

endeavor to harmonize the astronomy and geology of a barbarous people with the science of the nineteenth century. Never, for one moment, did he abandon the sublime standard of truth; he investigated, he studied, he thought, he separated the gold from the dross in the crucible of his grand brain. He was never found on his knees before the altar of superstition. He stood erect by the grand tranquil column of Reason. He was an admirer, a lover, an adorer of Nature, and at the age of ninety, bowed by the weight of nearly a century, covered with the insignia of honor, loved by a nation, respected by a world, with kings for his servants, he laid his weary head upon her bosom—upon the bosom of the universal Mother—and with her loving arms around him, sank into that sweet slumber called Death.

The angel of history added another name to the starry scroll of the immortals.

The world is his monument; upon the eternal granite of her hills he inscribed his name, and there upon the everlasting stone his genius wrote this, the sublimest of truths,

“THE UNIVERSE IS GOVERNED BY LAW!”

CHARLES BRADLAUGH



CHARLES BRADLAUGH, an English radical politician, secularist, and socialist, was born at London, Sept. 26, 1833, and died there Jan. 30, 1901. His early schooling he received at elementary schools in the East End of London, and at fifteen began to speak before street audiences, and at nineteen was a lecturer on Free Thought. After a brief career in the army in Ireland, he became a lawyer's clerk in 1853, and for a number of years subsequently lectured in various places, scoring many platform successes, in spite of his hard, reckless, aggressive treatment of the themes which he handled. He edited successively "The Investigator" and "The National Reformer," and in 1868 sought to enter Parliament. After several unsuccessful contests for the borough of Northampton, he was at length returned by that town in 1880, but his difficulties were by no means passed. He claimed the right to take his seat by affirmation, instead of by taking the oath of allegiance, and the House at once passed a resolution barring his right of entrance by either method. In February, 1882, he appeared before the House of Commons, and, taking out a Testament from his pocket, administered the oath to himself. After successive exclusions, ejections, and reëlections, he was in 1886 permitted to take his seat, and in 1888 moved and carried a bill allowing members entering Parliament, if they wished, to affirm instead of taking the oath. Bradlaugh's extreme views moderated perceptibly after his entrance to Parliament. During his last illness the House of Commons voted to expunge its resolution, of June 22, 1880, denying Bradlaugh's right to affirm or take the oath. He published, in 1872, "The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick," and, in 1882, "The True Story of My Parliamentary Struggle."

AT THE BAR OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

MR. SPEAKER,—I have again to ask the indulgence of the House while I submit to it a few words in favor of my claim to do that which the law requires me to do. Perhaps the House will pardon me if I supply an omission, I feel unintentionally made, on the part of the honorable member for Chatham [Mr. John Gorst].

In some words which have just fallen from him I understood him to say that he would use a formal statement made

by me to the Committee against what the Chancellor of the Duchy had said I had said.

I am sure the honorable and learned member for Chatham, who has evidently read the proceedings of the committee with care, would, if he had thought it fair, have stated to the House that the statement only came from me after an objection made by me—a positive objection on the ground that it related to matters outside this House, and that the House in the course of its history had never inquired into such matters; but I can hardly understand what the member for Chatham meant when he said that he contrasted what I did say with what the Chancellor of the Duchy said I said; for it is not a matter of memory, it is on the proceedings of this House, that, being examined formally before the committee, I stated “that the essential part of the oath is in the fullest and most complete degree binding upon my honor and conscience, and that the repeating of the words of asseveration does not in the slightest degree weaken the binding of the allegiance on me.”

I now say I would not go through any form—much as I value the right to sit in this House, much as I desire and believe that this House will accord me that right—that I did not mean to be binding upon me without mental reservation, without equivocation. I would go through no form unless it were fully and completely and thoroughly binding upon me as to what it expressed or promised.

Mine has been no easy position for the last twelve months. I have been elected by the free votes of a free constituency. My return is untainted. There is no charge of bribery, no charge of corruption, nor of inducing men to come drunken to the polling-booth. I come here with a pure, untainted return—not won by accident. For thirteen long years have I

fought for this right—through five contested elections, including this. It is now proposed to prevent me from fulfilling the duty my constituents have placed upon me. You have force: on my side is the law.

The honorable and learned member for Plymouth [Mr., afterward Sir, Edward Clarke] spoke the truth when he said he did not ask the House to treat the matter as a question of law; but the constituencies ask me to treat it as a question of law. I, for them, ask you to treat it as a question of law. I could understand the feeling that seems to have been manifested were I some great and powerful personage. I could understand it had I a large influence behind me. I am only one of the people, and you propose to teach them that, on a mere technical question, you will put a barrier in the way of my doing my duty which you have never put in the way of anybody else.

The question is, Has my return on the 9th of April, 1881, anything whatever to impeach it? There is no legal disqualification involved. If there were, it could be raised by petition. The honorable member for Plymouth says the dignity of this House is in question. Do you mean that I can injure the dignity of this House?—this House which has stood unrivalled for centuries?—this House, supreme among the assemblies of the world?—this House, which represents the traditions of liberty? I should not have so libelled you.

How is the dignity of this House to be hurt? If what happened before the 9th of April is less than a legal disqualification, it is a matter for the judgment of the constituency and not for you. The constituency has judged me; it has elected me; I stand here with no legal disqualification upon me. The right of the constituency to return me is an unimpeachable right.

I know some gentlemen make light of constituencies; yet without the constituencies you are nothing. It is from them you derive your whole and sole authority. The honorable and learned member for Plymouth treats lightly the legal question. It is dangerous to make light of the law—dangerous, because if you are only going to rely on your strength of force to override the law, you give a bad lesson to men whose morality you impeach as to what should be their duty if emergence ever came. Always outside the House I have advocated strenuous obedience to the law, and it is under that law that I claim my right. It is said by the right honorable baronet [Sir Stafford Northcote], who interposes between me and my duty, that this House has passed some resolution.

