

BONNER HYPATIA BRADLAUGH,  
ROBERTSON JOHN MACKINNON

**CHARLES  
BRADLAUGH: A  
RECORD OF HIS  
LIFE AND WORK,  
VOLUME 2 (OF 2)**

**John Robertson  
Hypatia Bonner**

**Charles Bradlaugh: a Record of  
His Life and Work, Volume 2 (of 2)**

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*Charles Bradlaugh: a Record of His Life and Work, Volume 2 (of 2) / With  
an Account of his Parliamentary Struggle, Politics and Teachings. Seventh  
Edition:*

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**PART I**

**CHAPTER I.  
IN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN**

Mr. Bradlaugh had agreed to make a second lecturing tour through the States in the autumn of 1874, and he started on it under the most inauspicious circumstances. We have just seen how he was obliged to delay his journey – just as earlier in the year he had been obliged to hasten his return – to contest the

election at Northampton, where he was once more defeated for the third and last time. He had originally taken his passage by the White Star Line, in the *Republic*, leaving on September 24th. At his request the owners obligingly transferred him to the *Baltic*, leaving October 1st. Unable to get away by this boat, he forfeited his passage, and leaving Northampton on the night of the poll, he just caught the Cunard ship the *Parthia* at Queenstown on the 7th. He started on his voyage despondent, utterly wearied, and with "a tightish sensation about the heart," for he had hoped and believed until the last half-hour that he was going to win the election. He thought, too, that before he had left the town he had succeeded in pacifying his disappointed and angry supporters in Northampton, but the receipt of a telegram at Holyhead, telling him of the rioting there and the calling out of the military, depressed him more than ever.

When he got on board the *Parthia* a curious little incident happened. As he was "standing gloomily, watching the last package carried on board," he wrote, "I was approached by a man, a steerage passenger, who, reverently touching his billycock hat, said, 'Father, do you go with us to the other side?' For a moment I was puzzled; but seeing that the man was serious, I answered, 'You are mistaken; I am not a Father.' The man looked dubious, nervously scratched the deck with a blackthorn held loosely in his left hand, and rejoined, 'No offence meant; I ask your reverence's pardon, but anyhow, it will be a blessing to have you with us on board, Father.' That I looked clerical I had been

told by the *Gaulois*, which described me in 1871, when attending the Paris Courts Martial, as dressed like a bishop; but this man's evidently earnest disbelief in my repudiation of priestly honours, coupled with his quiet acquiescence, made me doubt whether I was really the man who had been placarded a few hours before in Northampton as 'Bradlaugh the Blasphemer.'"

The journey began badly, and continued so until New Jersey was sighted. The sea was rough, the *Parthia* rolled, and the captain proved a churl. The embarkation of the steerage passengers was managed with an "uncouth harshness" which was painful to witness; to threaten "to put a man 'in irons' for coming back to give a last wave of his hand to a weeping sweetheart," commented my father, "was just a little too hard." On the 17th the passengers on board the *Parthia* had the mortification of seeing the *Adriatic* (White Star Line), which had left Liverpool two days after them, pass them, and forge ahead with a speed which soon left the *Parthia* behind. Everything seemed combined to render his journey unpleasant and vexatious.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In reference to Mr Bradlaugh's voyage in the *Parthia* I append an extract from the *New York Herald* for 7th September 1881, which purports to be an account of an interview between the reporter of that journal and Mr J. Walter, M.P., of the *Times*:—"The Bradlaugh Incident""Don't you think Bradlaugh was harshly treated?' 'Oh dear, no,' was Mr. Walter's eager response. 'That's all nonsense about his having crysipelas, and having been so brutally treated. He's a perfect ruffian. A fellow-passenger on the *Bothnia* told me of Bradlaugh and some of his comrades violently disturbing some religious services held on board the *Parthia*, so that Captain Watson was compelled to threaten him with putting him in irons before he would stop.'"My father, of course, wrote to the *New York Herald* and to Mr Walter, contradicting this, saying that the

