

THE YORKSHIRE POST
14 APRIL 1934

JURY STOP "BLACK MAGIC" LIBEL ACTION

Judgment for all the Defendants

"DREADFUL STUFF"

Judge and "Greatest Living Poet"

Before the defence in the "black magic" libel action had been concluded in the King's Bench Division, yesterday, the special jury, who, with Mr. Justice Swift, tried the case, intervened and gave a verdict for all the defendants.

"I have nothing to say about the facts except this," Mr. Justice Swift told the jury. "I have been over 40 years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another. I thought that I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness.

"I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at some time or another before me. I have learnt in this case that we can always learn something more if we live long enough. I have never heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous, and abominable stuff as that which has been produced by the man who described himself to you as the greatest living poet."

Mr. Aleister Crowley, an author, claimed damages from Miss Nina Hamnett, the authoress of a book entitled "Laughing Torso," Messrs. Constable and Co., Ltd., the publishers, and Messrs. Charles Whittingham and Briggs, the printers. Mr. Crowley complained that the book imputed that he had practised black magic, which he said was a libel upon him. The defence was a plea of justification.

Mr. Crowley denied that he practised black magic at a villa which he occupied at Cefalu, Sicily, and which was known as the "Abbey of Thelema." He admitted that he called himself "Beast 666" out of the Apocalypse. Miss Hamnett was once a student of his, but he denied that he supplied to her information on which her book was based.

According to the evidence given by Mrs. Betty Sedgwick, whose former husband, Raoul Loveday, died at the Cefalu villa,

a cat on one occasion was sacrificed in the course of a magical ceremony. Her husband then drank a cup of the cat's blood.

Mr. Crowley in his evidence had declared that there never had been any sacrifice of any animal in the ceremony, or any drinking of blood.

AT CEFALU **Woman's Story of Her Visit**

Resuming his cross-examination of Mrs. Sedgwick, Mr. Eddy asked, "Immediately before your marriage to Raoul Loveday, would your life be fairly described as drink, drugs, and immorality?"

"No," replied Mrs. Sedgwick, who added that she had not drugged herself for years. She took cocaine when she was 18, but not after she was 25.

When you married Raoul Loveday, was he in a poor state of health?—No, he had been very ill months before, but he got quite fir. He had great nervous energy.

Did he have a serious accident at Oxford?—I believe it was rather bad.

Did you try to embark him upon the life you were leading in London? I was a model, and I sat to keep both of us. I was sitting hard because we had no money. We were living together in a furnished bedroom, and I earned 1 a day.

Mrs. Sedgwick said that one morning a communication came from Mr. Crowley to her husband summoning him to Cefalu. She did not see the communication. Her husband did not tell her that Mr. Crowley wanted to give both of them a chance in Sicily and to enable her to live a clean life there.

Mr. Eddy: This was not an attempt to rescue you and your husband from the life you were leading?—No, nothing of that sort.

Mrs. Sedgwick said that after her arrival in Sicily articles about Mr. Crowley appeared, but she did not supply the information. On the day she arrived in England from Sicily she supplied information to the "Sunday Express," and was paid for it.

"I am suggesting that you are the source of all these stories about 'The Worst Man in the World,' " said Mr. Eddy, who added that in the "Sunday Express" of March 4 1923 there appeared a story headed, "Young Wife's Story of Crowley's Abbey." Mrs. Sedgwick agreed that this was the information for which she was paid. She did not write it.

"Tiger Woman"

Mr. Eddy: Did you write this book ("Tiger Woman")?—No.

A few facts—and somebody else has done the rest?—Yes.

Mrs. Sedgwick said, "We all pretty well lived in Crowley's room after the pentagram." She persisted that drugs were kept in his desk, which was unlocked, and were available to the people there.

Mr. Eddy then cross-examined Mrs. Sedgwick on her evidence regarding the "terrible sacrifice of a cat."

Are the cats in Sicily, or many of them, wild and destructive animals?—I only knew two and they were very charming cats.

I am suggesting that, if there is any basis for your story, it is that a wild cat was shot?—No, no.

Did Mr. Crowley shoot a cat himself?—No; he shot a dog outside in the courtyard.

Mr. Eddy: I am suggesting that this statement of your about the sacrifice of a cat, and your husband, who you agree was a man of refinement, drinking the blood of the cat, is pure fiction?—No; every word is true.

Mrs. Sedgwick said she didn't understand anything about the ceremonies at the "Abbey." There was a table or an altar in the "Temple," and it was under that that the cat ran. "It ran over the circle and tried to make for a bedroom," she added, "but it was cut so badly that it didn't know what to do or where to go."

