**THE PROSECUTION OF MR. BRADLAUGH.**

The trial of Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Annie Besant, who had been indicted for publishing an obscene book called “The Fruits of Philosophy,” commenced on Monday in the Queen’s Bench division, before Lord Chief Justice Cockburn and a special jury. The trial excited great interest, the court being crowded and its approaches densely thronged. The Solicitor-General, Mr. Douglas Straight, and Mr. Mead appeared for the prosecution; while the defendants conducted their own case.

Before the jury were sworn Mr. Bradlaugh said he wished to move to quash the indictment on the ground that it was defective, but the Lord Chief Justice said he could not hear him on that point. He would, however, reserve the question, and if there was anything in the objection it could be urged on a future occasion.

The Solicitor-General, in opening the case, having stated how the defendants had challenged the authorities of the City of London to prosecute them, said that about forty years ago a book called “The Fruits of Philosophy; or, the Private Companion of Young Married Couples,” was published. Some little time since a Mr. Watts was indicted at the Old Bailey for having published the work. The defendants, not being satisfied with the results of the trial, sold the book for sixpence to any person who, for the purpose of curiosity, of interest, of amusement, or of gratifying a morbid appetite, chose to buy it. The question of publication not being in dispute, the sole point the jury would be called upon to determine was whether this was an obscene work or not. By obscene he did not intend to convey the idea of vulgarity or coarseness, but that of a work calculated to deprave morals. The learned counsel then proceeded to say the work was originally written by an American named Charles Knowlton. It contained forty-seven pages of matter, it was asserted to be an essay on the population question, and its professed object was to show how the growth of the population might be checked. Vulgarity and coarseness of expression were doubtless carefully avoided in the work, but he submitted that prurient matters were put forward under the guise of philosophical and scientific disquisitions. He submitted that even if this pamphlet were intended to be read by married people only it would still be immoral in the highest sense, but it was evident from the work itself that it was intended for circulation among the general public without distinction of age or sex. He did not allege that the defendants had published this work with the intention of vitiating public morals; but at the same time the question for the jury would be, what was the character of the publication and what was the effect that it was calculated to have upon public morals. No amount of good intention on the part of the defendants could excuse them if the book were an obscene one.

Evidence of the publication having been given,

Mrs. Besant addressed the jury, saying she relied for her defence on the goodness of her cause. She had studied the question very carefully, and she appeared before the court not so much in the character of a defendant as of a counsel for her numerous clients, who were scattered in immense numbers throughout the land. She pleaded for the poor generally, for the hard-worked artisan, whose wages were failing daily, the over tasked mother worn out with her family cares, and the starving and uneducated little children who found that what was enough for two was insufficient for twelve. It was no light thing for her as a woman to appear as a defendant in this case, to be subjected to the worst imputations to risk her position in the world, and perhaps her liberty, but she did so cheerfully, in the hope that good might result from her efforts. The jury would have to find not only that the work was obscene, but that their intent was to deprave the public morals, before they could find a verdict of guilty. She submitted that the matter of the pamphlet was not obscene, that their intention in publishing it was good, that the knowledge it conveyed was useful and necessary, and that because that knowledge was useful and necessary it ought to be put within the reach of all. To excite improper passions glowing descriptions must be placed before the reader, but no one would think of trying to excite them by the use of mere dry physiological technicalities. The jury could not shift the responsibility for their verdict from their own shoulders on to those of the learned judge. She wanted them to declare that opinion, honestly expressed, should not be put down because some police agents did not happen to agree with it. A verdict of guilty meant destruction to her and to all she had worked for. This prosecution, she said, was a disgrace to English justice.

Mrs. Besant had not concluded her address when the court rose.