**BISHOPS AND PRIESTS.**

A PERFECT tempest of indignation has been raised with respect to the circulation of indecent literature; and the action taken in two prominent cases aptly illustrates the strong class-feelings which dominate the minds of English people. Two societies have been guilty of publishing and circulating obscene books. The offenders, on the one hand, were the Free thought publishers, represented by Mr. BRADLAUG and MRS. BESANT, and on the other, the Society of the Holy Cross, represented by some hundreds of clergymen of the Established Church. The Freethought people were summoned before the bar of justice, and subjected to the risk of fine and imprisonment; the members of the Society of the Holy Cross, up to the present time, have not found themselves within the clutches of the law. The only difference between the two cases is that Mr. BRADLAUGH’S volume was circulated extensively; while the Priest in Absolution was circulated privately amongst clergymen; but against this, it is to be remembered that the clergy who had the book were generally believed to inculcate its doctrines orally to a considerable extent. A jury has declared that Mr. BRADLAUGH’S book is obscene; the priestly volume is pronounced obscene, disgusting, loathsome; yet those who circulate it are allowed to go ……………………..The Times denounces it; Lord REDESDALE (check the name…………….) and the House of Peers condemn it; the ATTORNEY GENERAL, one of the chief law officers of the CROWN, declared amidst the chasers of the House of Commons, that it was disgusting and obscene; the Archbishop of CANTERBURY, in his place in the Upper House, said that any clergyman who had ……………….it was not fit to be admitted into the bosom of any man’s family. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the gentlemen who circulate and ……..the book are not prosecuted. It will appear to many who ……………..these things that the priest’s CARROCK, life charity, covers a multitude of ………….

We perceive that the Archbishop of CANTERBURYS, notwithstanding the fervor with which he ……………the book, and, impliedly, the people who ………it, has not scrupled to hold a private and “friendly” conference with two of these people, with a view to get the objectionable volume withdrawn from circulation and destroyed. The result of that conference, we are given to understand, in a suggestion that every member of the Society of the Holy Cross should burn his copy of the book. Such an ……………….would form a spectacle only ……………in sublimity by that presented at …………….when many of those who used, curium arts, brought their books together and burned them before all men. Whether the Society of the Holy Cross are likely to bring about an historical parallel like ………………….., we think, exceedingly doubtful. The gentleman who suggests that the books shall be burnt is, however, ………………….He believes that a great many members of the Society of the Holy Cross do, like himself, disapprove of the book, and will readily consent to destroy it. At any rate, he will, as a member of the Society, make his proposals at the first opportunity. The sensible reflection, and one which will readily occur to the mind, is that if there are many members who disapprove of the book they should at once burn their copies; and not only burn them, but cease to include the practices contained in them. There is no need to wait for an order from the Superior of the Society, or any other official, to do that which they honestly deem to be just and right.

The statements of the gentleman about referred to are singular. He tells the Archbishop of CANTERBURY that his copy of The Priest in Absolution had lain locked up since it came into his possession, and he was not aware, until he heard the ……………..in the House of Lords, that it was so vile as it …………….. Further, he believes that many other clergymen who possess it, will be able to make a similar statement. In charity, the public will perhaps be disposed to accept that explanation; yet some will think that while it is possible that one or two gentlemen might send for a book sold under the most solemn restrictions and pledges, and then lock it up without reading, it is exceedingly improbable that many men would do so. The very secrecy surrounding the transaction would not as an incentive to read; and the desire to purchase would argue the desire to reap the benefit of the purchase. If they have read the book, and have forborne to repudiate it until forced to do so by an outburst of public indignation, we shall know how to assess their present professions of virtue. If, on the other hand, they have never read the book which they took the trouble to purchase, they have suffered themselves to be made the tools of a designing and ………………party.

The Archbishop of CANTERBURY, while speaking upon the subject in Convocation, on Tuesday, seemed animated by a certain sense of pleasure at the probability of these confessors themselves confessing their misdeeds, and promising amendment of life. There is, however, little comfort to be gained from such scanty probabilities. The …………………………..could not ………………..the fact that ne of the two gentlemen who had so frankly repudiated the objectionable book, still held to confession. He approved of the practice of confession, though he disapproved of the particular rules laid down for it in The Priest in Absolution. The Bishop of LONDON was not, therefore, inopportune in submitting to Convocation, on Tuesday, a motion calling the attention of the Lower House to the declaration on the subject of confession adopted by a committee of the Upper House, in 1873, and inviting their immediate consideration of the same. This “declaration,” which is a somewhat long document, is to the effect that “the Church of England in the 25th Article affirms that penance is not to be counted for a sacrament of the Gospel, and, as judged by her formularies, knows no such words as “sacramental confession,” that she distinctly declares the full and entire forgiveness of sins through the blood of JESUS CHRIST, to all who confess themselves to ALMIGHTY GOD with full purpose of amendment of life. Yet for the relief of troubled consciences she has made special provision for confession in two exceptional cases, which special provision, however, does not authorize the ministers of the Church to require from any who may resort to them to open their grief, a particular or detailed numeration of all their sins, or to enjoin or even encourage any practice of habitual confession to a priest.”

What good his Lordship of London expects to accrue from this motion we cannot conceive. That remonstrance and admonition are thrown away upon the advocates of Confession is abundantly clear; the only alternative, then, is prosecution. But the Bishop of LONDON looks with disfavor upon legal repression or “persecution,” because it would not tend to repress confession, but to make it secret instead of public, and secret confession is more dangerous than public confession. Such reasoning and such policy as this, coming from the heads of the Church, are enough to shake one’s faith in sense and honesty. We submit that if confession is bad, and contrary to law, it ought to be put down, so far as the Church of England is concerned. It is no business of the Bishop’s to connive at it because it in public, or because it will become more dangerous should its advocates be forced by prosecution to follow the practice secretly. It is not business of the Bishop’s to parley with man who break laws and circulate filthy books, for which, if they were not protected by the stupid prejudices attaching in the public mind to the priestly office, they would be fined or imprisoned. That the practice of confession is bad in itself, that it opens the door to all kinds of pruriency and unclean thoughts, is notorious. The Bishop of LONDON himself, in his speech to Convocation, on Tuesday, said, “The extracts which were brought forward in the House of Lords contained the strongest exhortation to the priest engaged in this office to be most careful, whether in confession or cut of confession, not even to touch the hand of the person confessed. He asked whether the necessity of such a caution did not of itself show the danger of the system, and whether a system which might produce such pruriency in confessor and confessed as to require that they should not even venture to shake hands, did not carry with it its own condemnation. It was obvious that the relations between the confessor and the person who confessed must be different from what they were before. The woman who had gone through such a process must be in that man’s power – he did not mean in a wrong sense, but she knew she had a secret which she had not entrusted to GOD, but which she had entrusted to a human being, and her relations to that man must be different from what they were before.” Yet his Lordship exhorts his right reverend brethren not to “persecute” the men who follow practices and put questions to women of so delicate a nature as to entirely destroy those relations which ought to subsist between honest men and modest women. The Society of the Holy Cross have escaped a summons before a jury of their fellow countrymen; but they are called upon by Convocation to produce a list, of their members, and any statement in explanation or defence which they think fit to make. We shall be very much surprised if they show a repentant spirit.