

Partial transcript of 'Correspondence related to Sandys affair'

'It is alleged that Lady Sandys had, when an unmarried woman had a child some few years ago [and] that she had an intrigue with a Mr Richardson also a short time ago – whether the alleged facts were connected, or believed to be connected, I do not know, but they rest on distinct evidence – the first was affected by a monthly nurse who said she attended the confinement, the second was [believed] of Mrs Richardson, on her personal observation, who left her husband in consequence, tho' they were afterwards reconciled. These two facts are I believe undeniable, whether they constitute sufficient evidence is another question [...] I think that the facts taken in conjunction with several circumstances which need not be detailed, connected with the marriage, and the conduct...of several members of the...families, are for factual purposes sufficient...I conceive that one of the vital safeguards for the morality of our upper class, so far as we are able to maintain that morality, is the rule that no woman who has gone astray before marriage or after, shall ever again be received into society – I speak of actual and sufficiently established criminality, not of mere levity or impropriety of conduct, to which of course I would not apply such strict a rule. I conceive that a woman, who has unhappily so fallen, has made [a] gulf between herself and respectable society, and it is in her fault, though it may be also her misfortune, if that condition should be unfavourable to her fortunate character and position.'

From Lord Lyttelton

26th August 1872

Reference Number: 705:56 BA15492/160/2/4

'There have been widespread rumours derogatory to the character of Lady Sandys before her marriage. The existence of these rumours...do not stand alone. We took them, together with circumstances attending the marriage, and the conducts of some members of the family [...] We thought this information was prima facie such to require on our part the course that we have adopted. As stated, we acquainted...Lady Sandys with this resolution. Her reply, which she addressed to Sir John Pakington...expressed sorrow at the state of things; but did not contain the faintest hint...of suggestion that we were acting unjustly or improperly.'

Lord Lyttelton to Sir Charles Douglas

15th October 1872

Reference Number: 705:56 BA15492/160/2/44

'The most serious of the rumours in Worcestershire respecting Lady Sandys, was that she had had a child...I hope that you will allow me thus to record our emphatic denial, on the part of Lady Sandys family, of the truth of any such allegation. We certainly feel that any mere denial...might be of little value to those who, in the absence of positive proof, would act on the truth of any such rumour against a lady's virtue; but this we say, that it would be impossible to answer such a charge against *any* young lady, more conclusively, than we, as Lady Sandys' nearest surviving male relatives, do give on her behalf! Because it so happens that, to the knowledge or belief that of her mother, or of anyone else, Miss Voeux was never confined to the house of illness of any kind, so that such a thing could possibly have occurred!'

Sir Charles Douglas to Lord Lyttelton

18th December 1872

Reference Number: 705:56 BA15492/160/2/34

'I do not remember that Lord Lyttelton or I, in our communications with you, have written or said a word expressing belief or disbelief of that rumour. We did not tell you we acted on that rumour. We told you of three or four rumours, which were spread far and wide, in London and country, at the time of the marriage, and which I found in full circulation in the county. The rumour of the child was, as you say, the most serious; but there was another, little, if at all, less serious, on which you and Lord William Paulet have hardly touched. We told you we acted on these rumours, combined with and apparently confirmed by the circumstances of the wedding and the conduct of certain near relations of Lord and Lady Sandys. I told you that some of those relations were friends of mine; and I knew their feelings and their views and their strong opposition to the marriage [...] The lady who was the subject of these disparaging rumours and family differences was coming to us as a nobleman's bride, and what were we supposed to do?'

Sir John Pakington to Charles Douglas

22nd December 1872

Reference Number: 705:56 BA15492/160/2/44

'[I] did not say that you had acted on the rumour that Lady Sandys had had a child. You have now asserted that you did not. I believe you; but as you wrote that you had acted on "widespread rumours" and as I had ascertained that beyond doubt that in Worcestershire it was believed that you had acted upon that one as well as others...I deemed it right...to put on record our denial of its truth. As you now say you did not fail to give weight to our denial of the truth of what you admit was "the most serious rumour", it naturally follows that you should at least express your regret that your course was such as to lead respectable people in your county to believe that you had. [...] at least one rumour you did act on, which you described as "little, if at all, less serious" than that of having had a child – that rumour being that years ago Miss des Voeux was guilty of improper conduct with a married man...the whole matter was fully investigated by the proper person at the time...by Lord Frederick Paulet...(the uncle and acting guardian of Miss des Voeux) [who] was satisfied that the story was a falsehood; and, therefore, we need only remind you that his reputation was such as to forbid the suspicion that for any consideration whatever he would have noticed his niece as he invariably did, had he not been perfectly convinced she had done nothing to forfeit her station in society. [...] Let there be no mistake as to the views of Lord Paulet and myself. We say it is proper, in every point of view, that young ladies should know they cannot be "fast" (to use a phrase of the day, which may mean anything from comparatively innocent giddiness and folly to immorality and vice) and then, because they make a creditable marriage, be "received and visited" as of they had been known only for their propriety and virtue.'

Sir Charles Douglas to Lord Lyttelton

9th January 1873

Reference Number: 705:56 BA15492/160/2/37