My father arrived in New York unfortunately too late for many of his engagements. He was due to speak in Dartmouth College (New Hampshire) on the 20th, and he had barely time to get there. On the way he was delighted to meet Henry Wilson in the train. They chatted long together, enjoying each other's company, and talking much of Charles Sumner, a man revered and honoured by both, who had died since Mr Bradlaugh's last visit to America. As it happened, too, Sumner's opinion of my father's first lecture in Boston had only lately been published in the Boston papers. It was given in a letter written by Wendell Phillips in reply to some inquiries made of him by the Secretary of a lecture committee at Winchester, Mass. The letter ran: —

"Dear Sir, — In reply to your note of October 1st would say: I heard Mr Bradlaugh the first time he spoke in Boston. What Mr Sumner, who sat near me, said of that lecture, will deservedly have more influence and weight than any opinion of mine. While Bradlaugh was speaking, Sumner looked to me and said, 'This is very fine.' At the close of the lecture he remarked, 'This is, I think, the most eloquent

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statement was "monstrously untrue." He made only the one voyage on the *Parthia*; he said: "No attempt of any kind was made by any one to disturb religious services during that voyage. There was a disagreement between Captain Watson and the passengers as to the singing after dinner in the smoking-room, but it had not the smallest connection with religious services. The particulars were given in a letter signed by the passengers, and which was published at the time in several of the American papers. I never sang in my life, and was most certainly not even one of the singers."

speech I have heard for some years.'

*Wendell Phillips."*

*"Boston, October 2, 1874."*

At Dartmouth Mr Bradlaugh lectured to the students in their church, and the Rev. Dr Smith, President of the College, presided at his lecture. Two days later he was speaking at Cambridge, having this time a fine audience of over a thousand persons, including most of the Cambridge professors and a strong force from Harvard College. At Philadelphia on the 25th he won the sympathies of a crowded meeting, although here he had been publicly preached against, and people had been warned not to go to his lecture. At Charlestown (Mass.) he spoke in the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, with the pastor, the Rev. Mark Trafton, as president. In Boston he spoke in the Rev. James Freeman Clarke's Church of Disciples, and at Winchester in the Unitarian Church – "and yet," he said, "miracles are not believed in!" On the journey from Bangor to Dexter my father, at the invitation of the engine-driver, rode part way on the engine, and he relates how he found himself "perched on a nice soft seat in a corner, with my toes near enough to the furnace to make me forget that a sharp frosty wind was whistling; engine-driver Chase turned out to be quite a philosopher, and I had a pleasant time." Presently they had to slacken speed; "there are cattle on the track, three oxen and three full-grown calves. They run on in front, sometimes crossing the line; we ring the bell, whistle furiously, and puff-puff vociferously, till at last engine-driver Chase gets



angry and says, 'It is no use, those cattle are as stupid as your House of Lords.' 'Yes,' I answered, 'and will get run down like the Lords, if they do not get off the track.'"

Senor Castelar stated after Mr Bradlaugh's death that he was shunned by the ladies; but Senor Castelar's English was a little at fault. When my father was at Delaware he was taken by the students to the Female College, "where," he said, "the president introduced me to the senior ladies' class, who sang to me the American national hymn. I was asked to make them a speech, and am afraid I made myself supremely ridiculous. It is no joke to be suddenly called on to say something to twoscore of extremely good-looking young ladies... They all looked happy, and gave me a very pleasant greeting, one which made me think of my own girls at home." The girls on their side were evidently equally pleased with their visitor, for just before my father commenced his lecture that evening he received the following note: —

"The members of the Clionian Society, having made Mr Bradlaugh an honorary member of the same, desire, if he has no serious objection, to see him wear their badge this evening.

*Anna C. Long."*

He did wear the badge in his button-hole, "and very pretty it looked, and very pretty the donors looked too as they sat in the opera-house in front of me," he said.

