

ASTOUNDING REVELATIONS of WICKEDNESS when "BEAST 666" went to COURT



He was then alleged to have indulged in ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy and brandishing a sword.



Nina Hamnett, whose book provoked a libel suit which recoiled upon the plaintiff.

Aleister Crowley, self-styled "greatest living poet" and master of magic, charged he had been libeled, but the judge, horrified and disgusted at the things that came to light about Crowley's strange rites and writings, gave him a terrific tongue lashing

By Milton Bronner

LONDON

ALEISTER CROWLEY, novelist, short story writer, poet of sorts, student of magic, white and black, some time resident of the United States, brought his character into an English court the other day in a libel suit and received, so to speak, several knockout lams on the solar plexus.

Ghosts of Crowley's past rose in the court room, ghosts in the shape of books he had written, books which had been printed in very limited editions. They were accordingly very scarce.

The defense not only knew about them. It had them. It not only had them, it read extracts from them.

The judge and jurors sat with wide-open eyes and ears. They could visibly be seen making up their minds. From being the aggressor in a libel suit, Crowley was soon seen to be fighting a losing action.

The whole case for the plaintiff had been heard. One witness for the defense had been heard.

The bell rang for the next round. The jury punched straight for the jaw. It intimated it wanted to know whether it was a correct time for it to intervene. Time!

AND then up spoke Mr. Justice Swift of King's Bench, London:

"I have been over 40 years engaged in the administration of the law in one capacity or another. I thought I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at some time or another before me. I have learned in this case that we can always learn something more if we live long enough.

"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."

Without leaving the jury box to consult, the jurors announced their unanimous verdict for the defendants. Crowley has now appealed his case to a higher British court.

Some time ago Crowley was angered by a book called "Laughing Torso," written by Miss Nina Hamnett. He promptly brought a libel suit against her, the publishers and the printers.

He said there were passages in the novel which imputed that he practiced black magic and that this constituted a libel upon him. The defense was a plea of justification. Thereupon the issue was fought out before a crowded court room.

Crowley, a big, smooth-faced, rugged-looking man of about 60, was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge University, and inherited about \$160,000, which enabled him to lead a life of leisure.

He devoted much of his time to poetry, art, travel and mountaineering. He climbed the Alps and walked across the Sahara Desert. He became interested in the study of religions of the world and in magic.

ON his behalf, his attorney said there were two kinds of magic—white magic, which was beneficent, and black magic, which was evil and which his client had always fought and sought to expose.

In 1920 he started a little artistic colony in Cefalu, Sicily. The book complained of said he was supposed to practice black magic there. A baby was alleged to have mysteriously disappeared. The inhabitants of the Sicilian neighborhood were alleged to have been frightened of him.

Crowley took the stand as the principal wit-



Aleister Crowley, who called himself "Beast 666" . . . and disgusted an English judge.

ness for his side. He strenuously denied that he ever practiced or attempted to practice black magic. Giving further evidence, he denounced black magic as foul and abominable and, for the most part, criminal. One of the main instruments of black magic, he said, was murder.

A passage in the novel was read to him which stated that every day after tea he performed a ceremony called the Pentagram. He was alleged to have entered a room decorated with cabalistic signs and to have seated himself on a kind of throne before a brazier containing a charcoal fire, around which were hung sacrificial knives and swords and surrounded by a magic circle. He was then alleged to have indulged in ecstatic dances, lashing himself into a frenzy and brandishing a sword.

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Crowley said the whole passage was inaccurate. There was no throne and no sacrificial knives. The Pentagram was a ceremony which invokes God to afford the protection of His archangel. There was no obscenity, no animals were sacrificed and nobody was invited to drink their blood.

SO far all seemed fair in the case. Then began a long cross-examination. He admitted he was suing because he alleged his reputation had suffered. Then came a machine gun fire of questions:

"For many years have you 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."

"From your youth have you openly defied all moral conventions?"

"No."

"Did you proclaim contempt for all the doctrines of Christianity?"

"That is quite wrong."

Later on, he admitted that he assumed the designations of "Beast 666" and "The Master Therion" (The Great Wild Beast). Crowley said that 666 was the number of the Sun and he could be called "Little Sunshine." He said he had written several novels and about 18 short stories, besides many poems.

"Have you published material which is too indecent to be read, too indecisibly filthy to be read in public?"

"No. I have contributed certain pathological books entirely unsuited to the general public and only for circulation among students of psycho-pathology."

"**H**AVE you been attacked in unmeasured terms in the press of many countries?"

"I am not so familiar with the gutter press as that."

"They have all accused you of black magic?"

"I am a busy man and don't waste my time on garbage."

Here the cross-examining attorney referred to one of the plaintiff's books, "White Stains."

"Is it a book of indescribable filth?"

"It is a serious study of the progress of a man to the abyss of madness, disease and death."

"You have made a sonnet of unspeakable things, haven't you?"

"Yes."

He said only 100 copies of the book were made and handed to an expert on the subject in Vienna.

"Was that done because you feared prosecution if it was published here?"

"It was not. It was a refutation of the doctrine that sexual perverts have no sense of moral responsibility and should not be punished. I said they had and showed how they went from bad to worse."

"Do you want your reputation to be wider?"

"I should like to be universally known as the greatest living poet."

THEN came the American chapter in his life. Before America came into the war, when Crowley was in the United States, he contributed to a magazine in Chicago. Counsel read from an article and asked:

"Did you write that against your own country?"

"I did, and I am proud of it."

"Was it part of German propaganda in the United States?"

"Yes."

He explained that what he wrote was done with the intention of turning that propaganda into rubbish and that the British agents knew what he was doing, and why.

The first witness for the defense was Miss Betty May Sedgwick, authoress of "Tiger Woman." With her then husband, Raoul Loveday, in 1922 she went to Crowley's place in Sicily. She described the occurrence there and insisted that a cat had been killed and that her husband had to drink a cup of blood. Attorney for the plaintiff asked her if every word of that was not pure fiction.

"No, every word of it is true."

Following the close of her evidence, the jury intimated it had heard enough, and after the judge's short declaration, returned its verdict in favor of the defendants.