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SPEECH

OF

MRS. SUSANNA WRIGHT,

BEFORE THE

Court of King's Bench,

ON THE 14TH OF NOVEMBER, 1822;

IN THE COURSE OF READING WHICH

SHE WAS CONTINUALLY INTERRUPTED

BY

THE COURT,

AND

BEFORE SHE HAD FINISHED IT,

Committed to Newgate

FOR PERSISTING TO READ,

TO BE

BROUGHT UP AGAIN FOR JUDGMENT,

ON THE

FOURTH DAY OF HILARY TERM, 1823.

London:

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STREET.

1822.

TO THE
WOMEN OF THE ISLAND OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Dorchester Gaol, Nov. 19, Year 1822, of the
degrading Mythology of the Christians.

I DEDICATE to you the publication of the Speech of Mrs. Susanna Wright, in delivering which she was illegally stopped by the Judges of the Court of King's Bench. I ask your patronage to this Speech, with a confidence that there is nothing in it I may be ashamed to offer, or you to patronize; notwithstanding its expressions were grating to the corrupt ears of the very corrupt Judges of that Court. I publish it, because, I will, to the utmost of my power, resist that species of despotism, which forbids the speaking, writing, or printing of such unanswerable truths, and because I know, that the recognized laws of this country will not bear out the Judges in their conduct towards Mrs. Wright on the 14th instant.

She was committed for a contempt of Court, not for improper language to the Judges of that Court, but because she was bold enough to display a mind of her own, in the use of such matters as she considered essential to her interests, in so painful a situation. Trial is a mockery if the person accused be only allowed to use such words in defence as the prosecutors and their supporters, the Judges, think necessary or proper.

You will perceive that Mrs. Wright's Speech throughout is an argument upon law, if her indictment had any foundation in law. She no where moves out of the matter of her indictment: and her whole prepared discourse was strictly relevant, however disagreeable it may have been to those who wished to punish her for publishing the truth, and daring to defend it.

I recommend you to consider well this subject, and to consider whether Mrs. Wright be not a woman who deserves from you all the support you can give her in her present situation. She is rendering you a service, the importance of which time can only express. She suffers for you and your children, not for herself. She will do her duty, and I call upon you to support her.

R. CARLILE.

SPEECH,

&c. &c.

MRS. WRIGHT appeared in the Court of King's Bench, on the 14th November, 1822, to receive the judgment of the Court for having published two Twopenny Pamphlets, entitled "The Addresses and Correspondences of Mr. Carline," published in March and April, 1821, when after the usual nonsense had been gone through, she proceeded to address the Court as follows:—

May it please your Lordships,
I AM brought here, at the instance of a Society that professes to associate for the purpose of suppressing vice, to receive the judgment of this Court, for having published some pamphlets, which are denominated blasphemous libels upon the Christian religion. In searching for records of similar cases, I find, that, the earliest is the case of Jesus himself, the very founder of that religion! The only difference in that case and mine is, that Jesus did not deign to make any defence against so false and infamous a charge, before the Judges who solicited him to answer to the charge against him; and were not desirous to condemn him unheard, as is too often the case in modern charges of this nature; whilst I, in spite of all interruption, have made such a defence as to me seemed proper, for the encouragement and good example of those who may follow in the same glorious path. Yes, we read in the books of the Holy Evangelists, Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, that the Jewish priests, who, doubtless, fancied themselves the Vice Suppressors of that day, and that country, persecuted Jesus through all kinds of indignities, by scourging his back and breaking the skin of his head with the ruthless thorn, and their still more ruthless hands, and whilst the blood still trickled from his wounds over his cheeks and his back, they led him to that most horrid of all public executions, the death of the cross, upon the mere charge of blaspheming their God and their religion; a charge exactly similar to that which the Vice Suppressors of this day have placed

upon record in this Court against me, and for which they now ask the judgment of your Lordships, as modern Herods, and Pilates, and High Priests. Similar as is my case to that of Jesus, so hereafter similar shall be my conduct; if I am to receive any further prosecution, any further punishment from your Lordships' hands, I shall suffer with equal fortitude, and say with Jesus, "Father, forgive my persecutors, and my judges, for they know not what they do!"

If it be said to me that Jesus was not tried by a jury of his countrymen, I can answer, that I might as well have been without mine, for one of them was so blindly bigoted against, and so evidently ignorant of the subject he had to try, as to insist, that an argument in defence was an attack upon Christianity, and he would scarcely have believed the contrary had he not been corrected by the Lord Chief Justice. My accusers had the means of packing a jury, and practised them, and had the judgment of twelve of the most furious and most bigoted of the Jews, who accused Jesus, been taken, he would have had as fair a trial as mine, and perhaps fairer, for his Judges solicited him earnestly to speak in defence of himself, and mine as earnestly sought to silence me by continual interruptions.

