
Notes and Selections.

NEWSPAPERS AND THE LAW OF LIBEL.—Mr. Irving Brown, in his interesting American letter to the *English Law Journal*, has the following: "I was also interested in reading another recent paragraph in your journal, in which it was said that 'the representatives of the press ought no longer to be permitted to be present at executions.' That has been tried in the State of New York. When death by electricity was substituted for hanging, a few years ago, the law even provided that no newspaper should publish any account of the execution beyond the mere announcement of the fact. Such a cry as the newspapers set up! No newspaper paid any attention to the prohibition, but they all kept on publishing their sensational, disgusting, and demoralizing details, columns long. Nobody dared bring them to account, and very shortly the provision was repealed; and now the newspapers all over the country are trying to get relief from the ordinary law of libel, in order that they may publish scandal and falsehood unrestrained. Two or three States have relaxed the law in their favour. But why should newspapers have any special privilege of libel?" Why, indeed? But they have—at least, it is true in practice, if not in theory. In some of the evening papers, which have been not inaptly described as "literary gadflies," there are too often to be noticed insinuations, innuendoes, misrepresentations, and omissions, with a *suggestio falsi* here and *suppressio veri* there, which often cause grievous misunderstandings, and sometimes do irreparable mischief. Just enough pepper and salt are put in to make a spicy morsel for the vitiated taste of those who are being led on by the literary food they are provided with to crave for something ever more and more sensational, prying into the private affairs of private citizens, and cruelly holding up to public gaze the sorrow or shame over which charity would seek to throw its mantle of oblivion.