From November, 1922, to March, 1923, she was living in the house, said Mrs. Sedgwick, but not altogether with her husband, because she was turned out. That was not because of her husband's illness and to get proper accommodation for her. The children at the "Abbey" were not well cared for.

Mr. Eddy then referred to a passage of her book, in which Mrs. Sedgwick wrote of the children, "They were delightful children, healthy and well-fed, and with no appearance of being oppressed by their unconventional surroundings."

Is that true?—I didn't say they were underfed. I didn't approve their upbringing.

Was your husband well treated in his illness?—I suppose he was in a way.

What was he suffering from?—I have no idea. I thought it was laudanum poisoning.

Mr. Eddy pointed out that in her book Mrs. Sedgwick had said he was suffering from enteric, whereupon she said that was true.

"After he drank the cat's blood, he was violently ill and sick," said Mrs. Sedgwick, "and Mr. Crowley gave him laudanum, a lot of it, as medicine. I told Scotland Yard I thought it was laudanum poisoning at the time."

"These Little Touches"

Mr. Eddy: Did all these little touches in this book come from the journalist?—This was copied from the articles I wrote in the "World's Pictorial News."

They contain inaccurate statements?—I gave them the facts. They "worked round them," and got their data a little wrong.

You saw these wild statements in the original articles?—They are not wild, they are true.

But the statements about the undergraduate at Cambridge?—That was not true.

It was in the original article?—Yes.

Why did you allow that utterly untrue story to be reproduced in a book which goes out to the public as your story?—It didn't seem to me to matter much, and, as it had appeared in the article, it didn't matter if it appeared in the book. It certainly made the book a little more exciting.

Mr. Eddy referred to a passage in the book, in which Mrs. Sedgwick said:—

He (Mr. Crowley) ordered me to go, and there was a terrific scene. I should have said before that there were several loaded revolvers which used to lie about the Abbey. They were very necessary, for we never knew when brigands might attack us.

I seized a revolver, and fired it wildly at the Mystic. It went wide of the mark, and he laughed heartily. Then I rushed at him, but couldn't get a grip of his shaven head. He picked me up in his arms and flung me bodily from the front door.

Mrs. Sedgwick said she didn't see any brigands but was told they were about. When dogs came near, Mr. Crowley shot at them. He was not a good shot. He shot one dog, but there were others he just wounded.

"I am not Violent"

Raoul was her third husband, said Mrs. Sedgwick. She married her fourth husband about seven of eight years ago.

Mr. Eddy read a passage from "Tiger Woman," in which it related the fourth husband's mother as saying, "Oh, you foul, wicked woman, you are killing my son."

Mrs. Sedgwick said she was "Tiger Woman." Being rather feline in looks, she thought it was perhaps rather a good name for her.

Mr. Eddy: Nothing to do with your violent nature?—I am not violent.

A passage in the book which described a scene with another woman was read by Mr. Eddy. Part of the passage was:—

At last she got up and danced with the man . . . As they passed by, she looked backwards at me and said, "She is a pretty little thing, but it is a pity she has false teeth."

I jumped up and slapped her as hard as I could on the face. Waiters immediately bundled us upstairs into the street, fighting all the time. I meant paying dearly for that insult. False teeth, indeed?

I plunged my fingers into her hair, and pulled hard. The result was not what I expected. I found myself lying in the gutter, and clutched in my right hand—I could hardly believe my eyes—was a chestnut wig.

LETTERS

Witness Alleges They Were Stolen

Mrs. Sedgwick denied that, in relation to Cefalu, wherever her evidence contradicted that given by Mr. Crowley, her evidence was an invention. She had made nothing out of Cefalu up-to-date. She received two sums of £25 and £75 for magazine articles.

Mr. Eddy: In regard to your position in this case, I put it to you plainly that you are here as a "bought" witness.—I am here to help the jury.

Do you mean you wanted to come?—No, I was comfortable in the country. I had to come.

I am suggesting—without making any imputation against the solicitors—that you were obviously unwilling to come unless you were paid to come?—No.

Mrs. Sedgwick admitted having written to Messrs. Waterhouse and Co., solicitors for the printers and publishers, asking for £5 "on account of my personal expenses incurred in connection with my recent services in regard to evidence." At that time she had been paid between £15 and £20 from the solici-

tors for her expenses of coming up from the country and staying in London for a few days in connection with the case.

In reply, she received a letter stating "I am afraid I cannot send you as much as another £5. I am grateful for your help, but I thought previous remittances covered a good deal."

"Bumbletoff" and "Poddlediff"

"Are you known as Bumbletoff?" asked Mr. Eddy, handing a letter to witness. Mrs. Sedgwick replied that lots of people called her by that name. She did not remember having seen the letter before, or ever having received it.