It is the common practice of persons in my situation to bring before your Lordships a file of affidavits about former good character, and so on; to practise upon the well-known merciful dispositions of those who are always selected to fill the important offices of Judges of this Court. Every species of feigned humility, and penitence, and oftentimes the most barefaced perjury, as to present health, late sufferings, and past conduct, is exhibited, for the purpose of moving your Lordships to a merciful mood, and a mitigation of that punishment which the law has awarded them. But this is not my case; I come before your Lordships not to plead for a mitigated sentence, or a lessening of any given punishment assigned by law, I know there is no such law; and I come to show strong reasons why I ought not to receive any kind of punishment, but rather approbation and reward for what I have done to bring me here. I come not with a plea of feigned humility and false penitence, but with a mind elated with pride, from the assurance that the cause which has brought me here has been a common good, and not an evil to the community, nor an offence against the known laws of the country. I come not with a bundle of false oaths as to health, or to sufferings, or to past conduct, to excite pity where it is not due, but I come with an endeavour to excite

the approbation of your Lordships by a clear and fair statement of my past and present conduct, by shewing reasons for what I have done, why I should have done it, and why I should not have shrunk from doing it. After I have done this, I shall look for your Lordships' applause rather than for an infliction of punishment on account of the act that has brought me here.

Such is the preliminary matter I have to address to your Lordships. With me the age of precedent is gone, and I shall endeavour to be as rational in what I have to offer, as I desire to be considered free from unapt or impertinent remarks. I wish to try the effect of that sense, which is unjustly called common, in this atmosphere of legal quibble, legal subterfuge, and legal oppression. It is, I fear, a daring attempt, but like Franklin, I shall not fear the detonations which may ensue from the inflammable mixture, whilst I am near such safe-conductors as your Lordships, to save me from being scathed by the fire that will be engendered. In plainer English, and less figurative language, I would say, that I shall not fear the murmurs that will arise with the Gentlemen at the Bar, whilst a female sets them an example of duty, of courage, and of honesty, as the all-powerful words of your Lordships will restrain them from offering me their collected revenge and violence for an encroachment so daring on their prerogatives. I can assure your Lordships, that if I had known there was any one of them with a heart equal to my own, I would have yielded up this inappropriate and unpleasant task into his hand, that it might have gone forth with the grave influence of the Court habiliments, or the appalling impression of a "Learned Friend's" wig, and the imposing air of his gown. I can also assure the Learned Gentlemen at this Bar, that I have carefully searched all the authorities, and I have uniformly found that the precedents are all against my application to them for assistance. It is sufficient for the credit of so honourable a body, that some half dozen of them are employed against me, as, for the present, it will pay them better to attack than to defend my principles; and they will not be in danger of losing what is technically termed, "the ear of the Court."

For the foregoing reasons, and from a desire to avoid all bad precedents, I shall plead for myself; in so doing, I shall do justice to myself, if I miss it every where else, and upon this certainty, I proceed to the point of an argumenta-

tive statement of my case without a further waste of your Lordships' very valuable time. So thus goes my story.

The record against me in this Court, upon which a very ignorant Jury has returned a verdict of Guilty, and for which I now stand here for judgment, is a charge, that I have published what the pious suppressors of vice, and perhaps the law of this Court, call blasphemous libels. These miscalled libels consist of two small pamphlets of sixteen pages each, and however innoxious or auxiliary they may be to morals and physical truths, it seems they are to be held obnoxious to the religion of the British law, and the persecuting disposition of that association, some of whose members have, by their profligacy and horrid vices, proved themselves a disgrace to mankind and moral society. Unfortunately for this gang, it has happened, that whenever one of its secret members has become known, it has been discovered, that he has been tainted with some peculiar vice.

This word *blasphemy* is now become so very common, and so well understood, as to its real meaning, that, in a moral point of view, it has ceased to be considered an offence. If your Lordships were now to hear a Roman Catholic Christian impute the once heinous crime of heresy to a Protestant Christian, such an imputation would leave no other impression on your minds than pity for the former, whom you would consider in error. Such is now become the almost general view of the charge of blasphemy. That charge is founded on exactly the same principle as that on which the charge of heresy was founded—either a dread of change in the existing religious establishment, or a dread of loss of power and profit in those who are benefited by it. It is here that the whole charge of blasphemy centers, and it can entail nothing but disgrace on your Lordships and this Court, if you cherish this spirit of bigotry and corruption, and punish me for this fictitious crime. I protest in the face of this Court and my country, that I have committed no crime, that I have not offended against the morals or the known law of the land. I protest that I have done nothing deserving the charge of blasphemy, because the alleged object blasphemed cannot be proved, as to its existence or its foundation in truth and nature. I am charged with libelling and blaspheming the Christian religion, but what is this religion? It is a non-entity. The law recognises no such thing, or it recognises every thing that any ignorant bigot or corrupt fellow thinks proper to call Chris-

tianity. Who is the man that can define any thing to be the Christian religion, or the pretended religion of the law called Christianity, that I cannot controvert? I challenge every lawyer, every priest, every fanatic in the country to discussion. What, then, can your Lordships ground any punishment upon; or what beyond words wickedly and corruptly expressed, and without any meaning or truth?

The precise charge in the record against me is, that, "wickedly and profanely devising and intending to bring the Christian religion into disbelief and contempt among the people of this country, I, unlawfully and wickedly did sell, utter, and publish, and cause to be sold, uttered, and published, a certain scandalous, impious, blasphemous, and profane libel, of and concerning the Christian religion, containing therein, amongst other things, certain scandalous, impious, and profane matters and things, of and concerning the Christian religion." It is further charged, that I have done this, "to the high displeasure of Almighty God, to the great scandal and reproach of the Christian religion, to the evil example of all others, and against the peace of our Lord the King, his crown and dignity."

