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CEREMONIES IN "ABBEY OF THELEMA"

"Black Magic" Libel Action

DURING THE WAR

Article in an American Magazine

The hearing was resumed before Mr. Justice Swift and a special jury, in the King's Bench Division yesterday, of the libel action by Aleister Crowley, an 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 Griggs, printers, the defence being 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.

Resuming his cross-examination of Mr. Crowley, Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C., read a poem from one of Mr. Crowley's books and asked "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.

Mr. Hilbery quoted from another volume, and asked, "Are those poems all erotic?—No.

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

Mr. Hilbery, after quoting from another poem, asked "on any basis, literary or otherwise, is that anything but disgusting and infamous?"

Mr. Crowley: It means, if I may say so, that even the vilest of women can, through the influence of love, become a refining and inspiring influence in a man's life.

"PROUD OF IT"

Why Mr. Crowley Wrote an Article

Mr. Hilbery: Before America came into the war, when the affairs of the Allies were in great jeopardy, did you contribute to a Chicago magazine?—I did.

Counsel read an extract from an article in the magazine, and asked: "Did you write that against your own country?"

"I did, and I am proud of it," replied Mr. Crowley. "I suggest that you should understand a little of the context, and why I wrote it."

Mr. Hilbery: Was it part of the German propaganda in America?—Yes.

And written as such?—I endeavoured successfully to have it accepted as such. What I wanted to do was to over-balance the sanity of German propaganda, which was being very well done, by turning it into absolute nonsense. How I got Mr. _____ to publish that rubbish I cannot think. He must have been in his dotage.

That is your explanation, given after the Allied cause is safe and no longer in danger?—Lots of people knew it at the time.

Mr. Crowley admitted that he was the author of a publication in 1922 entitled "The Diary of a Drug Fiend," which was assailed in the Press.

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."

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

Did you say "Horatio Bottomley branded me as a dirty, degenerate cannibal"?—Yes.

You never took any action against the people who wrote and published those things about you?—No.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

Mr. Crowley agreed that in the article he announced that he was "The Master Therion," and that "practically my whole life has been spent in the study of magic." In his early days he had

a flat in Chancery Lane, and had two temples there; but one wasn't really a temple, it was just a lobby which was not used.

In the article, he referred to an occasion when he invoked the forces, with the result that some people there were attacked by unseen assailants.

Mr. Hilbery: 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. Hilbery: Was that your black magic or your white magic?—It is white magic, in which you protect yourself from such things.

Then it is white magic which becomes black, isn't it?—No, it is not. It is white magic making the wound antiseptic.

Questioned further about articles he had written, Mr. Crowley declared, "My duty in my writing is not to man, but to God."

Mr. Hilbery: As a part of your magic, do you believe in a practice of bloody sacrifice?—I believe in its efficacy.

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

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.

Spiritual Ecstasy

Mr. Crowley said that in the villa at Cefalu there was a sort of square box, in which were kept things.

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

Did it have on it a book which purported to contain the laws?—I expect so, yes. I don't remember these minute details after ten years.

There were candles upon it which were used for ceremonial purposes, said Mr. Crowley, and incense was used at the ceremonies. For the purpose of ceremony he did not require a knife. There were no knives, magically speaking, but there was a dagger and a sword. He wore an appropriate robe, and in some of the ceremonies he endeavoured to get concentrated spiritual ecstasy.

Mr. Crowley denied that he kept hashish at Cefalu. There was opium and strychnine.

Mr. Hilbery: Did you advise that drugs should be employed for the purpose of increasing or helping the spiritual ecstasy?

No, nothing would be more inappropriate at a ceremony.

When do you advise the use of them?—Under skilled supervision, but to a very limited extent.

Are you skilled to administer hashish?—Yes, I can get the desired results in ten minutes.

I suggest that hashish was used for the inmates of your villa.—It was not.

"Minute Cuts"

[A paragraph from the article is missing and picks up again at:] 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.

"This is a general practice by which any man may learn to control his actions and thoughts." added Mr. Crowley.

Mr. Hilbery: In Cefalu you used the word "I" without any obligation to cut yourself?—And so did everybody else.

Mr. Crowley agreed that there were drawings on the walls of the villa at Cefalu.

Mr. Hilbery: Were some of them, at any rate, frescoes which may technically have been obscene?—Not in my opinion.

Questioned about the ritual of his magic circle, Mr. Crowley said he spoke words which might have been intoning words.

With reference to the ritual of circumambulation, Mr. Crowley agreed that he did walk round the room. He went round at a pace resembling the pace of a tiger stalking a deer. He had never performed a ceremony naked—not in the presence of another person.

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 form hell.

"Man Who Sees Visions"

Mr. Crowley declared that while he was in America during the war he was leading a very public life. After America came into the war, he was working for the Department of Justice for the benefit of his country.

Mr. Justice Swift: Were you not in prison in America?—I wasn't in prison there or at any other place or time in the whole of my life.

Were you deported from Canada?—No.

Mr. Crowley explained that he did not take any action with reference to the earlier articles, because he was advised that his action would last 14 days, and that he would have to find £10,000 to fight it.

Mr. Justice Swift: Now you see how absurd that advice was, because this case won't take anything like 14 days.

Mr. Hilbery: Were your books from Cefalu seized by the Customs of this country?—Against my instructions certain documents and other things—I don't know what they were even—were attempted to be brought in by a man who had a power of attorney from me and abused it. That box or boxes—whatever it was—were seized.

Were they your books?—I don't know the contents of the boxes. Some of them doubtless were.

Cross-examining on behalf of Miss Hamnett, Mr. Martin O'Connor suggested to Mr. Crowley that he was a man who sees visions."

Mr. Crowley agreed, but denied that he had supernatural powers.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.