

A DECADE

IN THE

HISTORY OF NEWSPAPER LIBEL.

A MEMORABLE DECADE.

Up to the year 1882 the law of newspaper libel remained as it had been for a long period of years. In that year the first notable amendments were made. It will be exactly ten years on the tenth day of the present month of March since "The Newspaper Libel Act, 1882," of Ontario, was passed. Five years later, on the twenty-third day of April, 1887, another "Act respecting the Law of Libel" was passed, slightly amending the previous Act and applying mainly to newspapers. These two Acts have been incorporated in the general Act relating to libel in the Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1887. On the twenty-second day of May of the following year, 1888, an Act was passed by the Dominion Parliament amending the law of criminal libel in some important particulars. During the last session of the Dominion Parliament a bill relating to the criminal law of Canada, and embodying the law of criminal libel, was introduced by the Minister of Justice, and laid over to the present session. This measure, of which the sections relating to defamatory libel form but a small part, is one of great and far-reaching importance. It aims at codifying the whole criminal law of the Dominion, and is in this respect a new and interesting departure in legislation. It is founded upon, and adapted from, the draft criminal code proposed by the Royal Commission in England in 1879, the criminal law bill introduced into the British Parliament in 1880, and the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1886. The sections of the draft bill which codify the law of libel are eighteen in number. There are, of course, other sections which bear directly or indirectly upon libel as a criminal offence. They are all of vital moment to journalists, whether newspaper publishers or newspaper writers; they are of supreme consequence also to the commonwealth, because they affect the liberty of the subject, and, what journalists as a body will prize even more, the liberty of the press as an organ of public opinion.