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# Lord Coleridge, Lord Chief Justice of England

Vanity Fair

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## JUDGES. No. 17.

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### LORD COLERIDGE, LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND.

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THE Coleridge family was first heard of during the last century in the person of a decent Devonshire vicar. Having made several of his sons parsons and allowed another to lapse into poetry, his family survived him in the belief that it was endowed with a special inheritance of piety and literature; and when the vicar's grandson became a Judge, the Coleridges also annexed law to piety and literature. The vicar's great-grandson is the present Lord Chief Justice of England, who six-and-sixty years ago was thus born pious, literary, and legal. He went to Eton, where he acquired that caressing suavity and enviable smile which have since distinguished him, passed through Balliol, and was called the Bar. As a barrister he cultivated his suavity and his smile to a high point of perfection, and became a winning advocate and a most insinuating cross-examiner. At four-and-forty he went into the House of Commons as Member for Exeter, placed himself under the protection of the then dominant Liberal Party, and was by Mr. Gladstone successively made Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and a Peer, all in the space of nine years from his first appearance in Parliament. Seven years later he succeeded the late Sir Alexander Cockburn as Lord Chief Justice of England.

Lord Coleridge is a very moral man. He throws off without an effort the most beautiful moral platitudes. In cases which require hard, sound law, he is less admirable; but his morality is superior to, and compensatory for, all shortcomings in this respect. He is sentimental; he is pious; he is literary; and he is distinguished by great humility, and an apostolic innocence of the wicked ways and men of the impious, unlitrary, unsentimental common world. His detractors hold that he has made many mistakes in his law; but he knows that he cannot err; and when he recently came into collision with facts, in the case of Lord Ferrers—whom he hanged by a jury while History hanged him by his peers—he easily demonstrated that the perversity lay in such facts as refused to agree with Lord Coleridge's assertions. He is a classical scholar, a metaphysician, a High Churchman, and a writer who was once used to split hairs in the *Edinburgh Review*. But unfortunately he also thinks himself a wit. Anything so superior and refined as Lord Coleridge was never known; anything so inferior and bad as Lord Coleridge's jokes was never heard even from the Bench.

Lord Coleridge has three sons. He has also a son-in-law, in Mr. Adams, who has ventured, not without a certain success, to encounter his eminent father-in-law in the Law Courts, on domestic questions of great delicacy. It was in this case, when under examination as a witness, that the Chief Justice rose perhaps to his highest point of dignity and worthy bearing.

Personally and in private life Lord Coleridge is a charming man. He is very thrifty. He is a ready diner and an excellent talker, and he is much admired in the small circle of his personal friends. He never reads any newspaper except the *Times*.



Lord Coleridge

"The Lord Chief Justice"

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