at Cefalu, Sicily, which was known as the "Abbey of Thelema." He denied that he practised "black magic" there.

Giving evidence on Tuesday, Mr. Crowley agreed there were various forms of magic. "I approve some forms of magic and disapprove others," Mr. Crowley declared.

Mr. J.P. Eddy (counsel for the plaintiff): What is the form you disapprove?—That which is commonly known as black magic, which is not only foul and abominable but, for the most part, criminal.

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

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 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 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 congrega-

tion and utter a further incantation whilst resting the point of the sword on his or her forehead. The plaintiff 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.

Was there any throne?—There were chairs.

Was there any sacrificial knives?—No.

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

Did all those in the household take this Pentagram?—They were free to do so. Mr. Crowley denied that it was an obscene invocation or that animals were sacrificed and he invited people to drink their blood.

Counsel Reads Poetry

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. for the publishers and printers (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.

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

Yesterday Mr. Hilbery referred to a book entitled "Clouds Without Water," upon which, he suggested, Mr. Crowley built his reputation.

Mr. Crowley: My literary reputation.

Mr. Hilbery read a poem and asked: "Is that not filth?"

Mr. Crowley: You read it as if it were magnificent poetry. I congratulate you.

Mr. Hilbery: Is the meaning of it filthy?—In my opinion it is of no importance in this matter. You have read a sonnet out of its context, as you do everything.

You have been well known as the author of all these things that I have been putting to you, for years?—No. Mr. Crowley said that "Clouds Without Water" had only been circulated in a small way and very few people knew about it.

Do you still swear you were not known as the author of that book?—Not generally known. I regret that my reputation is not much wider than it is.

Do you want your reputation to be wider?—I should like to be universally hailed as the greatest living poet. The truth will out, you know.

Mr. Hilbery next quoted from a volume entitled "The Winged Beetle." "Are those poems all erotic?" he asked. "No," replied Mr. Crowley.

Would it be true to say that that book, like these others, contains disgusting words?—It all depends upon your views. The ordinary reviewer employed by important newspapers and magazines gave very good reviews of these books.

Questioned about a newspaper article, Mr. Crowley admitted that he wrote: "I have been shot at with broad arrows. They had called me 'the worst man in the world.' " "The first part meant," he said, "that my principal assailant was sent to penal servitude."

"Canard Every Week"

Mr. Hilbery (reading from the article): "They have accused me of doing everything from murdering women and throwing their bodies in the Seine." Is this true?—I hear a canard about me every week. Any man of any distinction has rumours about him.

Does any man of any distinction have it said about him that he is the worst man in the world?—Not necessarily: he has to be very distinguished.

Did you have a flat in your early days in Chancery Lane?—Yes.

You said: "I constructed a temple in the flat. It was a hall of mirrors, the function of which was to concentrate the invoked forces"?—Yes. Mr. Crowley agreed that in an article he referred to an occasion when he invoked the forces, with the result that some people there were attacked by unseen assailants.

Was that the result of the spirits which your magic had brought to the place?—That is the theory of certain people. "I had not the experience to control the forces then," added Mr. Crowley. "I was trying to learn how to do something and made a lot of blunders, as beginners always do." Mr. Crowley agreed that, in his "Confessions," he had said that once in Mexico he walked in the street in a scarlet robe and with a jewelled crown without anyone seeing him.

Mr. Hilbery: Was that because of your magic?—Yes.

As a part of your magic do you believe in a practice of blood sacrifice, do you?—I believe in its efficacy.

If you believe in its efficacy, you would believe in its being practised and say it could be practised without impropriety?—I do not approve it at all.

Don't approve it? You say (in his book on magic), "For nearly all purposes human sacrifice is best"?—Yes, it is.

Mr. Justice Swift: Do you say that you don't approve it?—Yes.

Referring to the villa at Cefalu, Mr. Hilbery asked whether there was an altar there.

Mr. Crowley: There was a sort of square box in which were kept things and there was a cupboard in which were kept things.

Was it an altar for the purpose of the ceremonies?—If you like, yes.

Were there candles upon it which were used for ceremonial purposes?—Yes.

Was incense used at the ceremonies?—Yes.

For the purpose of ceremony did you require a knife?—No. There were no knives, magically speaking, but there was a dagger and a sword.

Did you wear an appropriate robe at the ceremony?—Yes.

In some of the ceremonies were you endeavouring to get concentrated spiritual ecstasy?—Yes.

I suggest to you that one of the rules that you enjoined at the abbey was that nobody should use the word "I" except yourself as master?—It is not true at all.

With your approval an inmate had a razor or knife with which to cut himself if he stumbled into using a forbidden word, whatever it was?—They were not gashes, but minute cuts. You can see marks of them on my own arm.

Mr. Hilbery referred to articles in which Mr. Crowley was described as "The king of depravity," "The wickedest man in the world," "The man we would like to hang," "Another traitor trounced," and "The notorious Aleister Crowley."

Mr. Justice Swift: It is said of you, "It is hard to say whether he is man or beast."

Mr. Crowley: It was said of Shelley that he was sent from hell.

Mr. Justice Swift: I am not trying Shelley. I am only trying your case. When that was said in the public press did you take any steps to clear your character?—I was 1,500 miles away. I was ill and I was penniless.

I didn't ask you about the state of your health. Did you take any steps to clear your character?—I wrote to my solicitors and then it was impossible.

The answer is that you took no steps to clear your character?—Yes.

Mr. Crowley explained later that he was advised that his action would last fourteen days, and that he would have to find £10,000 to fight it.

The Judge: Now you see how absurd that advice was, because this case won't take anything like fourteen days. It won't last more than four days. I imagine you have not found £10,000 have you?—No.

The Judge: So you see how foolish the advice was which has left you resting under the stigma of these attacks for fourteen years.

The hearing was adjourned until today.