THE BRADLAUGH AND BESANT TRAIL

The trail of Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, for the publication of the work now so notorious under the title of “Fruits of Philosophy,” was commenced on Monday at Westminster. Mr. Bradlaugh moved to quash the indictment on the ground it was defective on the face of it. The Lord Chief Justice reserved the point, and the case proceeded. ---- The Solicitor General having addressed the jury on behalf of the prosecution, evidence of the sale of the books was given, and the case for the prosecution having been closed. Mrs. Besant addressed the jury in a clear voice and a forcible manner. She argued that the book was a great book to the public, especially the poor, who were totally unable to support large families. Such dry physiological details as the book contained, she argued, would never arouse any man’s or any woman’s passions. She made numerous references to the pages of the book, of which the jury were each furnished with a copy, and compared the work with those of Mr. Mill, Mr. Fawcett, and other writers on social and political economy, and also with physiological works of both English and foreign authors. She had not concluded her address when court rose. On Tuesday she resumed, and said no physical fact was of itself indecent, although it might doubtless be used to convey an indecent suggestion. In the examination for the Government Science School young girls were expected to be full acquainted with the most delicate question of sexual physiology, and prizes were given to successful candidates containing plates and details which she did not think should be placed in the hands of young people. When Lord Beaconsfield, Lord Derby, and the learned Solicitor-General were indicted for circulating works of this character in girls’ schools, she hoped they would remember that she had not been guilty of such conduct. [A laugh] The misuse of knowledge did not make that knowledge remained the same whether used or abused; the fault lay not with the giver but the receiver of it. Having made remarks respecting pages 31, 32 and 33 of the book, where special reference was made to a work by Dr. Chevasse, concerning advice to a wife, she passed on to repudiate the insinuations of the Solicitor-General that she was guilty of very bad things in circulating this book, whereas she would point out the great good conferred by the publication of information which enlightened the mind and prevented much suffering. She, therefore, put it to the jury whether she and her co-defendant could be chargeable with publishing a book which was likely to corrupt the young and demoralize society. Concluding what she had to say respecting the contents of the book, she next defended it from the saying that it was published at a very low price. It is said that it is sold at 6d to anyone who from motives of curiosity or morbid desire sought to possess it. Why, it was the glory of several publishing firms in London that they were able to sell books of information at a cheap price. As to the sale of the book, they has ceased to supply hawkers, but its circulation since 25th of March had been 125,000. After rapid glance at the clock, she proceeded to bring her address to a conclusion, speaking with more emphasis and rapidity. Unless, she said, the jury found her guilty of intent to corrupt the young (and she could not thing they would) she asked of them a verdict of justice at their hands. She had not published the book in ignorance, nor did she deny that she was a party to its publication. But she would deny, and that most emphatically, as also witnesses would testify, that it was a book calculated to inflame the passions of the young. She held that it was one which would prevent much suffering, and prove a benefit to mankind. She then sat down, having spoken for a day and a half.

Mr. Bradlaugh, in addressing the court, said when the learned Solicitor-General applied the term “filth” to a work in which, as he contended, there was not a trace of vulgarity, he must have forgotten that he was pleading for the conviction of a man and woman, and must have thought he was engaged in some civil cause. They had been arrested on a warrant. An indignity of which he did not complain, but which might have been well spared to the lady who was his co-defendant. In the periodical which he conducted he had even put forward Malthusian views, and if this book was obscene how was the poverty and misery of the working classes to be prevented? John Stuart Mill had left it on record that his attention had been directed to him (Mr. Bradlaugh) because he put forward these views. Indictments for obscenity, not under the statute, but the common law, must be looked at with a little care.

The Lord Chief Justice said what he would hold was that if the jury should be of opinion that the effect of this book was to deprave public morale and to corrupt youth it was an infraction of the law.

Mr. Bradlaugh submitted that even so he and his co-defendant could not be convicted under this in­dictment.

The Lord Chief Justice: I shall hold the con­trary

Mr. Bradlaugh proceeded to say that this was a pamphlet which dealt with population, and there­fore the subject was one on which the people had need to be instructed, and on which they could only be instructed by cheap literature.

The court then adjourned.

At the close of Mr. Bradlaugh's address on Wednesday, several witnesses, including a lady named Alice Vickers (the first lady who passed a medical examination), and Dr. Drysdale, were called to prove that the pamphlet alleged to be of an obscene character contained nothing that was not to be found in medical books. This closed the defendants' case, and the court rose.

Mrs. Besant is a lady about 35, with dark hair and complexion, and appeared in court in a black silk dress. She is not pretty, but is pleasing in ap­pearance, and her address indicated that she was a lady of culture. She has been separated from her husband (a clergyman of the Church of England) by mutual consent, for three or four years as there was a wide divergence between them upon religious questions. They have had children, a boy and a girl, Mrs. Besant has charge of the girl, and Mr. Besant of the boy.

Mr. Bradlaugh had four special reporters engaged at the trial, with the object of producing a verbatim, report in the National Reformer.

The Living Age thinks it worth while to announce at this juncture that “Mr. Bradlaugh is the Secularists' chief and leader, while Mrs. Annie Besant, the wife, as we have heard, of a clergyman of the Church of England, is one of the cleverest women, and one of the best speakers and writers we have ever heard or read." The yearly sale of the book in England was until recently only about 700 copies.