In continuing his journey west he lectured at Chicago, and this time he was fortunately able to spend some hours with

Hypatia Carlile and her husband. At Milwaukee his visit created extraordinary enthusiasm. "Nearly all the prominent lawyers, divines, newspaper men, merchants, thinkers, and writers of the city, with their wives, heard his first lecture; and they applauded at shorter intervals than any lecturer ever was applauded here before. It is rare indeed that such an aggregate of intellect is seen gathered together at one time in this city as was the case on Thursday, and that one man receives such approval."<sup>2</sup> The Milwaukee people urgently begged for a second lecture, which a fortunately vacant date in the following week enabled him to give them.

Iowa was the furthest point west he reached on this visit, the whole journey covering a distance of more than 4500 miles. When he went west again in the following February he met with a terrific snowstorm, generally described as the worst seen for many years. At Milwaukee the cold was so severe that at his lecture the audience sat enveloped in furs and rugs, although the janitor protested that he had used three tons of coal in his endeavour to warm the Music Hall. "The next time," commented my father, "I hope he will use thirty tons." The cold grew more and more intense, until at Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) which he reached on 10th February, the spirit thermometers registered forty degrees below zero. On leaving Fond du Lac there was a wait of ten hours at the station before any train came by which he could get to Oshkosh, where he was due that evening; at which

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<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Tribune.*

place – reached only just in time – he found a fine audience awaiting him in spite of the weather, if "weather" can be looked upon as an adequate term for atmospheric conditions where one thermometer registers forty-five degrees below zero and the others are congealed. The following day he was due at Madison, but as traffic was suspended he remained for a short time snow-bound at Oshkosh. Towards the end of February his farewell lecture was given at Chicago to the largest audience he had had that winter. "Every seat was filled, the stage was filled, the aisles were filled, and even the staircases were alive with people."<sup>3</sup> On this journey west he did a tremendous amount of travelling; in one stretch of eight days he was only two nights in bed.

In the Eastern States he had lectured at Salem (Mass.), with Dr Loring once more for his host and chairman, and an audience who gave him a glorious reception, although, apart from the warmth of their greeting, nearly everything was in "a state of unmitigated freeziness." At Bangor (Maine), where the snow was six feet deep in drifts, and was nowhere less than two feet save on the most travelled roads, the intense cold (twenty-three degrees) kept away the audience; but amongst those who did "brave the elements" was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maine, who warmly congratulated Mr Bradlaugh at the end of his lecture. At Lynn (Mass.), where he gave one of his last

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<sup>3</sup> He spoke in M'Cormick's Hall to an audience of 3600 persons, of whom 3500 had paid for admission; the hall had never been so full before, and the audience was as enthusiastic as it was large.

lectures in New England, in going from the railway station to the hall, he humorously relates: "I sat down twice to reflect on the uncertainty of human progress. To sit down in snow two or three feet deep is not dangerous, but is cold, and most certainly is ridiculous, especially when the sitter is tall and heavy. The second time I sat down I broke one of my ribs – that is, one of my umbrella ribs, and I filled my gloves with snow. I was reconciled to my fate when I learned that the gentleman sent out to escort me, and whom I had missed, had sat down three times."

At Philadelphia he spoke before the Pennsylvania Peace Society, and was delighted to find amongst his auditors Mrs Lucretia Mott. After the lecture Mrs Mott, on the invitation of the chairman, stood up to speak, and, said my father, "I felt reverence for the white-haired dame, which was mingled with astonishment when, her voice losing the tremor of age noticeable in the first few sentences, she spoke as clearly and distinctly as though at least thirty years had been taken from the count of her full-spent life. I valued highly the praise she gave me."