Is this charge true or false? There can be no other question for honest consideration. If I know any thing of the character of the King, the Chief Magistrate of this realm, I can venture to say, that nothing that weighs against the Christian religion can affect his peace or his dignity; and if I know any thing of an Almighty God, (and I will not allow that any person knows more of him than I do,) I take upon myself to say that this prosecution, this bringing me here for the judgment of your Lordships, is the greatest piece of blasphemy that can be offered to him, and a piece of hypocrisy that must excite his high displeasure, in the same ratio as he prefers truth to falsehood, honesty to dishonesty, virtue to vice. The Almighty God has nothing to do with the tithes, and fat benefices heaped upon the priests, and these alone constitute the religion and the Christianity of the law of this country; these are the foundation of that Christian religion, which the Vice Society calls upon your Lordships to protect from my blasphemy. The only profane matters and things to their views are those which dispute the rights of the priests to live in idleness upon the produce of the industry of others; of those whose labours produce all the necessaries, all the comforts, and all the luxuries of life, none of which can they themselves enjoy. With my prosecutors, the greatest of profanation is not to believe,

with one of your Lordships, “that blessings fall back upon the industrious labourer to the same extent as taxes are imposed upon the produce of his industry!”

If we enquire seriously what constitutes the Christian religion in this country, we shall find that the thing is altogether undefinable. The most pious of your Lordships cannot explain it, for if you refer me to the Thirty-nine Articles, established as a rule for belief in the reign of Henry the Eighth, I can instantly refer your Lordships to statutes of the Parliament, passed since that time, that go to contravene the very foundation of those Articles. The statute for the toleration of the impugners of the Trinity, passed in the 53d of George the Third, is a direct annihilation of the first of the Thirty-nine Articles, and saps the foundation of the other thirty-eight. All the statutes which have been made for the toleration of Dissenters, are so many contradictions to the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Royal declaration of Henry the Eighth that accompanied them.

The Christianity which your Lordships recognise, as the religion of the law, is that form which originated with Henry the Eighth, after he had despoiled, in a truly Royal manner, the Catholic churches, abbies, and monasteries, of as much of their accumulated wealth, as would satiate his royal avarice, and that of his parasitical followers. This first defender of a faith that he destroyed in a true royal style, sought to establish a new system of his own, in opposition to the Pope of Rome; and accordingly, in the year 1562, he sent forth his Royal Declaration, that the Thirty-nine Articles then and now recognized by the Established Church, “should never be disputed, departed from, or varied in the least degree.” I shall enlarge a little upon this subject, for an exposure of the contemptibility of royal decrees, declarations, and proclamations, when put forth to controul and give uniformity to matters of opinion. It was asserted in the Declaration here alluded to, issued near three hundred years ago, that then, “curious and unhappy differences had existed for centuries, and had been exercised in the Church of Christ,” and this Royal Head of the English Church thought that his word would be sufficient to put a stop to all further curious search and disputation, and that Christianity was to stand for ever as it then stood! Had that tyrant lived for ever, perhaps he would have accomplished his views, and have served every sceptic and disputant as he served Lambert the “schoolmaster,” by referring to the powers of the kindled faggot, where his powers of

argument failed, and by destroying indiscriminately all those who denied his supremacy in the Church. But, as if to display the contemptibility of all royal decrees, his daughter Mary, in the next reign, put it aside; and though restored again by Elizabeth, a century did not elapse before those thirty-nine articles became completely overthrown; a system sprang up that made almost every priest a teacher of a new doctrine, and a founder of a new sect; whilst Christianity was defined by the one and the other to be every thing that was strange, odious, and vile. I allude to the period of the civil war between Charles and the Parliament, and the overthrow of episcopacy.

The Thirty-nine Articles again raised their head after this period: many abuses and much tyranny were practised upon the Dissenters to support and keep them in existence; they have lingered on to this day, but it has only been to be subjected to a more effectual, to a philosophical extinction. They cannot revive again; nay, they are already almost lost sight of in the very Church that professes to be founded upon them.

What, then, is the Christianity I have blasphemed? The Thirty-nine Articles require us to believe contradictions, impossibilities, and falsehoods, both moral and physical. We must believe that there is but one God, of infinite power, though without body, parts or passion, and that this one God without body contains three persons in the same substance; substance is body, and in the very first article we are called upon to believe in a God with, and without, a body; and that three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are one God, without a body! Before a man can enjoy the tithes and rich benefices, and become a priest of the Established Church, he must belie himself by saying, that he believes such contradictions, and such physical as well as moral impossibilities to be consistent with truth. There was never any thing half so ridiculous submitted to the credulity of a Pagan in any part of the Heathen Mythology. We must also believe, that the second part of this God without parts was separated, and not separated, from the joint-stock company of religious commerce, or the one substance; and that a divided part of an indivisible Trinity was made man by passing through a natural state for that purpose, and was both God and man at the same time; and that this immortal God was crucified, which was the common mode of executing malefactors at that time under the Roman empire, by his own consent, that he so died and was

buried, for no other purpose than to reconcile himself to himself! and to be a sacrifice for us, to appease *himself*! We are here also required to believe, that this God without a body, parts, or passions, took a fourth part to itself, or added manhood to its Godhead, by taking “flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature into heaven,” still remaining one and indivisible! We are also required to believe, that one part of a bodiless, partless God, went down into hell, a fictitious place of torment, now proved to have no existence; that is, we are required to believe what we know to be a physical falsehood, and to assent to a proposition, as true, which we positively know not to be true, or to proclaim that in Christianity, a fiction or a falsehood are synonymous with truth, and both alike at the same time! The same argument applies to the fabled ascent into heaven with “flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature,” whilst astronomy has annihilated the heaven, by teaching us that the immensity of space is filled with planets similar to our own, and other scientific researches have taught us the physical impossibility of any animal to pass beyond the atmosphere of the earth, in an attempt to move towards any other planet.

