

**THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE
6 JUNE 1954**

Nancy Barr Mavity's Bookshelf

Some Juicy British Libel Suits

HATRED, RIDICULE OR CONTEMPT, by Joseph Dean; Macmillan Co., N.Y.; \$3.75.

Any misanthropic reader who expects, from this title, to settle down to a happy little session of teeth-gnashing will be seriously misled. It is just one of those resounding phrases in which the law abounds—in the present instance, the definition of libel as applied in British courts.

And, like all legal case books, even those not addressed to the lay reader, it has as many surprising plot turns, peculiar and even humorous aspects of human behavior, and "gimmick" endings as any two-bit thriller.

Dean, who is a learned member of the London bar, picks his nimble footed way through the legalistic thickets and gathers a whole basketful of juicy berries for our entertainment no less than our enlightenment. Omitting such overly familiar sensational libel suits as those of Oscar Wilde vs. the Marquess of Queensberry and Whistler vs. Ruskin, he concentrates on the humor, the paradox, the drama, the quackery, the eccentricities, prejudices and drama to be found in less widely publicized but equally beguiling court actions.

Among his cast of characters are a medium and a magician, a duchess and a dancer, cabinet ministers and blackmailers, members of Parliament and of the demi-monde.

Aleister Crowley, modern exponent of the blackest of black magic, is challenged to give a demonstration of his vaunted powers by making himself invisible in the courtroom (he didn't); Mrs. Meurig Morris, a medium who insisted that a disembodied French man was that moment present in the courtroom was challenged to make the otherworldly visitor visible to the judge and jury (she didn't either).

The cases range in time from early in the last century (1824) to almost the other day (1946). They reveal a wide variety of motives, from outraged family honor to a crafty scheme for turning a dishonest dollar. They turn upon all sorts of issues from verbal quibbles to basic principles.

They cover all sorts of occupations from Mme. Tussaud's "Chamber of Horrors" waxworks to political campaigns, from the dignified medical journal "The Lancet" to pulp magazines and motion pictures. The second longest trial in British court action was a libel action involving two rival sculptors.

Damages to the successful litigant may be a contemptuous farthing or thousands of pounds, but the reward to the reader ample. The law, like God in the hymn, sometimes "moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," and it is never more wonderful than when injured feelings are brought to court with the complaint of exposure to "hatred, ridicule or contempt."