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LAW REPORT, APRIL 11.

High Court Of Justice King's Bench Division "Black Magic" Libel Action Against Authoress.

Crowley V Constable and Co., Limited and Others.

Before Mr. Justice Swift and a Special Jury.

The hearing was continued of the action by Mr. Edward Alexander (Aleister) Crowley, an author, of Carlos Place, Grosvenor Square, W., against Constable and Co., Limited, of Orange Street, WC., Charles Wittingham and Griggs (Printers), Limited, of Brunswick Park Road, London, and Miss Nina Hamnett in respect of an alleged libel in a book entitled "Laughing Torso," published, printed and written by the defendants respectively.

Mr. Crowley complains that in "Laughing Torso," Miss Hamnett stated that he had had a temple at Cefalu, in Sicily, where he was supposed to have practised Black Magic. The defendants deny that the words complained of were defamatory and further plead that, if they were, they were true in substance and in fact.

Mr. J. P. Eddy, Mr. Constantine Gallop, and Mr. F. A. Lewis, appeared for the plaintiff; Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C., and Mr. C. W. Liley, for the publishers and printers of the book; and Mr. Martin O'Connor for Miss Hamnett. Mr. Arthur Reade held a watching brief for an interested party. Mr. Crowley, further cross-examined, said that his personal reputation had nothing to do with his literary reputation.

Mr. Hilbery read some verse out of a book entitled, "Clouds Without Water," and then asked: "Isn't that filth?"

The witness—You read it as if it were magnificent poetry. I congratulate you.

Is the meaning of it filth?—In my opinion it is of no importance in this matter. You are reading this sonnet out of context as you do everything.

You have been well known for years as the author of all these things which I have been putting to you?—No. I wish I had a far wider reputation. I should like to be hailed as the greatest living poet. Truth will out.

That is your view, is it?—Yes.

Mr. Crowley denied that he had a contempt for the ordinary views and standards of ordinary citizens. He had a contempt

for some of them. In 1910 he published "The Winged Beetle," a volume of poems. Those poems were not erotic.

VERY GOOD REVIEWS

Does not the book contain disgusting poems?—It depends on your views. The ordinary reviewers, employed by important newspapers and magazines, gave very good reviews of this book.

On any basis, literary or otherwise, is that [a poem which had been read] anything but disgusting and infamous?—It means that even the vilest or women can, through the influence of love, become an inspiring influence in a man's life.

Mr. Crowley agreed that during the War he visited the United States and in 1915 he contributed to a Chicago magazine an article in which he referred adversely to England and described the Kaiser as the genius of his people and an Angel of God sent to save the Fatherland from savage foes.

Did you write that against your own country?—I did, and I am proud of it.

Was that part of German propaganda in America?—Yes. I wanted to over-balance the sanity of German propaganda, which was being very well done, by turning it into absolute nonsense.

That is your explanation now, after the Allied cause has succeeded?—Lots of people knew it at the time.

Continuing, Mr. Crowley said that he did not know whether a book of his called "The Diary of a Drug Fiend" was withdrawn from circulation in 1922 owing to attacks in the Press. Last June he supplied the material for an article in a Sunday newspaper. In that article it was stated:—"They have called me the worst man in the World."

Is that true?—I hear a new canard about me every week. Any man of distinction has rumours about him.

Does any man of any distinction necessarily have it said about him that he is the worst man in the World?—Not necessarily. He has to be very distinguished. (laughter.)

Have you said that Horatio Bottomley branded you as a "dirty degenerate cannibal"?—Yes.

You have never taken action against any of the people who have said such things about you?—No.

Mr. Crowley said that in the article in the Sunday newspaper he said that practically the whole of his life had been spent in the study of magic. As the result of early experiments, when

he was inexperienced, he invoked certain forces with the result that some people were attacked by unseen assailants. On a later occasion he succeeded in rendering himself invisible. On another occasion he placed a dead bird in a skeleton's mouth to see if he could make the skeleton live as he had been reading about such phenomena in some mediaeval book. All these experiments, however, were connected with the practice of White Magic and not with that of Black Magic.

You advocate, as a magician, sacrifice and bloody sacrifice?—Not in the sense in which you mean.

Counsel read from a book on "Magick," written by Mr. Crowley, in which it was stated that bloody sacrifice was the most efficacious in practising magic, and that human sacrifice was best.

"A SCIENTIFIC THEORY"

Is that part of your theory of White Magic?—It is a scientific theory.

Do you believe in the theory of bloody sacrifice?—I believe in its efficacy.

And, therefore, you believe it could be practised without impropriety?—I do not approve of it at all.

Mr. Crowley said that at one period he conducted ceremonies of the "Rites of Eluisis," and as a result a being was caused to take human form and be seen.

Do you think that any ordinary person might suppose that that was Black Magic?—I cannot tell what any ordinary person would suppose about anything.