We are also required to believe nothing but what is found in the books of the Old and New Testaments, and yet different translations give us very different meanings to different passages, whilst what we are required to believe in these Articles is not to be found in any of those books of Jewish Scripture: for instance, the first of these Thirty-nine Articles requires us to believe that “there is but one God,” and he “without body, parts, and passions,” whilst the Jew Books uniformly represent the God of the Jews with body, parts, and passions, and constantly located, either in their Ark of Shittim wood, their Tabernacle, or their Temple; and that he was particularly endowed with the passions of anger, vengeance, and repentance. We are required to believe that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New, and that the Old, as well as the New, offers everlasting life to mankind by Christ, when in fact, there is not the slightest allusion to any thing of the kind, without perverting the true meaning of words. We are required to believe that we can do nothing by our works towards our salvation from that fictitious place of torment called Hell, and at the same time, we are further required to believe that every thing depends upon ourselves!

This is the Christianity of the Thirty-nine Articles of the

Established Church, or the religion of the law. This is the Christianity of one sect, but there are near one hundred different sects of Christians in this country, all professing different tenets, and each laying claim to that which they say is alone the genuine sort. One argues the sufficiency of Infant Baptism by affusion; another the immersion of adults in water, as a baptism essential to salvation. One argues for free will, and that man can do every thing for his own salvation; and another, that every thing is predestinated, and all that man can do is vain. One says that Jesus Christ is a part of the Godhead; and another, that he was nothing more than a prophet of the highest order, and the natural son of Joseph the carpenter, and Mary his wife. One believes the miracles he is said to have wrought; and another believes them not. All these, and a hundred others, alike call themselves Christians, and each boasts that he exclusively holds to the right Christianity. What, then, is the Christianity that I have blasphemed? or how can your Lordships, as judges of the law only, and not as priests of any sect, judge my opinions upon matters of religion, where the law recognizes such a variety? The Jew is protected in his opinions, though in reality more inimical to the Christian Religion than mine, and even inimical towards the moral part of the New Testament, which I am not. The Hindoo and Mahometan are protected under the British Government and law, and openly encouraged to practice their idolatries, in opposition to Christianity. Why, then, am I to be punished for rejecting this vague thing, called Christianity? Can the impugner of the Trinity be more of a Christian than I am, though he assumes the name, and does he value any thing more than the moral part of the New Testament, which I and every other Deist values?

I will put a case to your Lordships. If a Jew, Hindoo, or Mahometan, resident in this country, were publicly to state his opinion, that the religion of this country, which the law recognizes under the name of Christianity, was not founded in truth, and that he verily believed it to be founded in imposture, and to be a cheat upon the people, an opinion which we know each of those idolators to hold; would such a public expression of their opinions be amenable to our law as a case of blasphemy, whilst custom tolerates the practical part of their idolatries, and their opposition to the Christian religion?

If the law can punish, it does not, in those cases, and cus-

tom, as far as it relates to manners, forms the most powerfully operative part of the law. I am not a Christian. I am proud in rejecting the epithet after the confused notions I have exhibited as connected with what is called Christianity, and the inexplicable demands it makes upon our credulity. In relation to Christianity, I ask from your Lordships, to be ranked with the Jew, Hindoo, or Mahometan. I flatter myself that I stand before your Lordships as a person of good morals, though I have scorned to resort to the usual mode in those cases, of exhibiting them upon affidavits. I felt it to be unnecessary. I feel that my morals are not impeached, notwithstanding the abusive nature of the record against me. Lawyers are licensed to be abusive, and gallantry or courtesy towards the female sex is not recognized as an accomplishment in legal pursuits. The records of our Courts of Law, or the proceedings upon them, are not arguments to convince of error, but a system of bearing down by clamorous and false abuse; where the weakest is sure to go to the wall: where powerful oppression always triumphs. But is there any one among my prosecutors who will impeach my morals? Is there one who will show I am a bad mother, a bad wife, a bad friend, or a bad member of society? Will those slanderers, who have blasphemed me through the medium of the indictment, with the epithets of wicked, malicious and ill-disposed, come forward and show that I have ever been guilty of one immoral act in my life? Will their own characters bear the same scrutiny? Pray, for what are your Lordships called upon to punish me? For what, to shut me out of society? why strip me from my husband, and bereave me of my children? what have I done, more than to publish two pamphlets, the truth and morality of which are unimpeachable? Yes, I am charged with blaspheming Christianity, but how is it proved? by the verdict of a man who knows so much about it, as not to know when it was attacked or defended. By a special Jurymen, who was scarcely superior in intellect to an idiot; who was ignorant enough to think that every word that dropped from me must be an attack upon it, and who interrupted me when I was really reading the sermon of a Christian Priest who defended it, but condemned all persecutions in its support. My persecutors blaspheme their religion of Christianity by bringing me here for punishment: they speak evil of it, they pronounce that it cannot stand without persecuting those who impeach it; that it must not be spoken against, lest, like a bubble, it be dispersed with a breath.

