

Cambridge Daily News Saturday 5th December 1891

THE SPINNING HOUSE SCANDAL

By Our Own Reporter

It was with some feelings of trepidation and not a little misgiving that I was ushered into the building which has become notorious throughout the of realms of civilisation, and over whose portals ought to be written, in flaming letters, the inscription, usually associated with another place - 'All hope abandon ye who enter here!' Inside the gates, which had opened to my "Rat, tat, tat," I found a confrere, looking somewhat scared, due, I have since learned, to his being locked up in a dark corridor in company that did not tend to allay apprehension. The Court had been announced with a flourish of trumpets, to be an "open" court, and, acting upon this proclamation, I proceeded to walk through the precincts to the court itself. In the lobby a female attendant conveyed the information that reporters would not be admitted until the Vice-Chancellor had been consulted upon the matter, and, as that dignitary had not arrived, the reporters had to cool their heels in the court-yard for a time. Subsequently a Proctor came upon the scene or rather a bevy of Proctors and I intimated to the lady in waiting that she might appeal to them for permission for the Pressmen to enter sanctum sanctorum beyond. She did with "If you please, Mr Proctor, there's the reporters to get in." Mr Proctor stared, but vouchsafed no reply to the query. Then the good woman intimated that she wanted to lock the gate of the yard adding tersely, "You please stand out in the lobby. If you are wanted I will let you know." Sadly I retreated into the lobby, sighing over the newly-found freedom of the Court, and mentally blessing the proctors and the proctors' master. However it no use "kicking against pricks" and I had be content with a view of the promised land through a formidable iron grating ! Presently a more than usually formidable knock at the door heralded the arrival of the Vice-Chancellor and five minutes later a messenger brought tidings of great joy to the disconsolate Pressmen who were ushered into the Court to find seats, after bowing to the interrogatory of the Vice-Chancellor, "Are you reporters?" The room into which we had been admitted is small

in proportion with bare walls and strongly-barred windows. It was reassuring to recall the couplet of the poet that:

*Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.*

otherwise one might imagined that over-grown cell had been temporarily turned into a court-room. In front of a table sat the presiding genius, the Vice-Chancellor. On his right were a group of proctors and at the table also sat the Clerk of Court with the solicitor for defence of the hapless girl, Daisy Hopkins. Opposite the Vice - Chancellor and beyond the table are a couple of seats in shape like the pews in a church. Here the reporters found seats for their bodies but no resting-place for their note-books. Immediately behind, separating what may be called the well of the Court from the public were iron railings, some eight or ten feet high through which the public peered with much apparent interest. After some delay, the proceedings of the Court commenced and a greater burlesque upon a Court of Law it would be difficult to imagine. The Vice-Chancellor is not hampered with any well-defined formula. He constitutes a law unto himself and from his ruling there is no appeal. Point after point was raised by Mr Lyon only to be over-ruled "in the discretion of the Court" with a cold cynicism that was simply sickening. Well might a member of the Borough Bench who was an interested spectator of the scene, exclaim that "it made my blood boil." The whole of the proceedings are a parody upon justice and but for the grave consequences attaching to those who are hauled before this tribunal, might very well be dismissed with a contemptuous laugh. Another remarkable feature in this free and open (?) Court is the peremptory order given for all members of the University quit its walls. What would the world think if members of the University were admitted to our borough police court and townspeople rigorously excluded ! And yet one action is just as reasonable as another. With regard to the case of the incarcerated girl there is but one opinion outside the University - and even there opinion is much divided - that the sentence passed upon her is a direct infringement of the rights and of liberties of the subject. The prosecution failed prove anything detrimental to the girl's character even had they proved all they strove to prove, up to hilt, the gravity of the outrage that has been committed is not lessened one jot.

After Mr Lyon's experience of the new court and its mode of procedure, how many solicitors are there in Cambridge that will care to practice there ? Mr Lyon in the face of rebuffs that would have discouraged and dismayed many advocates stuck to his client with a determination that has won for him golden opinions. Only instructed five minutes before the case came on, without having any opportunity of personally consulting with the accused; refused every concession he asked for, he made a gallant fight not only for individual accused, but for elementary principle of liberty which the Court denies to those who by the misfortune of being residents in Cambridge come within the meshes of this precious Charter. There is one damning piece of evidence against the University authorities which Mr Lyon in the heat of the case did not pursue. The witnesses for the University stated that Mr Russell was not wearing either cap or gown. How then, in the name of common sense, supposing Daisy Hopkins to be guilty of the heinous crime of speaking to this man, could she have known that Mr Russell was a member of the University ? That gentleman denied the fact emphatically when taxed by the constable, and it is not likely that the girl would be able by some mysterious method to penetrate his disguise and so avoid the consequences of her indiscretion.

TO THE EDITOR

Sir I have just read your report of the Spinning House case. Do the people of Cambridge possess any backbone or not ? Are such monstrous proceedings to take place in our midst ? Mr C Russell of Jesus College Cambridge in his evidence. reported by you, says : She looked at me, I spoke to her. It was Corpus College. I went with her up Botolph-lane. I asked her if she could take me to her rooms!

