

THE TIMES
14 April 1934

HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

KING'S BENCH DIVISION
"BLACK MAGIC" LIBEL ACTION FAILS

CROWLEY v. CONSTABLE AND
CO., LIMITED, AND OTHERS

Before Mr. Justice Swift and a Special Jury

The jury stopped the case and returned a verdict for the defendants in the action by Mr. Edward Alexander (Aleister) Crowley, an author, of Carlos Place, Grosvenor Square, W., against Constable and Co., Limited, of Orange Street, W.C., 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 complained that in *Laughing Torso* Miss Hamnett stated that he had had a temple in Cefalù, in Sicily, where he was supposed to have practiced Black Magic.

The defendants denied that the words complained of were defamatory and further pleaded 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. Lilley 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.

Mrs. Betty Sedgwick, who visited Cefalù with her former husband, "Raoul" Loveday, in 1922, and gave evidence on behalf of the defence yesterday (Thursday), denied in further cross-examination, that, before her marriage, her life might fairly be described as "drink, drugs, and immorality."

Mr. Eddy.—Which part is inaccurate?—I have not drugged for years.

Drink?—I consumed about the amount which anybody else would.

Persistent immorality?—No.

Living a very fast life in London?—No.

When you married your husband was he in a poor state of health?—He had been very ill six months previously, but he was getting quite fit.

Did you try to involve him in the life which you were living in London?—I was a model and I had to keep both of us, so how could I do that? We had no money and I had to work every day.

Mr. Eddy said that he suggested that Mrs. Sedgwick was “the source of all these stories about the ‘Worst Man in the World’ and ‘orgies in Sicily.’ ” Mrs. Sedgwick agreed that she had given information about Cefalù to a Sunday newspaper. The article which was published, however, did not accurately reproduce the facts which she had given.

Mrs. Sedgwick declared that her story that a cat was sacrificed during one of the ceremonies at Cefalù was absolutely true.

“VERY CHARMING CATS”

Are the cats in Sicily wild and destructive animals?—I only knew two and I found them very charming cats.

I suggest that, if there is any basis for this story, it is merely that a wild cat was shot?—No, no.

Your husband was a man of refinement?—Very.

Did not Mr. Crowley shoot wild cats?—No. He shot a dog outside in the courtyard.

I suggest that at times he shot wild cats?—Never.

I suggest that your statement about the sacrifice of a cat and your refined husband drinking the cat’s blood is pure fiction?—No. It is absolutely true.

Were the children at the house at Cefalù well cared for?—I do not think that they were very well brought up. They were left to fend for themselves. They lived with the peasants most of the time.

Mrs. Sedgwick said that the children were quite well fed and happy. When her husband became ill he was well treated. She thought that he was suffering from laudanum poisoning.

You have state din your book [*Tiger Woman. My Story*] that he had enteric as the result of drinking impure water. Why this suggestion to-day that it was laudanum poisoning?—After he drank the cat’s blood he was violently ill and sick and Crowley gave him laudanum every day. I told Scotland Yard at the

time that I thought my husband died from laudanum poisoning.

Are you utterly reckless about what stories are communicated to the public as representing facts provided by you?—No.

Certain incidents, added Mrs. Sedgwick, had been apparently introduced into the book "to make it a little more exciting."

Is it to make your evidence a little more exciting that we are hearing all these things?—No.

Mrs. Sedgwick said that "Raoul" Loveday was her third husband. She did not marry again for several years.

In the meantime were you leading an immoral life?—No.

What were you doing to earn your living?—Acting as a model. I have been a model all my life.

Dealing with a statement from her book that she once slapped her mother-in-law, Mrs. Sedgwick said that her mother-in-law would interfere with her and annoy her.

"RATHER FELINE IN LOOKS"

You wrote your book under the name *Tiger Woman*. Why?—Because I think that I am rather feline in looks and I thought that it was a rather good name for me.

Anything to do with your violent nature?—I am not violent.