At Boston and at New York he was welcomed as heartily as ever. After his first lecture this time at Boston it had been noted that "for once" the great audience, who, it was said, seemed completely under his control, remained to hear the last word; after the last it was agreed that his lectures had been the greatest success of the season. His headquarters had been this time in Boston, and whenever he returned there from his lecturing journeys receptions were given to him, and every one

seemed eager to show him some kindness or courtesy. Not the least valued mementoes of this visit were a complete and finely bound edition of Sumner's works, a handsome memorial volume printed in honour of Sumner, and three fine photographs of the dead statesman. All these were brought him at different times by the Hon. Joshua B. Smith, who idolised the great Abolitionist. He brought these tokens of Sumner to my father because, as he once said, "Mr Bradlaugh was the friend of one I loved."

Although he was comparatively little at New York, still while he was there he met amongst others James Paxton, E. C. Stedman, the poet, and Anna E. Dickinson, who greatly charmed him by her apparent sincerity, her eloquence, and her clearness of thought.

My father returned at the end of February, with the satisfaction of knowing that, despite its ominous commencement, his winter's work had been a success in every way. The liabilities incurred by his sudden departure from the United States the year before, and his delayed arrival this year, had been met, and his indebtedness at home had been cleared to the extent of £1000.

He came home by the *City of Brooklyn*, and met with a very stormy passage. There was a furious gale, the waves sweeping the decks and bursting the doors. The wheel became unmanageable; the wheelmen were flung right and left. "For five hours and twenty minutes," wrote my father a week later, "our engines were stopped; the sea played with our helpless vessel as with a toy, and

the whole of those on board stood near death's gates. Captain J. S. Murray behaved in this terrible emergency with a courage and self-possession for which no praise can be too high. The *City of Brooklyn*, too, proved to be a good sea boat, and the morning light saw us out of danger; but in that twenty-four hours we only made ninety-one miles, and the log recorded a 'violent hurricane with mountainous seas.'"

My father's departure for the United States for his third lecturing tour, in the autumn of 1875, was very different from that of the year before, or even that of 1873. Now, at last, Fortune seemed to smile upon him, and everything was propitious. He set out in gay spirits and high hopes; his successes of the last two winters had assured him a welcome when he reached the States, and there was every prospect that by the time he came home again he would be able to lighten that terrible incubus of debt even more substantially than before.

He sailed in the *City of Berlin*, then one of the largest and most perfectly fitted Atlantic Liners afloat. He felt quite at home in her, for there were several familiar faces amongst the officers, and the captain was so courteous that the passengers voted him a special vote of thanks. It is rather curious that this resolution should have been signed on behalf of their fellow-passengers by Dr Fessenden, N. Otis, and Mr Bradlaugh, because a little later Dr Otis proved a friend in need to my father. On the voyage all went well, the weather was good, and the *Berlin* made a record passage of seven days eighteen hours.

After two or three days spent in New York my father went on to Boston, to find that city in the throes of an election for the office of Governor of Massachusetts. He attended a "Republican rally" at the old Faneuil Hall, and as he sat listening to the speeches of Henry Wilson and others, the influence of the room seemed to grow upon him; he remembered that it was there "that Otis pleaded against Lord North and George III.; it was there that the Boston men gathered that very December day on which the tea was thrown overboard in Boston harbour; it was there that groans accompanied the reading of the Boston Ports Bill." The meeting had the still further interest to him that it was presided over by R. H. Dana, the man who had been counsel for Anthony Burns.

Another question was also agitating, not merely Boston, but the whole country, and dividing parties into hostile camps, and that was the Currency question; and as upon this subject my father and Wendell Phillips took opposite views, their relations were by no means so friendly as heretofore.

The religious feeling which had been raised against Mr Bradlaugh every time was renewed with special bitterness this winter, and created quite a panic amongst the managers of lecture courses. It is much to their credit that the Rev. Dr Miner and the Rev. Dr Lorrimer had the courage to disregard the outcry, and invited him to lecture to their congregations as before.

