

James Watson – A Memoir of the days of the fight for a free press in England and of the agitation for the People's Charter pp17 -19

"It was in the autumn of 1818 that I first became acquainted with politics and theology. Passing along Briggate one evening, I saw of the corner of Union Court a bill, which stated that the Radical Reformers held their meetings in a room in that court. Curiosity prompted me to go and hear what was going on. I found them reading Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, Carlile's *Republican*, and Cobbett's *Register*. I remembered my mother being in the habit of reading Cobbett's *Register*, and saying she wondered people spoke so much against it; she saw nothing bad in it, but she saw a great many good things in it. After hearing it read in the meeting room, I was of my mother's opinion.

"In that room I first became acquainted with one who became my friend and constant companion; his name was William Driver. His name and my own were spoken of together amongst our friends in the same manner as afterward my name was mentioned with that of my friend Hetherington. From this time until 1822 I was actively engaged with Mr. Brayshaw, Joseph Hurtley, Robert Byerley (my wife's father), Humphrey Boyle, Mr. Gill, and a number of other friends, in collecting subscriptions for Mr. Carlile, spreading the liberal and free-thinking literature, and, by meetings and discussions, endeavouring to obtain the right of free discussion. In 1821 the Government renewed the prosecutions for blasphemy, and Mr. Carlile (then in Dorchester gaol under a three years sentence) appealed to the friends in the country to serve in the shop. Humphrey Boyle was the first volunteer from Leeds. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. On the 18th of September, 1822, I arrived in London, the second Leeds volunteer. I served in the shop at 5, Water Lane, Fleet Street, until Christmas, when I spent a week with Mr. Carlile in Dorchester gaol. At that time Mrs. Carlile and Mr. Carlile's sister were his fellow-prisoners. We talked over many plans and business arrangements.

"At this time the plan of selling the books by a sort of clockwork, so that the seller was not seen, was in practice. Notwithstanding that precaution, Wm. Tunbridge was arrested, tried, and sentenced to two years imprisonment, and fined £100. In January, 1823, Mr. Carlile took a shop in the Strand, No. 201. Mrs. Carlile, having completed her two years imprisonment, resided in the rooms above the shop. Towards the end of February I was arrested for selling a copy of Palmer's *Principles of Nature*, taken to Bow Street, and, not able to procure bail in London, was sent to Clerkenwell prison, where I remained six weeks. Two of my Leeds friends, Joseph Hurtley and Robert Byerley, then became bail for me. My trial took place on the 23rd of April, at Hick's Hall, Clerkenwell Green, before Mr. Const and the bench of magistrates. I conducted my own defence. Reports had been circulated that the persons who had been taken from Mr. Carlile's shop were but tools in the hands of others, and incapable of defending themselves: which was not true, as Boyle and others of the shopmen had defended themselves.