You, my Judges, if you do not allow me to go from this Court will blaspheme it; you will sanction persecution in its defence, and if your victims fall under the punishment you inflict, you will stain your robes with the blood of martyrs to truth. I therefore call upon you in the name of truth, in the name of every thing that is great and good in society; in the spirit of free discussion, which is the source of all human happiness and improvement, to allow me to proceed from this Court to my home, to my husband, and to my children, free from bond.

Christianity in all its varieties is a thing founded upon words and nothing but words, it has no relation to any thing in nature, in physics, or in morals, and I challenge any human being to shew the contrary of what I assert. Law in a civilized society is a compact between its members to preserve to each other their lives, their liberties, and their properties. There can be no such thing as law to preserve the use of certain words, it would be treated with ridicule and contempt, in such a country as this: therefore I protest against any decision of your Lordships, if you say there is a law to support the use of the words which relate to, or constitute the verbal system of, Christianity. If I am permitted to be punished upon the indictment against me in this Court, it will be despotism not law.

In all cases of law that come before your Lordships, you require proofs from the mouths of competent witnesses, that the life, the health, the liberty, or the property of some individual, has been injured. You always require the appearance of two parties before you, the person who has been injured, if life be not taken, and the person who has done the injury. If proof be shewn to your Lordships, that some person has been injured, and that the wrong done is brought home to another before you, as his action, you then give the injured party damages from the property of the other, or you inflict the pains which the law warrants on him who has done the wrong. This is all right and intelligible: this is law that relates to physical grounds, and that is supported or defensible upon moral grounds. But I would ask your Lordships, who have I injured, does any one stand before your Lordships as my accuser, to say that he has been injured by me? Will any member of the Vice Society stand forward as my individual accuser, and say I have done him an injury? One of your Lordships was once a member of this prosecuting, this persecuting society; does his Lordship feel that I have done him an injury in the publication of the pamphlets before the Court?

Then, if I have done no one injury, if no unpaid individual stands in this Court as my accuser, upon what moral grounds can your Lordship inflict any kind of punishment upon me? I may be told that the King is the person injured, and that he is my accuser, but all this we know to be fiction, because though prosecuted in the name of the King, it is notorious to your Lordships, that I have done him no physical or moral harm. The duty of your Lordships is to judge of actions not opinions. Expressing opinions of any established institution, or selling a printed pamphlet containing such expressions, cannot be construed to be an individual injury arising from malicious motives; because, in all public institutions, every individual in the society has, or ought to have, an equal interest. An interest of the same import to the person who may disapprove, as to him who may approve. It will be said, or it has been said, that I have been tried and found guilty upon the principles of the common law of the land. This I am also prepared to dispute. It was lately asserted by the present Solicitor General, in the House of Commons, that the common law of the land had no other foundation than common sense, and that they were synonymous terms. Your Lordships will support this proposition of the common law, and you will not venture to say that it is opposed to common sense, nor that it deviates from it in any shape or degree. Now then, I shall apply the principles of common sense to this prosecution: if they will not tally, if I show your Lordships that they are opposed to each other, I think, and I should hope your Lordships will so think, that I shall have shewn reasons sufficient why I ought to be dismissed from this Court without punishment. I will lay it down as an axiom, that there is no kind of law, either statute or common, but such as is, or can be well understood by your Lordships. What you do not or cannot understand, can have no relation to law, because you cannot administer upon just ground as law, that of which you do not understand or comprehend the bearing, and to which you cannot attach one rational idea, or an idea that is supported by a reference to any known existence. If, then, Christianity has any connection with the common law, it must have a connection with common sense, which, I think, I have fairly proved to your Lordships, that it has not; or if I have not yet proved it, I can adduce other arguments for that purpose, against which I challenge an answer and discussion.

Words are the signs of all ideas, and of all legal, literary, political or religious knowledge; and unless the words we

use have an evident relation to a something we know to exist in nature, they are idle words, and of no meaning. Your Lordships fill those benches as expounders and propounders of the law, and if the system of words called Christianity be a part and parcel of that law, I call upon you, before you inflict any punishment upon me, for libelling or blaspheming this part of the law, to expound openly in this Court, in what Christianity consists, and where and how it can be proved to be related to, or connected with, any physical power in existence. This is the ground, and the only ground, whereupon this point can be tried, as to its being or not being a part of the law of the land.

An affirmation, or decree of your Lordships, or a statute of the British Parliament, would not convert the Juggernaut of the Hindoos into an animated or intellectual being, and equally impotent is the argument that asserts Christianity to be a part of the law, while it has a foundation in nothing but words, for more than this has not yet been proved. If we speak of Christianity abstracted from the actions of those who call themselves Christians, we speak of nothing but a word; that word has no reference but to those actions, and those actions have no foundation but that word. Christianity is, in fact, the representative of nothing as a word, it has no physical or moral definition, and is a word that cannot be expounded, as law ought always to be expounded.

