

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

OF

THE SOCIETY

FOR THE

Abolition of Capital Punishment.

MAY, 1868.

The Committee have felt it desirable to postpone the publication of the Report until after the decision on the *Capital Punishment Bill* had been made known. That measure passed the second reading on the evening of Tuesday, April 21st, and went into committee the same night, and has since been read in the House of Commons a third time on Monday evening, April 27th. As its passage through the Upper House is a matter of course, the Bill may be considered as virtually law, and we shall be spared, for the future, the scandal of public executions. Notwithstanding an amendment of Mr. Gilpin to the effect that the Report of the Royal Commission and the state of public opinion justified the abolition of the death penalty, the measure was carried by a majority of 127 to 23, a result not wholly unexpected. Mr. Gilpin had great disadvantages to contend with, but he felt that it was an opportunity of stating the views of those who advocate abolition that should not be lost. His speech was clear and effective, and no attempt to answer it, or the speech of Mr. Neale, was made. The public mind is occupied by a subject of vast importance, and one that involves, besides other consequences, the fate of a nation:—many of the friends of abolition in parliament were of opinion that it would have been better not to introduce the question at present, but to wait the first opportunity in a reformed House of Commons:—others regarded the private executions as a step towards total abolition, and looked upon Mr. Gilpin's amendment as in effect in favour of public executions; that it was a phase of the question through which we must pass; and others, again, thought that it would hasten the abolition, as the privacy of such executions would become intolerable to the public. Many of the best friends of abolition, moreover, were absent from illness and unavoidable causes, and the majority in all probability was swayed by the advocacy of Capital Punishment by Mr. Mill.

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