Is there no law, by Charter and Common Law, to prosecute the person who solicits a girl of 17 or 18? If there is, in all fairness let him be prosecuted. I am a poor man but will give £1 towards the cost of such prosecution.

*The person who debauches is worse than the girl.
No such crime as you report is known to the Common Law of England and if Daisy Hopkins had looked at the same person in any*

other place than a University town no action would have been possible.

The liberty of the subject in Cambridge is at low ebb. The late agitation (far too weak) has done one thing, at any rate - compelled these people to hold public trials instead of private, and I trust its first case will be made the opportunity of a "vigorous" outbreak against the continuance of such powers as are exercised by the University.

I say nothing about the "trial" except to call attention to the unseemly haste with which it was rushed to a conclusion, and trust that the gentleman who appeared for the defence will not let the matter rest where it is.

One thing is certain, the University in Cambridge is not an unmixed blessing to the town. Yours, etc., Birkby Baldwin Cambridge Dec 4th

The following letter appears in the Daily Chronicle to-day (Saturday):— Sir Your report of the above case makes one's blood boil, to think that in this so-called enlightened England it is possible for the Vice-Chancellor of a University to sentence a (to all accounts) respectable girl to 14 days' imprisonment for the awful crime of speaking to an Undergraduate ! Now, sir, this is a disgrace to civilisation and must be remedied forthwith, and I ask you, through your powerful paper, to appeal to the Home Secretary for the immediate release of this girl. A Vice-Chancellor must no longer have jurisdiction in a case of this kind and, although the people of Cambridge undoubtedly benefit to large extent through the University, the fact of their having to put up with this abominable petty tyranny is a national disgrace. The Vice-Chancellor personally may be a very capable man but his sense of justice and common sense must be sadly wanting if his finding in this case is to be taken

as a sample. It reminds one of the poor Manipur Princes¹ who through their mistaken notion of right and wrong (or shall we say want of knowledge) and daring to protect themselves, suffered by losing their heads. Yours respectfully W F Brown, London December 4th.

THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE SPINNING HOUSE CASE

The Social Wing of the Salvation Army is taking up the new Cambridge Spinning House case. The Salvationist officer in command at Cambridge has been interviewing the relatives and friends of Daisy Hopkins and investigating the affair generally. So much was intimated in a letter forwarded to the Home Secretary from the Salvation Army headquarters on Friday. In this letter writer Colonel Barker petitions for a remission of the sentence passed on Miss Hopkins and says he hopes to be able to put evidence at the disposal of the Home Office which will vindicate her character. The Salvation Army, it will be remembered, did good service in exposing the last Spinning House scandal. - Daily Chronicle

FURTHER PRESS OPINIONS from "The Star"

The London Star of last (Friday) night contained the following reference to the Spinning House :— ABOLISH THE SPINNING HOUSE I AN ATROCIOUS SCANDAL ! WORSE THAN ANY THAT HAVE GONE BEFORE! Daisy Hopkins will have to be released from the black-hole of the Cambridge Spinning House without undergoing the 14 days' imprisonment to which she was yesterday condemned. The sooner this atrocious scandal is brought to the notice of the Home Secretary and the sooner he orders the girl's

¹ This is a reference to events in Manipur in April 1891. The Imphal Times in 2022 wrote: *The invading British forces occupied Kangla, the royal palace and symbol of Manipur's sovereignty on 27th April, 1891. In the subsequent developments the royal princes and important nobles of the country who took part in defence of the kingdom were rounded up one after another, put to trial where none of the accused was allowed to engage professional defence counsel. Some of them were awarded capital punishment and others given sentence of life imprisonment. Those awarded life imprisonment were exiled and deported to Kala Pani at the Andaman to spend the rests of their life including the deposed king Kullachandra. The trial of the Manipuris was described as mockery of justice and fair play. The manner in which the trial was conducted, and the legality in the composition of the court of enquiry to conduct the trial was questioned in media circles and in the British parliament as well. But the adage of 'might is right' was fully practised by the imperialists. Their media was so powerful that the Manipuris were branded as treacherous, barbaric and blood thirsty people.*

enlargement, the better it will be for the credit of the Vice-Chancellor of the University. For as an example of the reformed procedure at Spinning House trials it is worse than the old secret trial scandals. Daisy Hopkins is a girl of 17, living with her parents at 36 Gold street. She was detected speaking to a college man and promptly thrown into Spinning House, to be yesterday arraigned before the Vice-Chancellor on this awful charge. She is described as tall and well-dressed. For the first time on record evidence was taken on oath and accused was allowed to be represented by Counsel. But the value of these

CONCESSIONS TO FAIR PLAY

is less than at first appears on paper. While all the witnesses against the girl were sworn she was refused permission to make a statement on oath nor was her legal representative allowed to examine her. Oh, most impartial court! Under their Charter. the University had to prove that Daisy Hopkins was “a person suspected of evil.” There was no evidence to prove this. Mr Lyon had witnesses as to character asked for a remand in order that he might call a clergyman who knew the girl and he also asked for a subpoena for that gentleman. But no! There was to be no other side of the story told. A bench of the most blundering J.P.’s would hardly have dared refuse an adjournment in a case like this where evidence as to character is almost everything for the accused ... The proceedings have caused much excitement in the town and University. Outside the town and University they will have excited the greatest disgust and indignation.

