

THE LIVERPOOL ECHO
LIVERPOOL, LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND
10 DECEMBER 1953
(page 6)

“The Wickedest Man In The World”

Aleister Crowley was acclaimed the King of Depravity by the London Press, which also dubbed him the Wickedest Man in the World.

Other titles he chose for himself, such as Prince Chioa Khan, Baphomet and The Beast 666.

Mountaineer, poet, sex-maniac, drug-fiend and, above all, magician, Crowley was a man who had thrived for years on a dark, satanic notoriety. He was, therefore, the last man to be expected to come to court to claim damages for a libel on his good name.

But egotism is more blinding than blindness itself, and Crowley's egotism had been maturing steadily since he came down from Cambridge at the turn of the century and devoted his violent, unstable energies to experiments in sex, drugs and magic.

Over more than 30 years he wrote books (printed privately) in which he described the fruits of his researches. He established in a Sicilian farmhouse known at the Abbey of Thelema a pagan sex-cult which was intended—under his quasi-divine inspiration—to rejuvenate the world.

Visitors from England went out to the Abbey of Thelema, and returned with strange tales of the rites performed there.

Was Expelled

Eventually Crowley was expelled by the Italian Government and found himself once more in London. It was then that his egotism—his need for publicity and his need for money to indulge his passions—could only be satisfied by success in a sensational trial.

He found this passage about himself in a book of reminiscences entitled *Laughing Torso*:

“Crowley had a temple in Cefalu in Sicily. He was supposed to practice Black Magic there, and one day a baby was said to have disappeared mysteriously. There was also a goat there. This all pointed to Black Magic, so people said, and the inhabitants of the village were frightened of him.”

Crowley sued Nina Hamnett and Constable and Co., the authoress and publishers of the book, for damages for libel.

His action was tried in 1934, and lasted for four days.

All went well to begin with. Crowley entered the witness-box and claimed to be the student of a benevolent system of white magic.

"Magic," he told the judge, "is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformation with the will. It is White Magic if the will is righteous and Black Magic if the will is perverse."

But this picture of a harmless eccentric was quickly destroyed in cross-examination by Malcom Hilbery, K.C. (now Mr. Justice Hilbery), on behalf of Constables. Crowley chose to be ludicrously flippant.

"Did you take to yourself the designation of 'The Beast 666'?"—"Yes."

"Do you call yourself 'The Master Therion'?"—"Yes."

"What does 'Therion' mean?"—"Great wild beast."

"Do these title convey a fair impression of your practice and outlook on life?"—" 'The Beast 666,' " replied Crowley, "only means 'sunlight.' You can call me 'Little Sunshine.' "

"Truth Will Out"

Hilbery read some of Crowley's lascivious verses and asked:

"Have you not built a reputation on books which are indecent?"—"It has long been laid down that art had nothing to do with morals."

"We may assume that you have followed that in your practice of writing?"—"I have always endeavoured to use the gift of writing which has been vouchsafed to me for the benefit of my readers."

"Decency and indecency have nothing to do with it?"—"I do not think they have. You can find indecency in Shakespeare, Sterne, Swift, and every other English writer if you try."

"I regret," Crowley added, "that my reputation is not much wider than it is."

"You would like to be still more widely known as the author of these, would you?"—"I should like to be universally hailed as the greatest living poet. Truth will out."

Hilbery now began to quote from Crowley's magical works:

"The forces of good were those which had constantly oppressed me. I saw them daily destroying the happiness of my fellow men. Since, therefore, it was my business to explore the spiritual world, my first step must be to get into personal com-

munication with the Devil. I had heard a good deal about this operation in a vague way, but what I wanted was a manual of technical instruction. I devoted myself to Black Magic."

"Does that truly represent," asked Hilbery, "the spirit in which you approached magic?"

Many passages from Crowley's writings were read to him. His magical experiments began, of all unlikely places, in a flat in Chancery Lane, where " 'I had two temples: one white, the wall being lined with six huge mirrors, each six feet in height: the other black, a mere cupboard in which stood an altar, supported by the figure of a negro standing on his hands. The presiding genius of this place was a human skeleton'"

Dreadful Story

"Yes," said Crowley, interrupting Hilbery's reading, "Millikin and Lawley, £5."

". . . 'Which I fed from time to time with blood, small birds, and the like' . . .

"Was that true?"—"Yes."

"That was White Magic, was it?"—"It was a very scientific experiment."

". . . 'The idea was to give life, but I never got further than causing the bones to become covered with a viscous slime' . . ."

"I expect," said Crowley, "that was the soot of London."

And so the dreadful story was unfolded.

Demons appeared in Chancery Lane, and in the house which Crowley then took in the Highlands. Workmen and neighbours were mysteriously injured. In Mexico he carried out experiments in invisibility. "By invoking the God of Silence, Harpocrates, by the proper ritual in front of a mirror. I gradually got to the stage where my reflection began to flicker like the images of one of the old-fashioned cinemas. I was able to walk out in a scarlet and gold robe with a jewelled crown on my head without attracting any attention. They could not see me."