There is another argument which applies well to my case, and is suited to that which I have just offered to your Lordships. Admitting, for argument's sake, that Christianity is a something, that it is a part and parcel of the law of the land, as has been so often said without proof or exposition, is it unlawful to speak evil of any particular part of the law, or of any one, or of all the laws? If it be unlawful to speak evil of any particular law, and if such conduct be punishable as libellous and blasphemous, then, indeed, the act called the New Marriage Act has made libellers and blasphemers of nine-tenths of the people, and the Vice Society may yet be satiated with prosecutions and with persecution. Will your Lordships say that it is unlawful to libel or blaspheme any law that has once obtained an existence? No! it will not be said. Then, if it be not unlawful to complain of, or to speak evil of, to libel, to blaspheme any particular law, and to shew that it ought to be abrogated, for the benefit of the community, upon what law, or principle of law, is that part of the law which is called Christianity entitled to special protection? Despotism may ride over this ques-

tion, but law cannot answer it: nor can your Lordships justify, upon any principle of law, the infliction of any punishment upon me for speaking evil of that part of the law called Christianity, and wishing its abrogation from a conviction that the community would be thereby benefited.

But Christianity has never yet been expounded to be a part of the law of the land, neither by the judges of the law, nor by the preachers and teachers of religion. I now call upon your Lordships, before you attempt to inflict any kind of punishment upon me, to expound that as law, which has so often been called so in words, that shall not only consist of words, but words that are relative to, and the signs of, real and known existences. If you punish me without doing this, you will not administer law and justice, but despotism and injustice.

I could put a hundred questions upon this subject to a person who calls himself a Christian, or to a person who says that Christianity is part and parcel of the law of the land, to which that person shall not be able to give me an answer, though my questions shall be confined to what he will admit to be essential points in the system of Christianity. It will suffice that I say, that no one point in the various doctrines of what may be called fictitiously the physical part of Christianity, has ever been proved. I repeat it, not a single point in all the words that have been applied to the term Christianity, for these last seventeen hundred years, has ever been proved, or attempted to be proved. Not a point of it can be proved; if it could be proved, it would be in the present day; for at no period of existing history had ever knowledge made such a progress as it has in this Island, at this moment; whilst the more sound and more extensive our knowledge, the further we get off from any proofs of the truth of the tenets of Christianity. Among the priests of this country, at this day, there are men of genius, deep literary research, and an extensive scientific knowledge, yet, bring the wisest of them before me, and I will abash him with a few questions on the subject of his religion, on his Christianity. By half a dozen questions, I would make him ashamed of his profession. Since, then, it is notorious that none of those alleged existences which Christianity teaches, do exist, the inference is, that there is no truth connected with that system of words: if there be no truth, there can be no common sense: and if there be no common sense, it cannot be supported as law, or by law, and your Lordships have no just and excuseable ground

whatever, whereon to inflict any punishment upon me. To talk of blaspheming words, to call it criminal, and to seek to inflict punishment upon it, is a sort of logic to which your Lordships might be ashamed to listen; and let me beg of you, before you inflict any kind of punishment upon me, to show that I have done any thing more than publish a blasphemy of certain words, which relate to nothing, and the publication of which has done no kind of injury, either to an individual or to the community at large.

If Mr. Carlile, my employer, and the author, printer, and publisher of the words for which I have been indicted, has blasphemed the words of Parson Wait, it was because this parson was ignorant and insolent enough to blaspheme, in the first instance, what he could not refute. If Mr. Carlile blasphemes, he refutes as well. In all the correspondences between Mr. Carlile and this priest, the former has shewn the falsehood of the words of his opponent, as well as having blasphemed them, whilst the latter has confined himself to blaspheming, without putting forth a word that can convince any person of the truth of the words which he wishes to defend. On our side, the whole thing has been nothing more than a fair discussion of words, and it ill becomes your Lordships, as judges of law, to meddle with the matter. Let those words, on both sides, stand or fall according to their intrinsic value and weight, and your Lordships will gain credit for wisdom, as well as fair play.

Blasphemy, in its very worst sense, is a speaking evil of any thing, and to denounce the most wicked person that lives, the most wicked act that can be done, or the most wicked words that can be spoken, is equally a piece of blasphemy. Blasphemy is no crime, nor even offence in morals, unless it be founded upon falsehood. Every indictment, every judicial, and even judicious sentence of your Lordships', are acts of blasphemy, because there must be an accusation of wrong, there must be evil speaking, whereupon to ground the indictment and the sentence. Blasphemy has its right and wrong, its good and bad, as well as advice, or any other thing in morals. There is a blasphemy that is good, as well as a blasphemy that is bad. Just reproof is a correct or a moral blasphemy. False charges form an incorrect, an immoral blasphemy. My indictment is a piece of immoral blasphemy throughout, because it contains a series of charges, not one of which has been proved, excepting the act of selling the pamphlets, which I admit, and the others were, in some measure a

moral and physical impossibility to prove. To tell me that I had incurred the high displeasure of Almighty God, is a piece of presumptuous blasphemy, of which a Christian lawyer only could be guilty. Mr. Carlile was blasphemed wrongfully in the discussion that has been the subject of my indictment, whilst he blasphemed the priest and the priest's words rightfully. The blasphemy that I have published is not charged to be false, and no one will venture to say that it is false. If God is truth, and if truth has any relation to God, then are my prosecutors striving against him, and they shall strive in vain. The God of truth I have not blasphemed, the religion of truth I have not blasphemed. It is not my disposition to blaspheme any thing but vice and falsehood, and this species of blasphemy merits the applause, not the punishment of your Lordships.

I have now addressed your Lordships fully upon what may be termed the law of my case, or rather, I have shewn that it has no relation to law, and I shall proceed to examine the *prudence* and *morality* of your inflicting any kind of punishment upon me. Upon just and legal grounds you cannot do it, for I feel confident that the arguments I have offered against such grounds are unanswerable; and I shall now enquire what justification can be found on moral grounds.

