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"Black Magic" Libel Action

**AUTHOR DENIES BOOK STORY OF
STRANGE RITES IN AN ISLAND TEMPLE**



Mr. Aleister Crowley.

Questions about black and white magic, and alleged strange rites in a temple in Sicily, were put by counsel to Aleister Crowley, the author, in the King's Bench Division yesterday.

Mr. Crowley brought an action before Mr. Justice Swift and a special jury against Miss Nina Hamnett, authoress of a book entitled "Laughing Torso," alleging that passages in the book imputed that he practised black magic and that this was a libel against him.

The defence was a plea of justification.

Opening the case for plaintiff, Mr. Eddy said that for many years he had been interested in magic and had always fought against black magic.

There was 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. In 1920 he started a little community at a villa in Cefalu, Sicily, for the purpose of studying that form of magic.



Miss Nina Hamnett, a defendant.

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

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

Giving evidence, Mr. Crowley said he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and inherited between £30,000 and £40,000. He had studied the religions of the world and had been interested in black magic since 1897.

"LIKE NIGHTMARES"

The villa he took at Cefalu was on a hillside at a height of 4,000 ft.

He decorated his own room with frescoes similar to religious paintings in the Notre Dame. There were fantastic gargoyles—any odd thing that came into his mind.

Mr. Eddy: What was the guiding principle of this household?—Good manners.

You are familiar with the words: "Do what thou wilt shall be the will of the Law. Love is the law, love under will"?—I am. They are the general principles on which I maintain all mankind

should base their conduct. The study of those words has occupied the last thirty years of my life.

Mr. Crowley described the routine at the villa and added: "Visitors came from all parts of the world for the purpose of hearing what I had to teach."

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

Did the inmates give an undertaking to obey your will?—No.

Did you supply the inmates with razors and command them to gash themselves whenever they used the word "I"?—That is a foolish fabrication.

Is it true privacy was not allowed?—It is not.

Were there locks on the doors?—No.

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 black for the rest of the year?—It is not correct.

Counsel: It is said that everyone was instructed to enter their innermost sacred thoughts in a magical diary. What do you say about that?

Mr. Crowley explained that for the purpose of training in self-control certain exercises were given, and it was suggested that it would be convenient if students recorded their progress.

Mr. Eddy put to Mr. Crowley the following particulars in the defence:—

"Every day, after tea, plaintiff performed a ceremony known as pentagram. He entered robed into a room decorated with cabalistic signs and seated himself on a throne before a brazier containing a charcoal fire, around which were hung sacrificial knives and swords and surrounded by a magic circle.

"When all were assembled, plaintiff rose from his seat and, taking one of the swords, held it pointing to the altar, while he intoned an invocation in a strange language.

"Plaintiff then proceeded to execute ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy, brandishing his sword and leaping the magic circle."

"ANIMALS NOT SACRIFICED"

Mr. Crowley said that was not an accurate account of what was done at Cefalu. He denied that animals were sacrificed and that he invited people to drink their blood.

Cross-examined by Mr. Malcolm Hilberry, K.C., plaintiff said he was asking for the vindication of his name and for damages.

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

You have practised magic from the days when you were just down from Cambridge?—Yes.

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

These are out of the Apocalypse?—It only means sunlight. 666 is the number of the sun, and you can call me "Little Sunshine."

The hearing was adjourned till to-day.