

Court Cases 1911-1913

Court Cases

List & Cooney v "The People" (newspaper)

August 5, 2014

NOTE: Plaintiffs remarks are in bold.

Click on underlined title of libellous newspaper article printed by *The People* to view.

1913. L. No. 323.

In the High Court of Justice [in ENGLAND]
KING'S BENCH DIVISION

Folios 24.

Writ issued the 14th day of February 1913.

**BETWEEN ERNEST WALTER LIST
AND EDWARD COONEY, Plaintiffs**

AND

"THE PEOPLE" LIMITED, Defendants.

Statement of Claim.

1. The Plaintiff Ernest Walter List is a farmer and carrier residing at Debenham near Stowmarket in the County of Suffolk. The Plaintiff Edward Cooney is a preacher belonging to a religious community popularly known as "Go Preachers" or "Tramp Preachers," of which the Plaintiff List is also a member. The religious tenets of the said community are based on a literal interpretation of the New Testament.

2. The Defendants are the proprietors and publishers of a weekly newspaper called "*The People*" which has a very large circulation in the United Kingdom and in the British Dominions beyond the seas.

3. On or about the 14th day of July 1912 the Defendants falsely and maliciously printed and published and caused to be printed and published in the issue of their said newspaper [*The People Ltd*] of that date of and concerning the Plaintiffs and each of them the words following:

"THE COONEYITES.
"CHARGES AGAINST THE
"TRAMP PREACHERS.
"By our Special Commissioner.

"Rural Suffolk is in a ferment caused by the singular doings of the "Tramp Preachers" who have established themselves in this country.

"Also known as the "Cooneyites" and the "No Sect" these missionaries of the tattered coat and empty pocket have succeeded in creating such an hubbub in Suffolk that the wildest stories are afloat.

"Disclaiming denomination pouring contempt upon all organized forms of Christian worship and proclaiming that marriage as an institution is to continue no longer the "Tramp Preachers" have now fixed their headquarters at Debenham near Stowmarket. Already they have laid hands upon one of the most prominent tradesmen of the town of Debenham and have created Mr. List (**meaning the Plaintiff List**) the carrier Bishop of Suffolk while another (an agricultural labourer) has been elevated to the dignity of Archbishop of Norfolk. Although their preaching contains the wildest statements converts have not been lacking. Many have been young women of that mystical temperament that lends a ready ear to weird teaching and these have been induced to leave comfortable homes and throw in their lot with the Tramp Preachers.

"STRANGE DOINGS.

"For some time they have endeavoured to have a settled place of abode but only recently they have succeeded in obtaining their coveted desire. For a time they held meetings at Sudbury, Suffolk until they were driven from the quaint market town by an enraged army of 3,000 men and women who alleged that the Preachers were practising what was virtually a system of free love. Then other places were tried with little better result and it seemed as though the "Cooneyites" so sometimes called from their leader "Edward Cooney" (*meaning the Plaintiff Cooney*) would be compelled to always live up to their self-assumed title of the "Tramp Preachers." But now by various and strange means they have obtained a permanent footing at Debenham and the quiet countryside is in an uproar.

"Nor can this be wondered at. Firstly because the sect are surely like nothing else under the heavens literally the last word in freak religions and filling their converts with the wildest maddest "fits of hysteria. Indeed so great has been the excitement that nearly 30 overseers of the neighbouring parishes have thought it advisable to issue a signed statement warning the country people against the Tramp Preachers while a number of ministers of various denominations have also signed a similar caution."

"MIDNIGHT MEETINGS.

"Mysterious midnight meetings have been held in a large portable tent which the Cooneyites carry about with them to which all but the faithful are denied admittance. After singing strange hymns the brethren and sisters abandon themselves to a species of religious hysteria. Strong cries of ecstasy are succeeded by fits of what appears to the impartial to be madness while the Cooneyites roll upon the ground with dismal screeches and groans.

"But if this were all it is not likely that many would take much interest in the doings of the Cooneyites. But there are those who are saying grave things against this sect.

