**THE CHARGE AGAINST MR. BRADLAUGH.**

At the Guildhall, London, Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, better known as “Iconoclast,” and Mrs. Annie Besant appeared on remand before Alderman Figgins, charged with publishing an obscene book, on the 24th March. Long before the commencement of the case the court was crowded, amongst those present being a large number of well-dressed girls and women. Mr. Straight and Mr. Mead prosecuted and Mr. Bradlaugh, who had a small library of books before him, conducted his own defence and that of Mrs. Besant. The work which the defendants were charged with publishing was entitled “Fruits of Philosophy: an essay on the population question. By Charles Knowlton, M.D.”

Mr. Straight, in opening the proceedings, alluded to the importance of the case, and called attention to the obscenity of the book in question.

Mr. Bradlaugh said he at once admitted that if the work was obscene there would be no justification for the publication, but what he contended was that the work in question was not obscene, and that it was published for the public benefit.

Mr. Straight then proceeded to allude to the contents of the book, when Alderman Figgins expressed a doubt whether females should be allowed in court.

Mr. Bradlaugh said that many of the ladies present were witnesses in the case, and had come there to give their opinions on the subject at ………………….Two of those ladies were his own daughters and demanded, by their right as citizens, to be present and listen to the proceedings.

Mr. Straight, in continuation, said it was impossible to say into whose hands a work published at sixpence might come, and it might get into the hands of girls and youths at school and he used for the worst of purposes. The learned counsel then marked certain portions of the work on which the prosecution relied for a committal, and banded it to the alderman.

Officers were called to prove the purchase of several works at the defendants’ shop in Stonecutter street, and that Mrs. Besant was present, and that Mr. Watts pleased guilty, at the Central Crimina Court, to the offence of having published an edition of the same work. This was the case for the prosecution.

Mr. Bradlaugh said that he should endeavor not to occupy the time of the bench very long and he was indebted to the City for the manner in which the learned counsel had opened the case. In the first place he submitted, while he denied that the book was obscene, that the learned counsel must prove much more than that it was indecent and unbecoming before they could put him in peril of a verdict. He submitted, in reference to the observation of Mr. Straight that it might get into the hands of children, that if the work was ……………………innocent, they could not ground a verdict upon something that resulted from it afterwards. A razor, for instance, might get into the hands of a person who cut his throat with it, but who would think of indicting the cutter? (A laugh) He then proceeded to refer to the many works which had been published by scientific men on the subject of checking population. For instance, there was one by one of the most eminent writers of the day, Dr. Acton, who referred to the social and moral relations of the sexes, and that in words much stronger than any that could be found in his work, and he should show that the publication of that book had the highest sanction for it. Dr. Acton’s work was addressed to fathers, mothers, and young people, and he should put several persons into the witness box to show that there were numerous works containing similar doctrines to that contained in his work, the publishers of which had not been prosecuted. He then proceeded to observe that the law of population was written on in the first place by Malthus, then by Mr. Fawcett, and Mr. Millicent Fawcett, in their works on political economy, while the subject of checking the population had been dealt with by the late John Stuart Mill. Mr. Straight had referred to the price of the work, but what would be the use of a publication of the kind that would cost half a guinea and have to be on Mr. Churchill’s shelves? The object of his work was to reach the squalid and the poverty stricken, so as to enable them to have no greater burden in the way of offspring than they could maintain. Mr. Bradlaugh then referred, as a proof that he was not doing all this out of bravado to the fact that in 1868 he delivered a lecture on the subject before Lord Amberley and other eminent men, and he had for the last 18 years advocated those principles in the paper he had published. He mentioned this as a proof of the ………………..of his position.

Mr. Straight, in reference to Mr. Bradlaugh’s observation that similar works had been published, and the publishers not been prosecuted, said there was an old saying that two blacks did not make a white and that because other obscene works had escaped, it was no excuse for the present publication.

Mr. Bradlaugh repeated that the publication was not obscene, but scientific.

The chief clerk (Mr. Martin) cited a case in which the Lord Chief Justice defined an obscene libel as being that which suggested to the minds of the young anything of an improper character.

Alderman Figgins said he could not attempt to decide that, but must submit it to another tribunal.

Mr. Straight said that Walker defined the word obscene to be “immodest, offensive, disgusting.” He (the learned counsel) to say the least of it, considered some portions of the publication of Mr. Bradlaugh deserved that name.

The court having adjourned for ten minutes Mr. Bradlaugh put in a large number of books on similar subjects, observing that he had spent upwards of £ 100 on books since the previous hearing. The lengthy remarks of the defendant on the characteristics of each book occupied some hours. The case was adjourned.