Did you take the Caxton Hall for some of these ceremonies, and were you violently attacked in the press?—Yes.

Questioned about the house at Cefalu, Mr. Crowley said that he named the house the "Abbey of Thelema." Thelema was a cult of magic. To the best of his ability he furnished the big room of the house as a temple for the purpose of the performance of magic rites.

No ceremony had to be gone through by a person who wished to enter the Abbey. If a person arrived there, did you not meet him on the threshold with the greeting: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law"?—That was the normal thing to do. I am accustomed to say that every morning on waking.

Was he not required to answer you with the appropriate formula: "Love is the Law, Love under Will"?—I object to the word "required."

Was he expected to do so?—Yes .

Mr. Justice Swift—Would he get into the house if he did not?—Of course he would.

Mr. Crowley denied that on the floor of the temple there was a pentagram and a circle. There was, however, a geometrical figure—a polygon—of a magical significance.

Mr. Hilbery—Did you use a seat, sometimes within this figure, as a throne on which you, as presiding magician sat?—If you like to use the word "throne" I do not see how I can object to it.

CROSS-EXAMINATION "DENOUNCED AS WORST MAN IN THE WORLD"

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. (cross-examining): From 1932 to the present time you have it on record that you have suffered in your reputation because the book imputed to you that you were a person who used coarse and vulgar conversation?—I believe there is something of that in the statement of claim.

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.

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

And proclaimed your contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity?—I think that is quite wrong. I don't have contempt for all doctrines of Christianity.

Reading from Mr. Crowley's autobiography, "Judaism is savage and Christianity is fiendish superstition."

Counsel asked: Does that represent your views?—No.

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

"CALL ME LITTLE SUNSHINE"

Mr. Crowley admitted that he assumed the designations of "Beast 666" and "the Master Therion" (the Great Wild Beast). "666 is the number of the Sun, and you call me "Little Sun-

shine," he added. He was at Cambridge from 1895 to 1898, and became interested in magic there.

In 1898 did you get yourself initiated into a secret order called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn?—Yes.

Was the society devoted to the practise of magic?—Yes.

You have written one or two novels?—Yes, and about eighteen short stories.

Have most of your poems been privately printed?—Certainly not.

Is it true to say that practically all your works are erotic in tendency and grossly indecent in expression?—It would be totally untrue to say anything of the kind. I have published a collection of fifty-two 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.

Is it true that in more than one country you have achieved notoriety?—What is notoriety?

Evil repute—Then how can I tell you? No sensible person thinks anything bad about me.

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.

"THE STAVISKY GANG"

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. They would not 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.

Have you been attacked in unmeasured terms in the Press of many countries?—I am not so familiar with the gutter Press as that.

They have all accused you of black magic, haven't they?—I don't read such stuff as a rule. I am a busy man, and don't waste my time on garbage.

Mr. Hilbery quoted passages from "The Confessions of Aleister Crowley," and asked: 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.

TOOK DEGREE AS A MAGICIAN

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

Your magic is like your poems, a mixture of eroticism and sexual indulgence?—It doesn't involve anything of the kind.

Is the gratification of your own sexual lusts one of your principal interests and pursuits?—No.

Mr. Crowley, questioned about other passages, declared that he knew about a Chinese classic, Yi King, about the age of 14, and that at the age of four he was reading the Bible.

Is "White Stains" (a book of which Mr. Crowley said he was the author) a book of indescribable filth?—This book 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 handed to some expert on the subject in Vienna.

Was that done because you feared there might be a prosecution if they were published in this country?—It was not. It was in refutation of the doctrine that sexual perverts had no sense of moral responsibility and should not be punished. I maintained that they had, and showed the way they got from bad to worse.

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.)

Mr. Justice Swift (sternly): If there is any more laughter at the back of the court the back of the court will be cleared.

Mr. Hilbery: Is it technically an obscene book?—Yes. Technically I think it is, and I should not write a book like that today. In describing a disease you have to describe it in proper terms.

Do you agree that it would be quite impossible to paraphrase what these poems really were about in open court?—These

subjects were all for the clinical wards, mental hospitals and such places.

Do you think the sonnet is a particular {unreadable} when the book is for clinical purposes?—I should not think it now. At that time it was the only form of expression I had. That was my preternatural innocence.

ART AND MORALS.

Mr. Hilbery referred to another book "The Soul of Osiris," and suggested that it was highly sexual.

Mr. Crowley said what he had written was "portrayed in the language God had given me for the purpose."

Is what I have read indecent?—But you have read it out of its context. The book has laid it down that art has nothing to do with morals. Mr. Crowley objected to the word sex, and said if one looked for it one could find something indecent in the Bible and the works of Shakespeare, Swift, down to Thomas Hardy.

In regard to another of his publications, Mr. Crowley denied that his portrayal of a clergyman was a mockery of the Christian point of view. "I am exposing Black Mass," he declared.

The hearing was adjourned until today.