The first question that suggests itself is, Have I violated the laws of morality? Nothing of the kind is charged against me. The charge is, that I have wickedly scandalized and reproached the Christian religion; and a corrupt and ignorant Jury has said guilty upon the occasion: but from what we know of special Juries on those cases, how that Jury is formed, and whence its constitution emanates, it would have found me guilty of bringing scandal and reproach on the sun and moon, if such a charge had been made, and if the religion established by law had been a worship of those two planets, instead of the non-entities to which words are now addressed as a form of worship.

Your Lordships are, or ought to be, rightly and truly the conservators of public morals, and nothing more, for a breach of what is really law is a breach of morality; and it becomes a matter of great interest on my part to shew that I have not violated law or morality, by shewing that morality has no foundation in, connection with, or relation to, what is called religion; that the very essence of morality may be practised by that person in whose mind there is a complete absence of all religion.

Morality is a principle of action that has its foundation in the properties of virtue—of all that is right and good. It relates altogether to human actions, and is confined in its operations and results to human beings. Beyond the relations of human beings and other parts of the animal world it cannot be extended in motive or action. It forms the social duty of man with regard to all that exists about him: but it cannot relate to any unknown or feigned existence; it cannot relate to any thing that has ever come under the denomination of religion.

Religion is a thing that is wholly confined to the mind of man; it centers on the mind, and his actions amount to nothing, in a religious point of view, unless the mind strictly corresponds as the moving power or the stimulus to action, independent of any interest but that of pure motives and an absence of all hypocrisy and deception.

In religion you cannot prove the mind of man, you cannot tell the motives of the mind that stimulate the actions: but in morality the case is altogether different, for moral actions form the proofs of a moral mind, religious actions are no proofs of a religious mind. Taking a general view of mankind, we find that religious actions and professions are almost constantly founded in worldly interest, or that which is private, selfish, and partial, and at variance with the private sentiments of the mind, so much so, as never to be depended upon.

A moral action speaks for itself; it is good even if it proceeds from an immoral mind. It is thus evident that religion has no foundation or alliance with morality, but that they are two distinct principles in the human mind as well as in human actions, and carry no signs of relation.

Not the slightest breach of morality, not a single absence of moral duty has been proved or even charged against me; and though your Lordships are conservators of public morals, which are definable and intelligible to all, you cannot justly or legally set up yourselves as conservators of religious actions, duties, or relations that are totally undefinable. A breach of morality is a breach of law, because, in every breach of the kind some individual must be injured, and there must be an individual who has committed an injury; such a case forms a subject within and worthy of the cognizance of your Lordships, but what injury has been done in this case? Who complains of injury done by me? Where is my injured, unpaid accuser? Who are they who call upon your Lordships to inflict punishment upon

me? Are we sure that they are moral and honest themselves? They are a secret gang; we do not know them; and this prosecution has all the appearances of a trading concern, by which a few ignorant dupes are filched of money to fee the lawyers who alone appear against me. It is a conspiracy among a few priests and lawyers to deter, from all enquiry into the abuses on which they flourish, such individuals who are bold and honest enough to make it. It shall not succeed; no, not even if it has the support of your Lordships, which I trust it will not have on this occasion. Truth exposed by the power of bold and free enquiry will overthrow it. The day is gone by for seeking the aid of Judges of law to controul and shackle opinions, and to fix a standard for them as they fix a table of fees? No, no, it will no longer produce the desired effect, and your Lordships had better "be wise to-day," and tell these conspirators who have indicted me, or the lawyers who represent them, that their day is past, and that such villainy can be no longer countenanced. Let your Lordships cast your eyes throughout Europe and you will see, that the blood-cemented prejudices of past ages are crumbling to dust, and can no longer be preserved. The idols of ignorance or craft, and the ignorant and crafty idolators, must alike bend and retire before the rising and wide-spreading knowledge of the age. It is the height of madness and villainy to attempt to support the one or the other by indictment in these days. Your Lordships have now the opportunity to set a good example, and to put a stop for ever in this country to such practices, by sending me free from this Court. In so doing you would practically preserve your characters as conservators of public morals, for any punishment inflicted on me, on account of this indictment, will be a violation of law and morality. Religion is a thing that ought to stand by its own powers: if it has no power over the intelligent and enquiring mind, it is good for nothing, and ought to fall. In all other cases we grant superiority to the judgment of an intelligent mind, why not in this case, or, on the question of religion? In a matter of such vast import for human consideration, it is too much to require that intelligent minds shall succumb before the lowest gradations of ignorance, vice, folly, and known proved falsehood! Ignorance is the mother of religion, and the Vice Society seek his Majesty's Royal Letters Patent for its preservation and their profit, that intelligence may be made to pay tithes and tribute to it. Ignorance is the hand-maid of monarchial and priestly

legitimacy, but it is the duty of virtue and intelligence boldly to resist and honestly to triumph over it: that duty shall be performed.

