

" 185 1/2 Queen St. West, Toronto, April 3, 1899.  
To the Hon. the Postmaster-General,  
Ottawa, Ont.

" SIR,—I have received a notification from you that my journal, SECULAR THOUGHT, will not be allowed to pass through the Canadian mails, the ground of your order being the appearance in it of an article entitled 'An Easter Hymn.'

" In asking you to rescind your order, I beg to submit these considerations :

" You must be well aware that the editor of a paper cannot always exercise full supervision over all the matter which appears in it. If every journal were to be suppressed in which an objectionable item might occasionally appear, probably few journals would continue to be published.

" My journal is subscribed to by many prominent men in Canada, and I have received many letters approving of its general conduct and its clean and moderate tone. I greatly regret that any item should have appeared to which you could take exception.

" To carry out your order will involve me in very serious loss, and this is a punishment which I think your sense of justice will show you should not be inflicted without my being heard in my own defence.

" Should you favor me by rescinding your order, I will endeavor to see that no such objectionable matter shall appear in future.

" I would beg also to mention that our papers of last week, which were mailed on Thursday, and on which postage had been paid, have been stopped and returned to us.

" Very respectfully yours,  
" J. SPENCER ELLIS."

The Postmaster-General returned this reply :

" POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, CANADA,  
OTTAWA, 6th April, 1899.

" J. Spencer Ellis, Esq.,  
185 1/2 Queen St. West, Toronto.

" Sir,—I am directed to acknowledge your letter of the 3rd instant, on the subject of the notification conveyed to you in my letter of the 30th ultimo, that the journal entitled SECULAR THOUGHT, published at Toronto and edited by you, would in future be excluded from the mails on account of the objectionable character of a portion of the contents of the issue of the 25th ultimo.

" You add that this order should be rescinded, observing that 'the editor of a paper cannot always exercise full supervision over all the matter which appears in it;' that the general character of the paper has been 'clean and moderate;' and that you 'much regret that any item should have appeared in it to which objection could reasonably be taken.'

" You add that should the order be rescinded you will endeavor to see that no such objectionable matter shall appear in future.

" In reply, I am to say that section 170 of the Criminal Code (1892) makes it an indictable offence to publish 'any blasphemous libel' (the word 'libel' in this case being used in its general legal sense of any writing) while the Post Office Act 49 Vic. Chap. 35, Sec. 103 declares that 'every one who posts for transmission or delivery by or through the post any . . . matter or thing of an indecent, immoral, seditious, disloyal, scurrilous or libellous character . . . is guilty of a misdemeanor.'

" The contribution entitled 'An Easter Hymn,' which appeared in the issue of your paper above referred to, is in the opinion of the Postmaster-General of a class of publications prohibited by law and therefore not entitled to the privileges of the Post Office.

" He infers from your letter that it was so published without your knowledge.

" In view of the statement you make that you will 'endeavor to see that no such objectionable matter shall appear in future,' I am to say that if you can undertake to exercise such a care that no prohibited publications shall hereafter appear in the columns of the paper the privilege of the mails will be restored.

" It must be very clearly understood, however, that such supervision shall be efficiently and regularly performed, so that

the Department may not be under the necessity of calling in question subsequent issues of the paper. If such matter appeared in future issues, the Department would have to conclude that the paper was not one to which the privilege of the mails should be granted.

" If you are prepared to accept this arrangement, and will telegraph me to that effect to-morrow, the Postmaster at Toronto will be instructed by telegraph to allow the paper to go forward.

" I am, sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
" W. D. LESUEUR.  
" Secretary."

In accordance with the conditions thus laid down, we sent this message by telegraph :

" TORONTO, April 7, 1899.

" W. D. LeSueur, Esq.,  
Secretary Postmaster-General, Ottawa.  
" RE SECULAR THOUGHT.

" Sir,—I accept arrangement proposed in your letter of yesterday, and will observe conditions named in good faith.

" J. SPENCER ELLIS."

Now, although we are once again on deck, and are fully prepared to keep our engagement with the Postmaster-General to keep strictly within the law according to his interpretation of it, and until it is made both less doubtful and more in accord with present day notions of liberty and justice, the situation is not without grave difficulties for us. Some of our friends would perhaps be pleased to see all matter excluded from our columns except solid argumentative articles; others demand a larger attention to scientific matters; and others, including many of our best supporters, like to see some relief from the heavier mental food that satisfies the more phlegmatic sections. On the whole, we think we have fairly satisfied our subscribers, and especially those of the last class, though, as one of our correspondents hints, we can hardly expect to readily find a modern rival to Voltaire. But our difficulty arises in drawing the line between what the Postmaster-General may consider objectionable and what he may think allowable in the way of religious humor. With "An Easter Hymn" as an example, we may mark certain ideas as coming within the range of subjects to be kept out of the sacrilegious clutches of "A. Cede," though we presume that official etiquette may be satisfied if they are dealt with by our more sober friend Cattell. On these subjects we shall have to exercise our risible faculties in private, and not as if we were in a circus gazing at Barnum's mermaid, and looking at the yokels wondering at—and believing in—the marvellous freak of nature before them. We presume it will be allowable to laugh a little at drunken old Noah, or Balaam's talking ass, or Samson's foxes: but possibly it will not be wise to laugh too loud, for fear that some future Postmaster-General, possibly more bigoted and more autocratic than the present one, may make out a case against us of constructive blasphemy, and send us off to jail as well as stop the paper. For our own part, we cannot see where to draw the line, for, just as there is no quality in miracle—all miracles are equally wonderful,—so divinity does not admit of any qualification. To doubt the truth or "sacredness" of the words of a "divine man" is logically no more blasphemous