

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

Modern Lack of Privacy

In times past a king was the only man who was compelled to live in a glass house. As a matter of fact, a king always began his life by being born in public, for in able to establish his right to reign, it was necessary that his mother should be brought to bed in a room filled with the lords and ladies, who in case of need, could identify the royal infant. During his entire existence he always rose, dressed himself, ate his food and went to bed before as many persons of rank as could find standing room in his apartments.

Louis the Fourteenth was accustomed daily to take off his shirt in most majestic fashion in the presence of six hundred awe struck courtiers. Louis the Fifteenth was able to strike off the end of a hard boiled egg with surprising dexterity, to the immense admiration of the crowd that hung over the railing of the raised passage that ran by the side of the royal dining table. The custom of having displays of this kind, begun as a ceremony, became in time a matter of kingly duty. However intolerable it might be to the monarch, its omission was an offense to his subjects. Henry the Second of France refused to permit the people to see him dine and his refusal made him unpopular.

Furthermore if a king took any measures to conceal himself, the wits of the period usually invented details in regard to his private life that made him wish he had never withdrawn from the public gaze. In the present day the world has changed in form, if not in substance. The number of those who live in glass houses has greatly multiplied. A mania for uncovering the most private matters has spread through all classes of society. It is even considered that the fact that these intimate details are given to the world is a certain indication of assured position.

In many cases it is fondly believed that it is the sole thing needed to raise a man above his fellows. The opportunity of enjoying this illusion is given in the modern newspaper. The supposed distinction has become an object of eager anxiety to a large number of persons who have a strong desire to relieve themselves of an overpowering sense of their own insignificance. Every ward politician stands ready to furnish electrotype cuts of his portrait for the newspapers, accompanied by a graphic account of his life, taken down from his lips by an indulgent friend. He is not even disinclined to have the routine of his household incidentally set forth as a model for the whole community, nor is he displeased to discover the maiden name of his wife, the ages of his children, his habits, his tastes, his likes and dislikes, or even the color of his cravat, paraded in double leaded type for the information of less distinguished people.

The outcome of this rage for self-assertion, this craze for notoriety is the destruction of all true fame. No man becomes really famous. He is only one of a great and constantly increasing mob seeking to make themselves famous. One of the first results of this unfortunate state of things has been the demoralization of the newspaper reporter, who

tries to pry into everything because he finds a noble army of martyrs who sincerely wish to have their affairs pried into.

When he comes across a man of sense, guilty of no crime, who objects to being metaphorically impaled on a pin like an entomological specimen, to gratify the depraved taste of the public, in regard to matters they have no right to know, the disciple of Cadmus esteems him so abnormal a development of the human species that he straightway proceeds to become indignant. He concludes that the man is a crank and determines that his desire to live the life of a hermit shall not be gratified. The resistance he encounters is held by him in doubtful esteem. He considers it either a pretense of a modesty that does not exist, or a clear case of hostility to the press. If the victim is roughly handled through his refusal to submit and his skin abraded in the affray, the reporter declines to perceive that he can be charged with a crime, or even a breach of courtesy.

He merely says, what he thinks that the blame should be laid upon the subject himself for trying to be singular. If complaint is personally made to the man of ink, the latter expostulates and in the end sets up a plea of confession and avoidance, by referring to the horde of nonentities who always stand ready to be abused in the columns of a newspaper rather than take the alternative of being unnoticed altogether. A case in France illustrates, the difference between the combined force of law and public opinion in that country and in the United States. A few years ago, a provincial newspaper published a list of the pilgrims who had that season gone to the famous shrine of Lourdes. Unluckily the list included the names of a number of free thinkers whose indignation was aroused by a statement that caused great mirth among their friends and especially subjected them to the taunts of the faithful. They lost no time in bringing suit against the editor. The court instructed the jury that the plaintiffs were entitled to exemplary damages on account of the false information given in regard to them.

After a verdict had been rendered in accordance with these instructions, the Judge went on to say that the fact that a man chooses to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes is his own private matter and not a fit subject of newspaper comment and told the defendant that if the persons who actually went to the shrine had also brought an action, they could have recovered at least nominal damages for such a publication. It is the public taste, which, in this country, determines the limits of private right, in matters of this kind. The reporter simply acts in conformity with the demands of his fellow citizens. They have made him precisely what he is. If the public did not desire a particular kind of information, the reporter would not gather it, nor the newspaper publisher wish to print it. If a genuine shock were felt at revelations which, as a matter of good taste, should be suppressed, questionable articles would rarely appear. Each man who thrusts his personality upon a gaping crowd assists in debauching the minds of his fellow men. The crowd of struggling men and women, seeking to draw attention to their own unimportant affairs, has filled the papers of the day, with a mass of paltry details that stimulate personal vanity and serve no good end. These unworthy contents of the issues of the daily press take the place of more instructive matter and instead of serving toward the advancement of the race, tend to create the habit of paying attention to trifles.

Intellectual starvation is the result. The things worthy the regard of sensible human beings are kept back, in order that the miserable passion for seeing one's name in print can be gratified. Column of column is loaded with lists of names that have about the same interest to a man seeking to gain information in regard to the world's progress, and the real news of the day, as if an equal amount of space had been devoted to the publication of copious extracts from the Book of Numbers. In fact the ideal newspaper of the future bids fair to be one that will contain every morning a copy of all the names in the Cincinnati Directory, with a weekly resume including the contents of the directories of the neighboring towns.

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