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Blasphemy, it appears, is not within the bounds of the criminal law of New Zealand—"crimes against religion" not having been suggested as among the necessities or luxuries of a young community carving out homes in the wilderness. If the Codifiers were not mere copyists, they thought the time had arrived when the crimes in question should be added to the resources of civilisation, and that the new Code should equip the minions of the law with the means of suppressing irreverence dignified by the name of crime. The Freethought Conference, under the competent guidance of Mr. Stout, passed a resolution in favor of petitioning against the introduction of the "crime," and it would now seem to be the duty of Freethinkers to unite in defending the liberty they already possess, whether such liberty be due to an oversight or the generous impulses of legislators. There is no occasion for protecting religion by means of the criminal law. Ribald attacks on any form of religious confession only injure those who make them and give to theology the appearance of virtues it probably does not possess. No Freethinker allows his criticism in its severest form to degenerate into "indecent language." But it was well shown at the Conference that if the Code became law, the liberty of a Freethinker might some day be placed at the mercy of an orthodox and bigoted jury. A Christchurch newspaper, in criticising the action of the Conference, says the "crime" will be discussed from a *political* point of view when the Code is under consideration in Parliament. The meaning of this is not quite clear. It is a political axiom that the legislature should not unnecessarily create crime, and this is sufficient reason why it should not enact blasphemy.

Under the head of "Crimes against Religion" is the offence of assaulting ministers of Religion. "Every one is liable to two years' imprisonment with hard labor who—(1) By threat or force obstructs or prevents or endeavors to obstruct or prevent any clergyman or other minister of religion, in or from lawfully officiating in any church, chapel, meeting-house or other place of religious worship, or in or from the performance of his duty in the lawful burial of the dead in any churchyard or other burial-place; or (2) Strikes or offers any violence to, or arrest upon or under the pretence of executing any civil process, any clergyman or other minister of religion who is engaged in, or to the knowledge of the offender is about to engage in, any of the rites or duties mentioned in the last subsection, or in going to perform the same or returning from the performance thereof." There is a further clause entailing a penalty of forty pounds for "disturbing public worship." These clauses do not specially concern Freethinkers except as citizens careful to guard against abuses which affect the body politic. Now is this special legislation called for? A drunkard commits an ordinary assault on a citizen and

is summarily dealt with, but if he be guilty of the same offence against a clergyman he will be sent before a jury and be liable to two years with hard labor! Is there any reason for the distinction? In a country where there is no State Church priests are citizens and nothing more, or the State departs from its secular character. The foundation of all punitive laws is the protection of person and property, and the question arises in every act of legislation whether a suggested penalty is sufficient in a given case of infraction. The legislator is well aware that excessive punishment defeats its own ends, by creating sympathy for the criminal, through which his chances of escape are increased; and the penalty is made to err on the side of leniency rather than on that of severity, in order that the more effective deterrent of public reprobation may supplement the sentence. It may be said that the penalty is a maximum one, and that the judge has the discretionary power of apportioning the punishment to the nature of the offence. But it is the duty of the judge to keep in view the intentions of the legislature, and if for one offence a maximum penalty of three months imprisonment is provided, and for another two years, he will consider himself bound to recognise the distinction. It is moreover an abuse of terms to describe a common assault upon a clergyman as a "crime against religion," as it simply comes within the common category of an offence against society, and should be dealt with as such. It is best for all parties—clergymen, religion, and society at large—that the clause should be swept from the Code.

The taxation of church property is a question which will become more urgent as its merits are better appreciated by the electors generally. It is difficult to see why any property should not pay its fair share of either local or general taxation. If the property is much the owners are better able to pay; if it is little, the sacrifice will not be cruel. There are two reasons why church property should not be exempted. The first is that it receives the same protection and the same enhancement of value from the Government and the progress of society, as any other kind of property. The second is that the State, in exempting ecclesiastical property from taxation, is distinctly recognising religion, and wandering outside the secular sphere to which, in the colonies at least, it professes to confine itself. Freethinkers in some instances have claimed exemption for their own halls and places of meeting on the ground that they are a religious body. In one sense Freethought is a religious movement, and its claims to exemption are just as good as those of a theological sect; but that does not make the demand for exemption good in itself, and we think it not advisable or indeed justifiable to prefer an indefensible claim on the ground that others have obtained the same concession as that sought for. The best plan is to ask candidates for the Assembly whether they will agree to tax Church