"The chief enemy of the "Tramp Preachers" is Mr. W. D. Wilson of The Rookery Farm Cretingham, a pretty village some six miles from Framlingham and three from Debenham. Interviewed by a special representative of "*The People*" this gentleman had a singular story to relate."

"OF MARTHA AND OF MARY.

"As to Mr. Wilson's standing in the country none can speak against it. . . .

"But some time ago an event happened which grievously changed the even current of his life. There came into Cretingham two young women who simply announced themselves as Cooneyites—Name occupation sect—they professed to have none of these but repeated a formula in answer to all questions: 'I am of Martha' and 'I am of Mary.'

"They preached in the village and such power attended their ministry that **two sons and two daughters of Mr. Wilson threw in their lot with the sect.** At the present time these four young people have left the Rookery Farm where all their lives had up to this strange conversion been spent and have lost their identity—they are "Cooneyites."

"This loss of his children was a severe blow to Mr. Wilson. He conceived a violent antipathy to the sect and has spent much money and energy in endeavouring to drive out the wandering sect from Suffolk, For a time he did succeed now that they have taken up permanent quarters in Debenham, he has redoubled his crusade and the countryside is plastered with bills and posters that provide much reflection for the thoughtful and merriment for the rustics.

"ALLEGED IMMORALITY.

"Among the Cooneyite female preachers was one **Alice Pipe** a pretty girl with a sweet voice. Under a species of hypnotic influence she falls into a sort of trance. It is gravely announced that she speaks by the Spirit and many have been converted through her.

"It is declared that many young girls have joined this sect wandered about the country and at last lapsed into immorality. In support of this Mr. Wilson has sworn a declaration before a notary at Ipswich in which he makes the most specific charges against the most prominent of the sect (*meaning the Plaintiffs*).

"This document which has been extensively circulated throughout Suffolk charges the sect with repudiating marriage. It asserts that one of the statements of a Cooneyite preacher was that marriage was hammered out by the devil on an anvil in hell. It accuses them further of holding midnight meetings after which the converts of both sexes sleep together in a tent with but a curtain of gauze between. Further the names of young women are given who have been seduced and abandoned by certain of the "Tramp Preachers" while cases are quoted of Suffolk girls who have become mothers without being married. And lastly the statement asserts that a number of young women have been induced to leave England and have lived immoral lives in South America and the States.

"As has been said Mr. Wilson is a man of good standing in the county and therefore his charges have created the most intense excitement. Up to the present the Cooneyites have not replied to the grave charges made against them but it is reported that they intend to do so."

4. The said words meant and were understood to mean that the Plaintiffs were themselves engaged in and the confederates and accomplices of persons engaged in the "White Slave Traffic" and in teaching and practising sexual immorality and

debauchery of the worst kind and in making religion a cloak for indulging their animal passions and corrupting women and girls and inducing them to lead lives of unchastity and procuring them to be sent abroad for the purposes of prostitution and in teaching that there was no sanctity in marriage and repudiating Christian teaching in relation thereto and were hypocrites of the vilest and most loathsome kind whose outrageous conduct had drawn down upon them the execration of the public and excited the deserved censure of the overseers of many parishes and that the charges made in the said documents and by the said Wilson were true and supported by evidence worthy of credit and had been investigated by the Defendants' special commissioner and were considered by him to be so well founded as to deserve the attention of all thoughtful men and to be given wide publicity.

By reason of the premises the Plaintiffs have suffered damage and been greatly injured in their reputation and brought into public odium ridicule and contempt.

(a) Damages.

(b) *An injunction restraining the Defendants their agents or servants from publishing or circulating or repeating the said words or any part thereof or any similar attack on the Plaintiffs or either of them.*

J. BROMLEY-EAMES.

DELIVERED the 26th day of March 1913 by PILGRIM & PHILLIPS of 14 and 15 Coleman Street in the City of London Agents for FRANCIS GLOVER & SON of the City of Bath Solicitors for the Plaintiffs.

[Read Ed Cooney's Statement for Court Case \(#1\)](#)

[Read Wm. Irvine's Statement for Court](#)