THE trial of Mr. BRADLAUGH and Mrs. BESANT for having published an obscene book was concluded yesterday. The jury found the defendants guilty, but exonerated them from any bad intention in publishing the work. LORD CHIEF JUSTICE COCKBURN ordered the defendants to come up for judgment on that day week. The Court would then be sitting in banco, and Mr. Bradlaugh could urge his objection to the indictment.

Two kindred subjects of a very unpleasant character have recently occupied a large amount of public attention. The prosecution of Mr. BRADLAUGH and MRS. BESANT for the publication of a pamphlet called “Fruits of Philosophy,” and the questions asked last night in the House of Commons regarding a little book called “The Priest in Absolution,” suggest topics for serious reflection to all who are interested in the maintenance of public decency and morality. The prosecution which has lately been carried on in the Court of Queen’s Bench ended yesterday in the conviction of the defendants, and the further sale of the book which they have so actively circulated among readers of all classes is thus happily prohibited. As for “The Priest in Absolution,” it is not on sale to the general public. Indeed, the copy from which LORD REDESDALE procured the extracts he read to the House of Lords one evening last week seems to have been obtained by means which were decidedly open to exception, the book itself being carefully withheld by its publishers from promiscuous circulation. We have the authority of the ATTORNEY-GENERAL, however, for the statement that the public sale of this manual would be an offence against decency, punishable by the common law. It would thus appear that for the technical offence committed by the people who circulate disgusting literature of the class represented by these two books, the law as it now stands provides a sufficient penalty. Indeed, it cannot be said that justice errs on the side of insufficiency in this matter. It takes no note of the motives of those who publish or sell works which are legally obscene; but whether they be philosophers desirous of ameliorating the future of their race by the introduction of practices the moral depravity of which, in the eyes of some, is stoned for by their physical results, or religious enthusiasts with a weakness for searching into the most secret recesses of the life and the heart, it puts them on an equality with the wretches who purvey filth for mere gain.

Very naturally, this seems a hardship to earnest people like Mr. BRADLAUGH and the leading members of the “Society of the Holy “Cross.” Both the physical and the spiritual reformers believe that the circulation of their special manuals will prove of benefit to man-kind. We have seen during the present week the melancholy spectacle offered by a lady of education and of undoubted ability, who has stood up in a Court of Justice to insist upon her right to propagate everywhere the most extreme doctrines of MALTHUS in more offensive and pernicious forms than any MALTHUS advocated. We give MRS. BESANT full credit for believing that she is serving the cause of humanity by taking this course, and we have no doubt that she looks upon herself as a martyr, not merely for the liberty of the Press, but for the spread of that particular kind of knowledge on the importance of which she lays so much stress. She professes to have seen what probably most of us have seen in our time-the suffering and poverty often caused by the rapid increase of families, and she thinks that there is here an evil to be remedied against which it is permissible to fight with any weapons. In exactly the same way, the members of the Society of the Holy Cross have been struck by the existence of moral evils-as old, alas! as the beginnings of our race-against which they feel it to be their duty to do battle. They have found, as they believe, a short, simple, and heroic remedy for these evils. It is not one of their own devising, indeed. On the contrary, it had been tried for centuries in the most powerful of European Churches, and its advantages and dangers have been discussed by the gravest and ablest men of all religious parties. But it has been left to these enthusiasts to revive it, and to revive it in its most pernicious and obnoxious form. Whilst the Bradlaugh and the Besants are seeking to regenerate humanity by the publication of such filthy trash as this worthless pamphlet from the pen of forgotten doctor, the Mackonochies and Stantons are striving to gain the same end by the re-introduction of the Confessional, with its prurient pryings into the most sacred recesses of the individual and the family life, its shocking machinery for making the young, the ignorant, and the innocent conscious of the existence of evil of which they might otherwise long escape all knowledge.

Without casting the slightest imputation upon the personal sincerity of either class of reformers, we must say that they show an almost inconceivable amount of folly and recklessness in the course they are pursuing. Far be it from our wish to give any additional notoriety to works which are already unhappily too notorious. But what healthy-minded man can read either of the two manuals we have named-the physiological or the spiritual *Vade Mecum*- without turning away with loathing and contempt from the erotic rubbish which is offered to him in the one case as scientific and in the other as religious truth? That any human beings should be so weak and foolish as to see either in “Fruits of Philosophy” or “The Priest in “Absolution” the means of improving the physical and moral condition of our race must be astounding-even to those who believe with MR. CARLYLE that a large majority of mankind are “recognisably fools.” But these offenders against public decency do not err only in their opinion of the efficacy of the strange methods they advocate. Perhaps their greatest blunder is the way in which they mistake the spirit of the age in which they live. Especially is this the case with that small knot of Protestant clergymen who are anxious to secure to themselves all that priestly influence, that personal ascendancy over their flock, of which the father-confessor can generally boast. Some of these gentlemen may feel themselves aggrieved by being coupled with MR. BRADLAUGH and his fellow-defendant. Our view of the case, however, is that the conduct of clergymen who act up to the spirit of the precepts conveyed in “The Priest in Absolution” is still worse than that of half educated “philosophers” who aid in the dissemination of crude theories or coarse suggestions on the subject of the increase of population. It cannot, at any rate, be alleged against MR. BRADLAUGH and MRS. BESANT that they are seeking to propagate their views by any secret or underhand means. On the contrary, they have been only too ready to let all the world know what they were doing and to abide the consequences. But the semi-Romish priests who are striving to set up the Confessional in Protestant churches and Protestant families, with all its attendant dangers and evils, and without the safeguards which to a certain extent surround it in its original home, are secretly undermining the citadel of which they pretend to be the loyal defenders. Until LORD REDESDALE made the horrible secret known to us the other evening, who could have conceived it possible that so foul and detestable a spiritual weapon as that which it is the object of “The Priest in “Absolution” to fashion and perfect was in regular use in Church of England?

We have every reason to be satisfied with the result of the trial in the Court of Queen’s Bench, and with the emphatic declaration of the real character of the manual of the confessional which was made by the ATTORNEY-GENERAL last night. It would have been a great public misfortune if such a work as that which MR. Bradlaugh, in his Quixotic chivalry, undertook to publish, had escaped the condemnation of the law. Nobody will wish that any vindictive punishment should follow yesterday’s verdict. Justice, indeed, will be satisfied with the prevention of the further circulation of this wretched pamphlet. We must say, however, that we deeply regret that this prosecution was ever instituted. The LORD CHIEF JUSTICE has pointed to some of the pernicious results already produced by it, and we cannot doubt that more harm has been done by the indiscreet zeal of those who determined to suppress an obscure although indecent book with all the publicity of a great legal process than by the original sale of the work itself. It was necessary when the prosecution had once been undertaken that there should be a conviction; but it would have been better if there had been no prosecution at all. The case is no doubt different with regard to the movement which has led to the publication of “The Priest in Absolution.” Yet even in that case indiscreet section and furious zeal may do an infinite amount of mischief. After all, detestable as may be the conduct of those who seek to introduce the superstitious an even the vices of the Middle Ages into the religious life of to-day, it should be remembered that their power is at the best a very limited one. They may create a great commotion for a time, and may appear even to threaten the safety of the Protestant Church; but their efforts have their natural termination, and when the tumult is at an end we shall find how slight has been the mischief really wrought. A great writer has reminded us that the burning of a mere handful of straw may obscure the sun; but the straw soon blazes away, the smoke is dispersed, and the sun shines on as brightly as ever. It is not by the establishment of a “Society of the Holy Cross” or the publication of a book like “The Priest in Absolution” that the Protestant faith of England can be really imperilled or impaired.