THE BRADLAUGH CASE

(From the *Times.*)

But “well-intentioned people” are proverbially weak, open to delusion, and liable to the commission of foolish acts. In the interest of the public we look to the act alone and consider whether or not it is mischievous and violation of the law of the realm. It is impossible to doubt that this book is mischievous and corrupting in the hands of the many thousands to whom it has found its way. Unhappily, the great moral facts of this metropolis are too suggestive of the ideas which really form the attractions of this book. It is a present, it is stated, from America to this country. But for a very long time past London has been plied with works the professional and even scientific character of which thinly disguised a too evident purpose to prey on a diseased imagination. The plea of arresting the excessive increase of population ought not to be allowed to pass without more challenge than it has received from the court and the jury. We may be ready to admit, indeed we must admit, for so the doctors and their female coadjutors often pronounced, that there are many cases in which it is expedient that the command to increase and multiply ought to be modified in some way or other. But this can only be in most exceptional cases. To make them the law of society, or even the prevalent usage, would be in fact to subordinate all that is good and healthy and strong in society to all that is bad and sickly and weak. We might as well treat all the world as incurable patients because some are out of health, all the world as paupers because some can hardly earn their own bread, all the world as mad because some are quite rational, and all the world as utterly wicked because some are wanting in stability of character, as believe this a proper book to be put into the hands of the majority of people or its advice good for the world generally. Of course, after the verdict especially, we have no wish to call in question the intentions of the publishers. They may believe the book the best present they could make to a young man or young woman, indeed to a whole family, about to enter life upon a career of utility and honour. But, on the other hand, we are also aware that there are persons who sincerely believe the greatest service they can render their innocent neighbours is to strip them of everything they fondly regard as a virtuous sentiment or right principle of action. There certainly are persons who think they are only opening our eyes and breaking out fetters when they reduce goodness, and even affection, to a calculation of material consequences. Indeed, some do not leave us the trouble of a calculation, for they tell us, and think it the very best of good thing, that we grow out of our antecedents and upon them by law so irresistible and uniform as to save us from responsible action. Happily, the real truth is that the world is greater than one man or one opinion, and since we have to choose between Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant on the one hand, and certain reserves and proprietor surrounding the first laws of nature and the domestic health on the other, we are glad to find that this well-intentioned pair are not hold to have established a right to dictate new rules of actionand new conditions of existence to a reluctant and, as it feels, an insulted world.