

THE LIVERPOOL POST AND MERCURY
LIVERPOOL, LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND
14 APRIL 1934
(pages 8 & 9)

BLACK MAGIC VERDICT
AUTHOR LOSES IN LIBEL SUIT
JUDGE'S STRONG COMMENTS
"BLASPHEMOUS STUFF"



Mr. Justice Swift.

The action of Mr. Aleister Crowley, author, against Miss Nina Hamnett and others, in what became known as the "black magic" case, ended yesterday in a verdict and judgment for the defendants.

The "black magic" libel action ended yesterday in a verdict against Mr. Aleister Crowley, the plaintiff. Judgment was entered for all the defendants with costs.

"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."

Mr. Justice Swift uttered these words yesterday in addressing the King's Bench jury, which returned a verdict for the defendants, with costs, in the "black magic" libel action.

The action was brought by Mr. Aleister Crowley, an author, against Miss Nina Hamnett, authoress of a book entitled "Laughing Torso," and Messrs. Constable and Co., Ltd., pub-

lishers, and Messrs. Charles Whittingham and Briggs, printers. Mr. Crowley complained that the book imputed that he had practiced "black magic," which he said, was a libel upon him. The defence was a plea of justification.

A Model's Denials

When the hearing was resumed yesterday, Mr. J. P. Eddy (for Mr. Crowley, the plaintiff) continued his cross-examination of Mrs. Betty Sedgwick, whose former husband, Raoul Loveday, died at Mr. Crowley's villa at Cefalu, in Sicily, which was known as the Abbey of Thelema.

Mr. Eddy asked: "Immediately before your marriage to Raoul Loveday would your life be fairly described as drink, drugs, and immorality?" "No," replied Mrs. Sedgwick, who added that she had not drugged herself for years. She took cocaine when she was eighteen, but not after she was twenty-five.

Witness denied that she was living a fast life in London. She was a model, and she sat in order to keep herself and her husband. She earned £1 a day.

Mrs. Sedgwick agreed that on her arrival in England from Sicily she supplied information to a Sunday newspaper. "I am suggesting," remarked Mr. Eddy, "that you are the source of all these stories about 'The Worst Man in the World.' "

Asked if there was a word of truth in her evidence about the "Terrible Sacrifice of a Cat," and about her husband drinking the cat's blood, she replied: "Absolutely true—everything about the cat is true."

"Bought Witness" Suggestions

Mr. Eddy.—Yesterday I suggested that you are not here merely out of a sense of duty to assist my lord and the jury to get at the truth, but that you had regarded this case as a means of getting money?—No.

To what extent have you exploited the villa at Cefalu?—Not at all.

How much have you made out of Cefalu up to date?—Nothing.

Mrs. Sedgwick added that she received two sums of £25 and £75 for newspaper articles.

Mr. Eddy.—In regard to your position in this case, I put it to you plainly that you are here as a "bought" witness.

Mrs. Sedgwick.—I am here to help the jury.

Mrs. Sedgwick admitted having written to Messrs. Waterhouse and Co., solicitors for the printers and publishers, asking for £5 "on account of my personal expenses incurred in connection with my recent services in regard to evidence." At that time she had been paid between £15 and £20 from the solicitors for her expenses in connection with the case.

Lost Letters

Mr. Eddy.—Did you authorize anyone to extract letters from your case and give them to Mr. Crowley?—No.

Mr. Justice Swift.—Are these produced by Mr. Crowley?—Yes.

Do you know how Mr. Crowley got possession of your letters?—I can't imagine how he got them.

Mr. Hilbery (for defendants).—Were there other letters in the case?—Yes; everything was taken from the case. The contents were all stolen.

Until they were produced here with the suggestion that it was documentary evidence that your evidence had been "bought," did you know they had got into Crowley's possession?—I didn't know at all.

When some of the copies of the missing letters were produced and referred to, Mr. Justice Swift agreed with Mr. Hilbery that they should remain in the custody of the court. He instructed the associate of the court to keep them until the case was over. "Then remind me to discuss them again, please," he added.

Referring to Mr. Crowley's refusal to accept his challenge the previous day to try his magic, Mr. Martin O'Connor (for Miss Hamnett) said it was appalling that "in this enlightened age a court should be investigating magic which is arch-humbug practised by arch-roguers to rob weak-minded people." "I hope this action," he added, "will end for all time the activities of this hypocritical rascal."

Mr. Eddy then made his final submission to the jury. He submitted that no reasonable jury could do otherwise than find a verdict in favour of Mr. Crowley.

At the end of Mr. Eddy's speech, Mr. Justice Swift told the jury: "I have nothing to say about the facts except this. I have been over forty years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another. I thought that I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious had been produced at some time or another before

me. I have learnt in this case that we can always learn something more if we live long enough."

The foreman said that the jury were unanimous. They found a verdict for the defendants.

Judgment was entered for all the defendants.

Mr. Eddy asked for a stay of execution.

Mr. Justice Swift.—No, Mr. Eddy. It was a plain question of fact for the jury.

Mr. Eddy.—I would desire to call to your attention to the form of summing up to be administered, particularly the need for calling attention to the cross-examination and so forth.

Mr. Justice Swift.—You shall do that in another place when it seems convenient to you to do it.

Mr. Justice Swift added that the letters would remain in court and would certainly be in proper custody if they were taken to another court.