WHAT THE “Pall Mall” SAYS

The Pall Mall Gazette of last (Friday) night contained the following : “Another Spinning House Scandal— Dr Peile the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University certainly deserves, and is unfeignedly tendered, our best thanks for the way in which he has again brought the Spinning House scandal to the front. His manner of doing so may be open to some exception, but the force and cogency of it cannot for a moment be questioned. Until his proceedings in yesterday’s case, the scandal had apparently retired somewhat to the background. On general principle, indeed, and as

a matter of abstract theory, everybody who took our side in the protest which we raised on the occasion of last scandal remained, we imagine, of the same opinion still. Coercion is odious whether in England or in Ireland: and it is not made more laudable when the persons against whom exceptional laws are administered are women. But as a matter of immediately practical politics some cause had certainly been shown for letting the matter rest. At Oxford, it was pointed out, the Coercion Courts were not conducted with quite such complete disregard of every elementary principle of justice and every judicial form as at Cambridge. And the Cambridge authorities promised to set their house in order by adopting some of Oxford customs. "For first time on record we read in the report of yesterday's proceedings. which is not without its touch of sedate irony, "evidence was taken on oath and the prisoner was allowed to be represented by counsel." So far so good. It is something that the University, even at the end of the 19th century, should pay this amount of homage to the elementary forms justice. Again the form of procedure at the Spinning House might, it was urged, be antiquated, but then, how patriarchal and benevolent was the tyranny! The proctors, we are told, were social reformers. Nothing was further we were assured from anybody's thoughts than to do even a moment's wrong to any poor girl of the town. On the contrary, nothing was ever done, except for the girl's good, and the Spinning House was intended, not more to preserve the morals of the young men than to reclaim and reform the young women! Such was the case made out for maintenance of the Coercion Courts at Oxford and Cambridge; and, in view of further compromises and concessions, the question of principle was in some danger of being once more forgotten. From this danger Dr Peile has removed the anti-coercion cause at a stroke. He has shown in the frankest possible fashion that the forms of judicial fairness adopted at Cambridge are a pretence, and that the benevolent intentions of the proctors and their constables are a sham. He reminded us all once more that irresponsible and exceptional powers are certain to be abused and that the system of special laws and special tribunals at the Universities is as unjust in practice as it is indefensible in theory. Let us take, first, the reforms in procedure about which much was made as a concession but which Dr Peile turned inside out so frankly yesterday. He allowed evidence to be taken on oath; but as his right to administer the oath is somewhat arbitrary, he

might have allowed the prisoner to be sworn also. This however he declined to do; but what is more important was his refusal to grant a remand in order that the prisoner might call further witnesses in her defence. So far as the report before us enables us to judge, this was a scandalously unjust decision. The girl's alleged offence took place on Wednesday evening at 10.30. The case came on the very next morning and yet the magistrate, if one may use a judicial term of so unjudicial a personage— declined to give the girl any time to call witnesses. What's the good of taking evidence on oath and allowing the girl to be represented by counsel if all the time the power of effectual defence is, in practice, to be taken from her by other means? Had the evidence against her been overwhelming there would have been some excuse for Dr Peile. But it not and this takes us from the form of procedure to the merits of the case. The girl was charged as a common woman but no evidence in support of that allegation appears to have been given. On the contrary, the constables admitted in cross - examination that they had never seen the prisoner behaving in an improper manner; whilst two witnesses called for the defence gave her an excellent character. It alleged against her further that she was "talking to a University man"! But it was proved, on the contrary, that it was the University man who spoke to her! About what the University said there was a conflict of evidence; but he himself admitted that it was he who began the conversation. What, therefore, it comes to, on the evidence as reported, is this, that a girl, against whose character nothing whatever was proved, has been sent to prison for 14 days and branded as a common woman because she was spoken to by a University man! It is surely unnecessary to say another word in condemnation of the Academical Act. If exceptional measures are necessary at the Universities at all, and the common law of England is insufficient then in the name of all that is just and reasonable let the coercion be administered [against] the members of the Universities, [not against] members of the general public.

The following letter is illegible in the BNA

TO THE EDITOR Sir Could you spare space for short letter in I express view our view of Spinning House question authorities should know their i laying up store of biiterness in the hearts of any rate of undergraduates of this University and bitterness perhaps

because of its very incapacity present will some burst out and be formidable enemy and direction it will take will be hatred of all authorities themselves bold whether they religious or moral We may course confounding together things that are really separate but distinguishing is difficult task shall say " This clergymen do is kind of bigotry which in minds of people who talk about purity this is part of great puritan wave which is rolling so threateningly now" and all our hatred will be together Once more it is religious moral system of men which will brunt of it comes fancy it would be well for religious people if they did not rouse anti-religious storm is educational place this is place improve but some of us are being educated rather strange hostility to everything is called morality hostility which is absolutely disinterested and which springs from our Yoon Ac Oswald Sickest

Trinity College Cambridge December 4th