He had written that in India he sacrificed a goat and on another occasion crucified a toad. His "magical writings" spoke much of "the bloody sacrifice" to be made "within the Circle or the Triangle."

"Those magicians who object to the use of blood have endeavoured to replace it with incense. For such a purpose the incense of Abramelin may be burnt in large quantities. Dittany of Crete is also a valuable medium. . . . But the bloody sacrifice, though more dangerous is more efficacious: and for nearly all purposes human sacrifice is the best."

Even in his treatises on magic Crowley could not refrain from absurd bombast, "For the highest spiritual working one must accordingly choose that victim which contains the greatest and purest force. A male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim," and he added in a footnote: "It appears from the Magical Records of Frater Perdurabo (one of Crowley's titles) that he made this particular sacrifice on an average about 150 times every year between 1912 and 1928.

This, said Crowley, showed that these passages were not to be taken seriously—they were only an historical account of ancient practices.

Hilbery had exposed Crowley as the blackest of Black Magicians and a pathological liar. It was left to Martin O'Connor, cross-examining, on behalf of Nina Hamnett, to show him in the character of a fraud and imposter.

"I understand you to say that you are a gentleman who sees visions: is that right?"—"Sees visions, yes."

Crowley was asked about a bill from Mrs. Rosa Lewis for his stay at the Cavendish Hotel in Jermyn Street.

"Were you summoned for the amount of your bill by Mrs. Lewis in the Westminster County Court in April, 1933?"—"I have no information on the subject."

"What?"—"I do not know. People do all sorts of things like that and I never hear of them."

"That is peculiar, and I will tell you why. County Court summonses have to be served personally."—"Yes, but I do not know. Someone gives me a paper and I put it in my pocket. I think no more about it. A fellow gave me a judgments summons only yesterday. I have never seen one before. It was a very nice shade of yellow."

Remained Visible

But the judgment summons was not to be found, and so O'Connor proposed a test: "You say that you have visions. Conjure up a vision of when you are going to pay Mrs. Lewis the £24 for which she had judgment against you last April. Now throw a vision. Tell my Lord and the jury when the vision tells you that you are going to pay Mrs. Rosa Lewis the amount for which she has judgment for your board and residence"—"If I am bound to pay her I shall pay her."

"When?"—"When I can. . . ."

O'Connor now conceived the idea that Crowley's magic should be demonstrated in court, where so many arts, crafts and sciences have been exhibited to a select and critical audience.

"You said yesterday that as a result of early experiments you invoked certain forces with the result that some people were attacked by unseen assailants. That is right, is it not?"—"Yes."

"Will you try your magic now on Mr. Hilbery?"—"I would not attack anybody."

"Is that because you are too considerate or because you are an imposter pretending to do things which you cannot do?"—"I have never done wilful harm to any human being."

"My friend, I am sure, will consent to your harming him. Try it on."

But the magician was reluctant, and the judge objected.

"Mr. Martin O'Connor," he said, "we cannot turn this court into a temple."

"There is one other question," O'Connor resumed, "You said 'On a later occasion I succeeded in rendering myself invisible.' Would you like to try that on? You appreciate that if you do not I shall denounce you as an imposter?"—"You can denounce me as anything you like. It will not alter the truth."

Crowley remained visible and Martin O'Connor resumed his seat.

That was the end of Crowley's evidence. Out of all his acquaintances in the literary and artistic worlds only one man, a German merchant, then came forward to testify to his good character.

Judge's View

A witness for the defence described life at the Abbey of Thelma in Sicily. Each evening she said, there was a magic ritual known as "Pentagram" which lasted for about two hours, and longer on Fridays.

Crowley and his mistress ("the Scarlet Woman") appeared in robes. Crowley gave long readings, interspersed with incantations such as "Artay I was Malcooth—Vegabular. Vegadura. ee-ar-la. ah moon." The walls of his bedroom ("the Room of Nightmares") were decorated with terrible and indecent paintings, and there was a bureau full of bottles and drugs, all labelled. Finally, this witness described the sacrifice of a cat called "Mischette." Her husband, she said, had drunk its blood.

The truthfulness of this witness was questioned, but before very long the jury indicated that they wished to hear no more.

Counsel for Crowley was called upon to make his final speech, and then Mr. Justice Swift summed up.

"I have been," the judge declared, "over 40 years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at one time or another before me. I have learnt in this case that we can always learn something 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 describes himself to you as the greatest living poet."

As soon as the judge had finished, the jury returned a verdict against Crowley. But Crowley appealed to the Court of Appeal.

Since it had not been proved that a baby had disappeared in the Abbey of Thelema, he was, his counsel argued, entitled to at least a farthing damages. But the Court of Appeal were firmly of opinion that there had been no miscarriage of justice, and Crowley's appeal, like his claim, was dismissed with costs.

Crowley went bankrupt and disappeared from the lurid limelight which had been his special attribute for so long. He died in 1947 in a Hastings boarding house. At his funeral in Brighton Crematorium his Hymn to Pan and part of his Gnostic Mass were recited, a magical performance which provoked the wrath of the town council.

"Rose of the World!" Crowley once wrote in a poem to his wife.

If so, then what a world!

What worm at its red heart lay curled

From the beginning?"