Mr. Eddy: Do you know anyone by the name of Poddlediff?—Yes, he is an old friend of mine.

"Do you swear you have not received that letter addressed to 'Dear Bumbletoff' "? asked Mr. Eddy.

Mr. Justice Swift: The witness says she does not remember receiving the letter. There the matter must stop.

Mrs. Sedgwick admitted that she eventually received a letter from Messrs. Waterhouse, enclosing £5 for expenses incurred in coming to London about the case.

Mr. Eddy: Did you ever authorize anyone to extract those letters from your case and give them to Mr. Crowley?—No.

Mr. Justice Swift: Are these produced by Mr. Crowley?—Yes.

Do you know how Mr. Crowley got possession of your letters? I can't imagine how he got them.

Mr. M. Hilbert, K.C. (for the publishers): Were there other letters in the case?—Yes, everything was taken from the case. The contents were all stolen.

Until they were produced here, with the suggestion that it was documentary evidence that your evidence had been "bought," did you know they had got into Crowley's possession?—I didn't know at all.

When some of the copies of the missing letters were produced and referred to Mr. Justice Swift agreed with Mr. Hilbert that they should remain in the custody of the Court.

Mr. Hilbert said he would like to call Mr. Harper, of Messrs. Waterhouse, when the cheques were available, to refute any suggestion that he had been a party to purchasing any evidence.

Mr. Eddy: My suggestion was, is, and will be, that money explains the presence of Miss Betty May (Mrs. Sedgwick) in the witness-box. I do not make any sort of imputation upon the

solicitors. I suggest they were put in the position by the attitude taken up by the witness.

Referring to Mr. Crowley's refusal to accept his challenge the previous day to try his magic, Mr. Martin O'Connor, opening the case for Miss Hamnett, said it was appalling that "in this enlightened age a court should be investigating magic, which is arch-hum-bug practised by arch-roguers to rob weak-minded people."

"I hope this action," he added, "will end for all time the activities of this hypocritical rascal."

Mr. O'Connor suggested to the jury that the point had been reached at which they should stop the case.

Jury Intervene

Later, during Mr. O'Connor's speech, seeing two jurymen talking, Mr. Justice Swift stopped counsel. "You were talking," he said to the jurymen. "Yes," said one of them, "we were whispering." "There is no reason why you should not," said the Judge.

All the members of the jury then conferred together. Then one of the jurymen said they wished to know whether this was a correct time for them to intervene.

Mr. Justice Swift: You cannot stop the case as against the defendants. You must hear all of their case before you stop it. But you may stop it against the plaintiff, when Mr. Eddy has said everything he wants to say, and when I have taken care to see that you know what the issues are which you have to try.

Mr. O'Connor said he had nothing to add and would call no evidence.

Mr. Eddy then made his final submissions to the jury. He submitted that no reasonable jury could do otherwise than find a verdict in favour of Mr. Crowley, notwithstanding the view that had been indicated. The law of libel was available to everybody, whether he was of good or bad character.

Mr. Justice Swift asked the jury if they were of the same mind as intimated earlier. "If," he said, "you think that he was never libeled, or that his reputation was never damaged or, if you think the defendants have justified what was written, then your verdict should be for the defendants.

His Lordship made the remarks quoted at the beginning of this report of the case.

The jury asked whether they might retire.

Mr. Justice Swift said that if there was any doubt about the matter the case must go on.

The foreman said that the jury were unanimous. They found a verdict for defendants.

Judgment was entered for all the defendants, with costs.

Mr. Justice Swift said that there was no reflection on Mr. Harper. "Mr. Eddy made that as plain as he can," added his Lordship. "The jury's verdict has made it equally plain, and, if there is any satisfaction in this, I think there is no reflection upon Mr. Harper.

Mr. Eddy asked for a stay of execution.

Mr. Justice Swift: No, Mr. Eddy. It was a plain question of fact for the jury.

Mr. Eddy: I was desirous of pointing out before the jury gave their decision exactly what had to be done before a verdict could be returned at all. It is no use my doing it now, but I would desire to call your attention to the form of the summing-up to be administered, particularly the need for calling attention to the cross-examination and so forth.

Mr. Justice Swift: You shall do that in another place when it seems convenient to you to do it. I thought I had followed the Instructions of Lord Justice Scrutton. I still think that I did, but you can go and point out to him that I did not. Some day another jury will reinvestigate the matter.

Mr. C. W. Lilley (for the defence) mentioned the documents which the Judge had in his custody. "You indicated some difficulty as to the proper ownership of them," he said. "Pending an application for them to be made on behalf of one party or the other, we should be very glad if they may stay in the custody of the court."

Mr. Justice Swift: We will keep the letters in court, and we shall certainly have them in proper custody if you take them to another court.