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Magician's Libel Suit

"BEAST 666" IN THE BOX

Alleged Story of Goat and "Vanished" Baby

Complaining that passages in the book "Laughing Torso" imputed that he practiced "black magic," Mr. Aleister Crowley, the author, brought a libel suit in the King's Bench Division yesterday against the authoress, Miss Nina Hamnett.

Constable and Company, Ltd., the publishers, and Messrs. Charles Whittingham and Briggs, printers, were joined as defendants.

The defence was a plea of justification.

Mr. Eddy (for Mr. Crowley) said there was one passage in the book which was a piece of mere vulgarity—"typical of the book"—he added, "and I do not propose to embarrass the jury by making any reference to it."

For many years Mr. Crowley had been interested in magic: he had always fought against black magic.

Two forms of magic to which Mr. Eddy referred were white magic and black magic, the former being on the side of the angels and the latter 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 at a villa in Cefalu, Sicily, to study it.

Mr. Crowley's bedroom was described as "The room of nightmares," because of the 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."

Mr. Crowley, counsel added, denied that suggestion that he supplied the information to Miss Hamnett, who was at one time a student of his.

INHERITED £30,000

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

He was educated at Cambridge, and inherited between £30,000 and £40,000. He had been interested in black magic since 1897.

He met Miss Hamnett two or three years before the war.

Mr. Crowley said black magic was foul and abominable.

He never practiced black magic at Cefalu and denied that the inmates had to obey his will.

Counsel: It is said that drugs were stored in your room and were available for the inmates?—I had a medicine chest. No one is going to take anything nasty.

Is it true that you even advised Loveday (a young man who died at the villa) to take drugs?—I suggested various medicines for small ailments.

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.

"ECSTATIC DANCES"

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, but the inhabitants were not frightened by it.

Mr. Eddy put to Mr. Crowley a description in the defence of an alleged ceremony known as Pentagram, involving the use of a brazier surrounded by sacrificial knives and swords and a magic circle which concluded with the plaintiff executing ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy, brandishing his sword and leaping the magic circle.

Mr. Crowley denied that this was an accurate account. The Pentagram was a ceremony invoking God to afford the protection of his Archangel.

He denied that it was an obscene invocation or that animals were sacrificed and he invited people to drink their blood.

Mr. Malcolm Hilbery, K.C. (cross-examining): 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 papers.

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

Reading from Mr. Crowley's autobiography, "Judaism is savage and Christianity is fiendish superstition," counsel asked: Does that represent your views?—No.

Mr. Crowley admitted that he assumed the designations of "Beast 666" and "The Master Therion" (the Great Wild Beast).

"666 is the number of the Sun and you can call me 'Little Sunshine.' " he said.

STAVISKY GANG

Is it true that practically all your works are erotic in tendency and grossly indecent in expression?—It would be entirely untrue to say anything of the kind. I published 32 hymns which were highly praised in the Catholic Press.

Were you expelled from Cefalu by Fascists?—Like Mr. H. G. Wells and many other distinguished Englishmen.

In 1929, in Paris, did they refuse to grant the renewal of your identification cards so that you had to get out of France?—Yes. A discharged employee was blackmailing me and used his pull with the Stavisky gang or whatever it was.

Mr. Crowley explained that some of the "lower papers of England" and papers of America, France and in Italy had attacked him, though the decent newspapers had all treated him properly.

They have all accused you of black magic, haven't they?—I don't read such stuff as a rule.

MARKS OF A BUDDHA

Mr. Hilbery then referred to passages in Mr. Crowley's book, "The Confessions of Aleister Crowley."

You assert that you had the distinguishing marks of a Buddha at birth?—Yes. I have got some of them now.

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

Your magic is like your poems—a mixture of eroticism and sexual indulgence?—It doesn't involve anything of the kind.

Is the gratification of your own sexual lusts one of your principal pursuits?—No.

Mr. Crowley agreed that he was the author of "White Stains."

Mr. Hilbery: Is that a book of indescribable filth?—This book is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease and murder.

You have made a sonnet of unspeakable things?—Yes.

OBSCENITY DENIED

Mr. Crowley said only 100 copies were printed of "White Stains" for men of science.

You know it is an obscene book?—I don't know it. Until it got into your hands it never got into any improper hands at all. (Laughter.)

Mr. Justice Swift asked the jury if they wanted to see the book.

They said they did not.

Mr. Hilbery read a stanza from a poem entitled "Madonna of the Golden Eyes," and suggested that it was highly sexual and highly indecent.

Mr. Crowley: I cannot see that it is indecent. It is an expression of passion such as you find in "Romeo and Juliet."

"I am exposing Black Mass," he declared in reply to another question. "I am the modern James Douglas."

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.