On the resumption of the case, the court was densely crowded, but it is a noticeable fact that none of the ladies whose presence Mr. Bradlaugh on the last operation demanded as a right were in court. It was understood that no application had been made on the subject, but that Mr. Bradlaugh had undertaken that no ladies, except the defendant, should be present.

Mr. Bradlaugh said, after grave consideration, and recognisng the extreme courtesy shown him by the learned counsel for the prosecution and the pains the alderman had taken, himself and Mrs. Besant had determined to abridge the case as much as possible, especially as the alderman had decided that it would be his duty to commit for trial.

Dr. Charles Robert Drysdale, of the Royal College of Surgeons, was then called. He said he was the author of several medical works. He read the pamphlet, the subject of the present charge, twenty years ago.

Mr. Bradlaugh : As a medical man, what is your opinion of that work?

Mr. Straight objected, and after some discussion the alderman decided that the evidence could not be received.

Mr. Bradlaugh then proceeded with his defence, comparing other passages in the pamphlet complained of with some in a work by Miss Marian Sims, entitled “Clerical Notes,” and with passages in Savage’s “Pelvic Organs,” contending in each case that the language in “Fruits of Philosophy” was more chaste than in the unprosecuted works to which he had referred. He also drew attention and used the same argument in regard to a work by Chavasse exposed on all the bookstalls of Messrs. W. H. Smith and Son, and sold by that firm, entitled, “Hints to Mothers,” both being obtainable in paper covers, and at a small price. Having finished these comparisons, Mr. Bradlaugh said, let them look around the country and see the thousands of miserable and squalid children which crowded their streets and alleys and then ask whether it was a crime to place in the hands of the poor information which would prevent their bringing into the world progeny which inherited the diseases of the parents, and rendered their lives a misery. He and his co-defendant conscientiously believed that they were doing their duty in putting the information into the hands of the people. The cause in which the pamphlet was issued he had advocated for years, and for his exertions in this direction he had been thanked by John Stuart Mill in his works; by Lord Amberley, and other leading me. Now, when wages were on the decrease throughout the ……….., when taxation and cost of living were increasing. If he could not tell those poor men and women how they were to prevent hungry children growing up in misery and want, whence was to come the remedy? A …………adjournment here took place to enable Mrs. Besant to prepare her ………………

The Alderman on returning into court said he did not believe the book was not published in the interest of science, but that the object of it was, as had been stated to limit the families of married women, and that is pointed out how unmarried persons might satisfy their passions without fear of the consequences. As to whether it was an impure and libidinous …………….within the meaning of the words of Lord Campbell, it would be for the jury to say. He thought there was sufficient to enable him to commit the defendants for trial.

Mrs. Besant then proceeded to read a long defence, observing that Mr. Bradlaugh’s case and her own were a joint one. She complained of the indignities to which she had been subjected by her arrest, and expressed her content to know that she would have another opportunity given her in a higher court of removing any passing slur which this harsh procedure might have temporarily cast upon her. After going over many of the arguments of Mr. Bradlaugh, she said that she desired to put on record their earnest conviction that the fact of over-population ought to be recognized, and that the difficulties arising from it ought to be fairly and honestly considered. They had both made themselves acquainted with the misery which, alike in large town and country village, arose from too many months and too little food. They had seen the wretched homes the repulsive food, the drunkenness, the recklessness which grew out of the hopeless despair of comfort arising from over large families. They had seen how children were born but to die and how women’s health was sacrificed by the drain of too constantly recurring child-bearing. It ought to be accepted as an axiom that no persons should have more children than they could support and educate and that unhealthy persons should not weaken the next generation by …………………..their own ………………….Yet it would be cruel to deny to ……….the ……………………………home and the comfort of mutual love. Since people ………………………..marry they must be taught, they should be taught ………………………..in marriage and to conceive children…………………..to ………………………………………………….The returns of ……………………………….showed the terrible amount of infant mortality amongst the mortality arising from ………………………able ………………….but even those sad records ……………not if the many who were not even ……………enough to ………………………who ……………………………..on from year to year …………………………………….and helpless nor ……………………………….show the …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..It was not ………………………………………our children should be born only to …………………………………………………………..with an almost ……………………………………………..we had only two ………………………………………either to prevent the over-…………………………of children, or to murder them after birth by overcrowding, by disease, and by starvation. They (the defendants), preferring the former alternative, believing it to be the more moral, the more humane, the more rational, had determined to spread such knowledge amongst the people as should make that alternative possible and for so doing they stood committed for trial on a criminal charge.

On resuming her seat, Mrs. Besant was loudly applauded.

In answer to the ………………………….Mr. Mead, on behalf of the prosecution, said that he was quite content to take the personal recognisances of the defendants.

Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant were then formally bound over in their own recognisances to appear at the Central Criminal Court.