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LORD COLERIDGE ON SOCIETY JOURNALS.

Chief Justice Coleridge has had an opportunity of expressing from the bench his opinion of that portion of the press which exists by gratifying the appetite for scandal and gossip. Mr. Edmund Yates, a literary man of some note, who is also proprietor of the *World* newspaper, was prosecuted before the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice, for a libel in the *World* upon the Earl of Lonsdale. The libel was in these terms:—

"A strange story is in circulation in certain sporting circles concerning the elopement of a young lady of very high rank and noble birth with a young peer, whose marriage was one of affection, but whose wife has unfortunately fallen into a delicate state of health. The elopement is said to have taken place from the hunting field. The young lady, who is only one or two and twenty, is a very fair rider and the gentleman is a master of hounds."

This was generally understood to indicate the Earl of Lonsdale, but to do Mr. Yates justice, it must be stated that he declared in an affidavit that he did not see the paragraph until it was in proof, and did not know that it applied to the Earl. He also endeavoured in subsequent issues to do away with the effect of the paragraph which was entirely unfounded. However, he was prosecuted criminally, and a sentence of four months' imprisonment was pronounced. Mr. Yates has appealed, and it is probable that the sentence may be annulled on a technical ground (that the Public Prosecutor's *fiat* had not been granted prior to the application for the information). The following observations were made by the learned Chief Justice in passing sentence:—

"Now this is certainly not the time nor the place for delivering any discourse upon the subject of the liberty of the Press, nor is it in the least degree necessary. No one who breathes English air or has ever had his heart touched and his judgment moved by the *"Areopagitica"* of Milton will doubt that the

free Press of this country has been, on the whole, an unspeakable blessing, or will desire to narrow in any degree its fair or lawful scope, or impede its lawful exercise. Public affairs, and public men, using the expression "public" in its largest possible sense—literature, art, science, religion, the catalogue might be indefinitely extended—these things are the fair and lawful topics of discussion in the Press, and these may be freely discussed, and I hope discussion of them will always be practically and absolutely unfettered. But when we come to private matters very different considerations obviously arise. Public men—in England, at least—must submit to public comment as one of the necessary ingredients of their career. But private men—and, indeed, all men, public or private—in their private relations are entitled to have their privacy respected. Why should we have our lives pried into, our movements watched, our dress recorded, our company catalogued, our most private relations dragged into the light of day—not for any conceivable good—to the great English people, but only to gratify the foolish vanity or the abject curiosity of a small minority of a privileged class. I find it, I declare, difficult to believe that any man's mind can feel pleasure in feeding on this sort of food, with which the columns of the paper before me are filled. I can hardly believe that any educated man or any gentleman can feel anything but humiliation and self-contempt in having to supply such food. We have, however, in this case to deal with a gross personal libel in a paper which lives on the publication of the most utterly attenuated personalities. It is not the case of a paper of high aim and real public usefulness committing a breach of the law inconsistent with its general conduct and character. We have to deal with a personal libel, occurring in the midst of paragraphs which are not indeed libellous but are made up of personalities so trivial that, prior to experience, one would have supposed they could not possibly have interested for a single moment in the faintest possible degree any human being. More than this, it seems from the defendant's own affidavit that at least one lady of high rank caters, and is paid for catering, to this paper