First, I submit that that resolution does not affect the return of the 9th of April. The conditions are entirely different; there is nothing since the date of that return. I submit next, that, if it did affect it, the resolution was illegal from the beginning. In the words of George Grenville, spoken in this House in 1769, I say, if your resolution goes in the teeth of the law—if against the statute—your resolution is null and void. No word have I uttered outside these walls which has been lacking in respect to the House. I believe the House will do me justice, and I ask it to look at what it is I claim.

I claim to do that which the law says I must. Frankly, I would rather have affirmed. When I came to the table of the House I deemed I had a legal right to do it. The courts have decided against me, and I am bound by their decision.

I have the legal right to do what I propose to do. No resolution of yours can take away that legal right. You may act illegally and hinder me; and unfortunately I have no appeal against you. "Unfortunately," perhaps, I should not say. Perhaps it is better that the Chamber that makes the

law should never be in conflict with the courts which administer the laws that the Chamber makes. I think the word "unfortunately" was not the word I ought to have used in this argument.

But the force that you invoke against the law to-day may to-morrow be used against you, and the use will be justified by your example. It is a fact that I have no remedy if you rely on your force. I can only be driven into a contest, wearying even to a strong man well supported, ruinous and killing to one man standing by himself—a contest in which, if I succeed, it will be injurious to you as well as to me. Injurious to me, because I can only win by lessening your repute, which I desire to maintain. The only court I have the power of appealing to is the court of public opinion, which I have no doubt in the end will do me justice.

The honorable member for Plymouth said I had the manliness on a former occasion to make an avowal of opinions to this House. I did nothing of the kind. I have never, directly or indirectly, said one word about my opinions, and this House has no right to inquire what opinions I may hold outside its walls. The only right is that which the statute gives you; my opinions there is no right to inquire into. I shelter myself under the laws of my country. This is a political assembly, met to decide on the policy of the nation and not on the religious opinions of the citizens. While I had the honor of occupying a seat in the House, when questions were raised which touched upon religious matters I abstained from uttering one word. I did not desire to say one word which might hurt the feeling of even the most tender.

But it is said, Why not have taken the oath quietly? I did not take it then, because I thought I had the right to do something else, and I have paid the penalty. I have been plunged

in litigation fostered by men who had not the courage to put themselves forward. I, a penniless man, should have been ruined if it had not been that the men in workshop, pit, and factory had enabled me to fight this battle. [An interruption.]

I am sorry that honorable members cannot have patience with one pleading as I plead here. It is no light task, even if you put it on the lowest personal grounds, to risk the ambition of a life on such an issue. It is a right ambition to desire to take part in the councils of the nation if you bring no store of wisdom with you and can only learn from the great intellects that we have. What will you inquire into? The right honorable baronet would inquire into my opinions. Will you inquire into my conduct, or is it only my opinions you will try here?

The honorable member for Plymouth frankly puts it, opinions. If opinions, why not conduct? Why not examine into members' conduct when they come to the table, and see if there be no members in whose way you can put a barrier?

Are members whose conduct may be obnoxious to vote my exclusion because to them my opinions are obnoxious? As to any obnoxious views supposed to be held by me, there is no duty imposed upon me to say a word. The right honorable baronet has said there has been no word of recantation.

You have no right to ask me for any recantation. Since the ninth of April you have no right to ask me for anything. If you have a legal disqualification, petition, lay it before the judges. When you ask me to make a statement you are guilty of impertinence to me, of treason to the traditions of this House, and of impeachment of the liberties of the people. My difficulty is that those who have made the most bitter at-

tacks upon me only made them when I was not here to deal with them.

One honorable and gallant member recently told his constituents that this would be made a party question, but that the Conservative members had not the courage to speak out against me. I should have thought, from reading "Hansard," not that they wanted courage, but that they had cultivated a reticence that was more just. I wish to say a word or two on the attempt which has been made to put on the government of the day complicity in my views.

The Liberal party has never aided me in any way to this House. Never. I have fought by myself. I have fought by my own hand. I have been hindered in every way that it was possible to hinder me; and it is only by the help of the people, by the pence of toilers in mine and factory, that I am here to-day after these five struggles right through thirteen years. I have won my way with them, for I have won their hearts, and now I come to you. Will you send me back from here?

Then how? You have the right, but it is the right of force and not of law. When I am once seated on these benches, then I am under your jurisdiction. At present I am under the protection of the writ from those who sent me here. I do not want to quote what has happened before; but if there be one lesson which the House has recorded more solemnly than another, it is that there should be no interference with the judgment of a constituency in sending a man to this House against whom there is no statutory disqualification. Let me appeal to the generosity of the House as well as to its strength. It has traditions of liberty on both sides. I do not complain that members on that [the Conservative] try to keep me out. They act according to their lights, and think

my poor services may be injurious to them. [Cries of "No!"] Then why not let me in? It must be either a political or a religious question.

I must apologize to the House for trespassing upon its patience. I apologize because I know how generous in its listening it has been from the time of my first speech in it till now. But I ask you now, do not plunge with me into a struggle I would shun. The law gives me no remedy if the House decides against me. Do not mock at the constituencies. If you place yourselves above the law, you leave me no course save lawless agitation instead of reasonable pleading. It is easy to begin such a strife, but none knows how it would end. I have no court, no tribunal to appeal to: you have the strength of your votes at the moment. You think I am an obnoxious man, and that I have no one on my side. If that be so, then the more reason that this House, grand in the strength of its centuries of liberty, should have now that generosity in dealing with one who to-morrow may be forced into a struggle for public opinion against it.