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Witchcraft is Reality

By SAM LOVE.

(United Press Staff Correspondent.)

New York, Dec. 11.—(UP)—Witchcraft is as much a reality as an electric light; black magic as factual as a radio program, an expert approached by the United Press for a possible explanation of the strange murder of Nelson D. Rehmeyer, near York, Pa., calmly asserted yesterday as he sat in his studio apartment just off snow-streaked Fifth avenue.

W. B. Seabrook, who has seen magic work on its victims in the jungles of Hairi, in Arabia among the Yezidee or "devilworshippers," in Kurdistan and in the south of France, finds nothing strange in the eerie revelations now coming from a modern city in Pennsylvania. Near York, Rehmeyer was killed defending a lock of his own hair from the three charged with his murder.

Seabrook once saw a woman bewitched in a manner hard to explain as she strolled unexpectedly down Fifth avenue in front of the New York public library. Other and even stranger occult matters are embodied in "Magic Island," a book he has just written after living for more than a year among the voodoo practitioners in Haiti, and which will become an automatic best-seller in January when it is published under the distribution system of the Literary Guild.

"Black Magic works—it can even kill without the use of poisons or material things," said Seabrook.

"Therefore, if this old farmer, Rehmeyer, was really a witchdoctor and really put a spell on his neighbour, John Blymyre and on the Hesses—and it could be proved—if it were on the jury I should be inclined to regard their retaliation almost as much a matter of self-defense as if Rehmeyer had gone after them with a gun.

"Assuming that these people do believe in their own powers, Blymyre, John Curry, 14, and Wilbert Hess, 18, went to the old man in fear of death, harm and destruction.

"Blymyre and the boys have been quoted as saying that what they wanted was a lock of Rehmeyer's hair to break a spell he had cast on them.

"That is not so—a lock of hair in black magic is used only to put a death spell on the person from whom it came. If they went to get a lock of Rehmeyer's hair, they were after an ingredient for a death charm against him. Had they buried it eight feet underground where it would rot, as they apparently intended, it is conceivable that Rehmeyer would have sickened and died.

"There are two and only two forms of destructive black magic, both of which have been practiced since the beginnings of time by savage tribes and which have their parallels in civilization.

"Number one is imitative magic. In medieval Germany and Italy—among savages, too—this formula has been usually to make a wax figure of the victim and either to melt it slowly or to stick pins into it. In Haiti last year I saw a man dying because he knew that up in the mountains an old woman was slowly unwinding the threads composing a little doll which represented him.

"Number two is sympathetic magic, or contagious magic. In this case you take some part, or some emanation, from the actual body of the person you plan to destroy. A lock of hair, or a finger nail paring is quit usual, although a shirt that has been perspired on is also used. Having required this, you make your charm and repeat your incantations, placing the object in a place where it will slowly rot away. The theory is that the victim will decay with it.

"I am a rationalist about these matters. I do not believe that they are miracles. I think these methods are nothing except a technique, by which the black magic practitioner manages to focus such subconscious or supernatural powers as he has.

"There is no question but that black magic can kill a person if the person on whom the magic is practiced believes in it. It is perhaps by auto-suggestion. But the thing I am in question about is whether this kind of black magic can kill or insure a person who absolutely disbelieves in it.

"I am not sure.

"I once saw magic work in the sunshine of a spring day in Fifth avenue opposite the New York public library on an unsuspecting victim. This thing is one of the things that makes me say I am not sure.

Aleister Crowley did it. He is a Cambridge graduate, head of the Rosycrucian Society, known to scholars and others on both continents. Crowley, undoubtedly a fantastic combination

of the real thing and the Charlatan, has spent many years in Central China. He both believes and practices medieval magic.

"Crowley and I had always had this dispute. He conceded that if you were adept enough you could do these things without recourse to mechanical objects. On this spring day, after lunch we were walking down Fifth avenue.

" 'Pick out any person,' he said, 'who is walking down the street ahead of us, and who is going in the same direction we are.'

I waited quite a little to ward off trickery. Finally I pointed out, about 20 feet ahead, a not conspicuous young woman, tall, well-dressed, walking with an elderly man.

" 'Take my stick,' said Crowley, handing it to me. He approached to within five or six feet of the young woman.

"Then he did a piece of mimicry I have never seen equaled on stage or anywhere else. What he was doing was to coordinate every movement, every rhythm of his own body to the exact way in which the woman was walking. He began with the greatest skill to swing his arms, his hips, his shoulders, exactly as she did. He became, almost, her shadow.

We had gone nearly a block and were in front of the library when, suddenly, Crowley let his right leg go limp under him. He clutched his knee with both hands, barely preventing himself from falling. At the same instant, five or six feet ahead, the young woman crumpled to the sidewalk. Crowley grinned, winked at me, and was at her side so quickly that he helped her escort pick her up. She said she was not hurt.

" 'It took me nearly a year to learn that from a Taoist priest in China,' said Crowley. 'He could kill. I can't. I wish I could'."

Black magic, Seabrook said in an attempt to rationalize its curious manifestations, is merely the reverse of the benevolent occurrences, widely claimed and apparently substantiated among faith-healing, God-fearing religious folk.