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"BLACK MAGIC" LIBEL ACTION

AUTHORESS SUED BY AUTHOR

"THE ABBEY OF THELEMA"

Alastair [*sic*] Crowley, the author, alleged in the King's Bench Division to-day that passages in Miss Nina Hamnett's book, "Laughing Torso," imputed that he practiced "black magic," and he sued Miss Hamnett, the publishers, and the printers for libel.

The defence was a plea of justification.

Mr. Eddy, for Mr. Crowley, said that Mr. Crowley inherited a large fortune, and was devoted to poetry, art, travel, and mountaineering. For many years he had been interested in magic—white magic on the side of the angels and black magic on the side of the devil.

The magic in which Mr. Crowley believed was that which stressed the will, and in 1920 he started a little community in Cefalu, Sicily, for the purpose of studying it. It was an old farmhouse, and Mr. Crowley's bedroom was described as "the room of nightmares" because of fantastic frescoes on the walls.

A passage in the book stated that Mr. Crowley "had a temple called the Temple of Thelema at Cefalu, where he was supposed to practice black magic."

One day, the passage continued, 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.

INHERITED OVER £30,000

Mr. Crowley in evidence said that when he was young he rebelled against the "general atmosphere of the Plymouth Brethren."

He inherited between £30,000 and £40,000. The villa at Cefalu was on a hillside, faced an immense rock like Gibraltar, and dominated the cathedral city. "I decorated my room with frescoes similar to religious paintings in the Notre Dame. They were fantastic gargoyles—any odd thing that came into my mind. People said they looked like a nightmare."

The villa was known as the Abbey of Thelema. There were up to eleven in the household, the guiding principle of which was good manners.

The study of the words, " 'Do what thou wilt' shall be the whole of the law. Love is law, love under will," had occupied the last thirty years of his life. "There is no end to what they mean," said Mr. Crowley.

Later Mr. Crowley declared, "Black magic is suicidal. There are various forms of magic as there are different forms of prize-fighting and all-in wrestling. I approve some forms of magic and disapprove others."

Mr. Eddy: What is the form you disbelieve?

Mr. Crowley: That which is commonly known as black magic, which is not only foul and abominable, but for the most part criminal.

MALIGNANT AND EVIL

Mr. Eddy: Is murder of children associated with black magic?—It is most common. Alleged black magicians have been condemned to death. I say black magic is malignant. It is evil in its purpose or means, or both.

Did you ever practice black magic at Cefalu?—Never.

Is it true that men shaved their heads, leaving a symbolic curl in front, and that the women dyed their hair red for six months and then black for the rest of the year?—It is not correct.

Mr. Crowley denied that he told Miss Hamnett the things of which he complained in the book. No baby mysteriously disappeared. A goat was kept for milking purposes, but the inhabitants were not frightened by it. The inhabitants were all his very good friends.

Cross-examined by Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. (for the publishers and printers), Mr. Crowley said he was asking for damages because his reputation had suffered.

Counsel: For many years you have been publicly denounced as the worst man in the world?—Only by the lowest kind of newspaper.

Did any paper call you the monster of wickedness?—I don't remember which paper.

JOINED SECRET ORDER

Have you ever from the time of your adolescence openly defied all moral conventions?—No.

And proclaimed your contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity?—I think that is quite wrong. I don't have any contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity.

Mr. Crowley agreed that he was at Cambridge from 1895 to 1898, and then became interested in magic.

Mr. Hilbery: In 1898 did you get yourself initiated into a secret order called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn?—Yes.

Was that society devoted to the practice of magic?—Yes.

Were you finally expelled from Cefalu by the Fascists?—Like Mr. H. G. Wells and many other distinguished Englishmen my presence was not desired by Mussolini.

Mr. Crowley declared that papers in America, "the lower papers of England," and papers in France and Italy had attacked him.

Mr. Hilbery referred to Mr. Crowley's book, "The Confessions of Aleister Crowley," and remarked, "You say in that book that you were a remarkable child?"

Mr. Crowley: I must have been.

You assert that you had the distinguishing marks of a Buddha at birth?—Yes.

MASTER MAGICIAN

Do you believe that?—Yes, I have got some of them now.

And you continue in your claim to be a master magician?—Yes. I took a degree which conferred that title.

Mr. Crowley denied that his magic and his poems were "a mixture of eroticism and sexual indulgence." He agreed that he was the author of "White Stains."

Mr. Hilbery: Is that a book of indescribable filth?

Mr. Crowley: This book is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease, and murder.

He later told Mr. Hilbery: "Until it got into your hands it never got into any improper hands at all."

There was laughter at this remark, and Mr. Justice Swift threatened to clear the back of the court.

The Judge asked the jury if they wanted to see "White Stains." They said they did not.

Mr. Crowley was asked about another book of his, "The Soul of Osiris," and he denied that it was indecent. If one looked for it, he said, one could find something indecent in the Bible and the works of Shakespeare, Swift, and down to Thomas Hardy.

The hearing was adjourned until tomorrow.