I suggest that wherever your evidence conflicts with Mr. Crowley's it is an invention?—No. Mrs. Sedgwick again denied that she had given evidence because she hoped to make money out of doing so. She was in Court out of a sense of duty. She had received from £15 to £20 from the defendant's solicitors.

What was that for?—It was for my expenses.

What expenses?—I lived in the country and they wanted me in London, and they had to pay for my expenses.

Mr. Eddy produced certain letters which, he said has passed between Mrs. Sedgwick and the defendants' solicitors, and also a letter which he said was written to "Bumbletoff" and was signed "Poddlediff." Mrs. Sedgwick said that Bumbletoff was a nickname of hers and that a very old friend of hers was known as "Poddlediff." She never remembered seeing that letter.

Did you not discuss with "Poddlediff" the question of your giving evidence in this case?—No. He had enough troubles of his own without troubling about mine.

Re-examined, Mrs. Sedgwick said that she had not seen the letters produced by Mr. Eddy for a long time. She had kept her letters in a small box.

Mr. Hilbery.—Did you ever authorize anyone to extract those documents from your box of private papers and give

them to Mr. Crowley?—Certainly not.

Mr. Justice Swift.—Do you know how Mr. Crowley got possession of your letters?—I cannot imagine how. Everything was taken from the case, but the use was left. The letters were stolen.

Mr. Hilbery.—Did you ever know that they had got into Mr. Crowley's possession?—No.

Mr. Justice Swift said that whoever had the letters was, according to Mrs. Sedgwick's evidence, in possession of stolen property and they had no right to have them. "We shall never know in this case," his Lordship added, "because we shall have no opportunity to find out, but it would be interesting to know how Mr. Crowley came to be in possession of letters between the defendant's solicitors and this witness."

Mrs. Sedgwick said that, in the first instance, she was approached by the defendant's solicitors to give evidence. She had asked for her expenses beyond which she had not received a penny piece and she had never made any sort of commotion about being paid anything if she were to give evidence.

Mr. Justice Swift directed that the letters which had been produced should be retained in the custody of the Court.

Mrs. Sedgwick added that her first husband was killed in the War. She divorced her second husband.

Mr. Eddy said that he suggested that if any Motley which had brought Mrs. Sedgwick to give evidence, but he made no sort of imputation against the defendants' solicitors. All he suggested was a wholly improper demand by Mrs. Sedgwick

DEFENCE OF THE AUTHORESS

Mr. Martin O'Connor, in opening Miss Hamnett's defence, said that Mr. Crowley had originally complained of two libels. One was a charge that he had been guilty of immorality, but he had thrown that overboard and run away from the defence which had been pleaded that he was a lewd, blasphemous, and abominable man. He said: "Let it go. You have called me a black magician."

By his "magic" Mr. Crowley had preyed on weak-minded persons for years. The present proceedings would throw a light on "this hypocritical rascal" which, it was to be hoped, would put an end to his activities for all time. As to his reputation, there was no one in fact or in fiction against whom so much inquiry had been alleged.

At the end of Mr. O'Connor's speech the jury asked whether

they could intervene.

His Lordship told the foreman that the jury could stop the case as against Mr. Crowley when Mr. Eddy had said everything he wanted to say and he (his Lordship) had taken care to see that the jury knew what issues they had to try.

Mr. Eddy then addressed the jury. At the end of his speech the jury intimated that they were still of the same opinion.

His Lordship, in directing the jury, said that he had never heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous and abominable stuff as that which had been produced by the man who described himself as the greatest living poet.

The jury returned a verdict for the defendants, for whom judgment was accordingly entered with costs. A stay of execution was refused.

Mr. Justice Swift said that there was no reflection on the defendants' solicitors. Referring to the documents which were in the custody of the Court, his Lordship said that they would remain there. They would be in proper custody, if they had to be taken to another Court.

Solicitors.—Messrs. Forsyte, Kerman and Phillips; Messrs. Waterhouse and Co.; Messrs. Edmond O'Connor and Co.; Messrs. Osborn-Jenkyn and Son.