What can be said of religion, when no one can define the duties it imposes; but that some other disputes and opposes them as wrong? It is impossible that such a non-entity, such an undefined, unintelligible thing, can constitute law, or claim the protection of morality. Religion is an incomprehensible phantom: morality is a comprehensible good—it is substantial, intelligible to every mind, and almost to every thing that has sensation. If we are kind and humane to almost every animal, we can impress it with something like notions of morality; it will feel kindness, and return it: but let us talk about religion to a brute animal, and what impression can we make upon it? None at all; and the reason is, that religion has no foundation in any thing natural, it is altogether an unnatural excitement of the human mind, and not a thing for protection by your Lordships, as Judges of the law and conservators of public morals. Every judicial interference on matters of religion is a breach of public morals. It is a violation of the sanctity of the mind, for every intelligent mind is a moving temple, and sacred to the purposes of meditation and reflection: it ought not to be enslaved nor incommoded with dogmas not its own; it should be as free to change as the atmosphere of which it is a limited and circumscribed part; restraint can only corrupt it, and to do this, it does not become your Lordships to assist. Imposed restraint on the mind may make hypocrites and immoral men, but can never aid the extension of morality. It is incompatible with the powers and character of the human mind that any laws can effectually controul it. When properly cultivated and properly excited, it is a machine of vast power, and as difficult to be controuled by other minds as the surrounding elements; it is altogether a thing of the elements; it contracts and expands; it storms and becomes calm; it is baneful or beneficial accordingly as it is acted upon by contingent circumstances. But it neither corrupts nor destroys, unless where it be impeded. A law has lately been made to enforce the practice of morality towards dumb animals; as far as it goes, it is good; but it premises an absence of morality in this highly Christian, this profoundly religious nation. This law will have its effect, because it relates to morality; it relates to something tangible. But what avail any laws that enforce the practice of religion? Nothing at all! All such

laws have failed. They have been null and void, with the exception of having been made the instruments of prodigious human suffering. Then I call solemnly and seriously upon your Lordships, as conservators of public morals, as guardians and protectors of the weak and poor against the oppressions of the strong and rich, to put a stop to the career of vice and persecution carried on by the Vice Society, or that association which falsely and hypocritically calls itself a Society for the Suppression of Vice.

I am sensible that I am calling upon those who have hitherto countenanced, supported, and applauded this Society, but it is always the right time to stop short in a career of error, and retrace our steps, and that in this case, my persecutors, not me, are in error, I am fully convinced, and the assurance that it will be so made to appear, makes me bold in performing my part in the serious drama now exhibited. I am satisfied that I stand upon the rock of truth, with all the laws of morality for my shield: my banner is the emblem of candour and simplicity, my weapons are reasonable arguments, and my enemies are tyrants, robbers, and oppressors. They may be strong and powerful, but they cannot crush me. If punished, if I suffer in this glorious warfare, I shall have the condolence and the support of all that is good, of all that is moral, of all that is honest, virtuous, and incorrupt in the country. The balm of public approbation will be mine, the lash of public disapprobation will fall on my tyrant persecutors.

In conclusion, I will recapitulate, in a few words, the substance of the whole of my arguments, by way of leaving their true and proper impression on your Lordships' minds. I am charged with unlawfully publishing a blasphemy on the Christian Religion. I have shewn your Lordships that the charge is legally erroneous, because the Christian Religion is a thing undefinable and unintelligible upon any legal, moral, or physical ground. I have shewn that it has no relation to morality, and consequently no relation to common sense, or what is common law. I have shewn that blasphemy is not in itself a crime, but that it may be moral and legal, as well as immoral and illegal, and that my blasphemy is of the former quality.

And I flatter myself that I have shewn in my conduct, as a whole, throughout this prosecution, that the human mind has reached that degree of knowledge that will enable it to triumph over every attempted oppression, and to defeat the desired ends of religious persecution. My boldness, if I

have shewn any, I ask your Lordships to attribute to a consciousness of innocence, and a candid sense of honesty; and since I have clearly shewn that I have committed no offence against law, or the law's foundation, public morals, I trust I shall not be punished for my defence, as has been the judicial practice of late, avowed and menaced.

This Court has witnessed slanderers and blasphemers of the most infamous kind purchase impunity from a silence that was tantamount to an inability to set up any kind of defence, whilst honest and moral individuals have been severely punished for fully proving and boldly asserting their innocence; and it has been illegally avowed, that the defence, more than the alleged offence, has been the ground and reason for punishment.

I feel warranted in introducing such remarks, upon the ground that Mr. Prichard, the solicitor for the prosecution, told me, personally, in the name of your Lordships, that I should receive a very severe sentence for making such a defence at the Guildhall in the city, before the special jury.

Had I committed any offence, I should, in consequence of such a menace, have set up an argument to shew, that your Lordships had no kind of authority, in law or justice, to punish for a defence, of whatever nature it may have been, but that your authority is solely confined to a cognizance of the offence. Insult may and ought to be punished as a contempt; but arguments in defence, however pointed and strong, can never constitute an insult or contempt. I therefore beg leave to suggest, for your Lordships' final consideration, that as the presence of my very strong and well-pointed arguments in defence have exploded the charge of an offence, I ought to be allowed to walk free from this Court, and return to my home, with my children and my husband, to pass my time as a moral member of the community, as I have always hitherto done. This the law warrants, and this justice, morality, and humanity demand that the Court should award, and that all useless religious persecution should cease henceforth and for ever.

Note.—Mrs. Wright, after many interruptions, read so far as the epitome of the Thirty-nine Articles, when she was committed to Newgate for persisting to read, to be brought up again on the fourth day of Hilary Term, 1823.