At the end of October he was feeling very unwell, but persisted in continuing his work, and for a week or two seemed rather

better. Since the friendship which sprang up between them on board the *City of Berlin*, Dr Otis and my father had not lost sight of one another, and when he became worse again he consulted Dr Otis, who strongly advised change of scene and climate, as preparation for the hard work and the cold which would have to be faced on his Western tour. Hence, in the middle of November, finding himself part way there, he went on to Washington. At Washington he found that almost his only friend in the city, Henry Wilson, the Vice-President of the United States, was lying sick unto death in the Capitol. He called upon him, but finding him so ill, simply left his card. Mr Wilson, on hearing of his visit, sent his secretary with a note – the last, I believe, that he ever wrote – asking him to come on the following morning, but my father never saw him again. He returned to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York, sad and ill. Dr Otis saw him professionally and in the report he sent to England early in December he said he had been suffering from "much work and little rest" for several days; later he found him suffering from pleurisy and some threatenings of typhoid. As the fever rapidly developed, Dr Otis suggested that he should go to St Luke's Hospital, where he could have the best care – professional and general – and on my father agreeing, he took him there in his own carriage on 30th November. At St Luke's Hospital Mr Bradlaugh felt that he owed his life "to the great skill and generous kindness of Dr Leaming, to the unremitting attentions of Dr Abbe, and to the patient and never-ceasing care of my nurse, William Shaw." Even before he was



allowed to leave his bed it was decided he could do no more lecturing that season, and within four days from leaving his sick-bed he was on board the *City of Richmond* on his way home. Friends said he was rash – that the journey would kill him. He was so weak that he could scarcely stand, and he shed tears almost directly a kind word was said to him; but if his body was weak, his will was strong; he would go, and he was sure that he would grow stronger more quickly moving on board ship than inactive in New York. A copy of "Alice in Wonderland" had been accidentally left in his cabin; he was so weak that it took him nearly the whole voyage to read this little book; he laughed over it and delighted in it like a child. Afterwards, he always remembered it with a certain enjoyment, and was ever ready to quote from it such touching verses as "You are old, Father William," "'Tis the voice of the sluggard," or "Will you walk a little faster?"

Speaking of his sudden return a week or two later, Mr Bradlaugh said: "I came back to England because I was advised that it would have been suicide in my weak state to face the Western winter. I come back to Europe reluctantly, for I went to the United States to earn enough money to pay my debts, and I am compelled to return poorer than I left. Indeed, I owe it to Mr Moncure D. Conway's assistance that I was enabled, at the moment, to discharge the obligations my illness had created in New York."

Mr Conway has since told me that when he went to see my

father while he lay ill in the St Luke's Hospital, my father begged him to make inquiries of nurse and doctors whether he had said or done anything during the time of his illness which could be construed into an alteration of his opinions upon religious subjects. He wished Mr Conway, in the event of his death, to bear testimony that his convictions had remained unchanged. Mr Conway, whose own opinions were by no means so heretical as Mr Bradlaugh's, was nevertheless anxious to carry out the wishes of the sick man with the utmost exactitude, and therefore made the most scrupulous inquiries. But he only learned that Mr Bradlaugh had been a most docile, uncomplaining, and grateful patient, and that he had not uttered a single word which could afford the slightest justification for a suggestion of recantation. That my father's dread of the usual "infidel deathbed" myth was well founded we know by what has happened since 1891. Even as it was, although he recovered from his illness in New York, and was alive to contradict such fables, it was actually said that he had sent for a minister to pray with him, and one clergyman was even reported to have specified the "minister" as a Baptist! It was long before my father entirely recovered from this illness, and although formerly a smoker, after this he lost all desire for a cigar. It was not until a few years before his death that he renewed the habit, and even then only in a very modest way – a cigar in going to the House of Commons, a cigar in coming back he enjoyed; at other times he smoked little.

It is worth noting that while Mr Bradlaugh was in the

States, whenever he had an evening to spare, wherever he might happen to be, he generally devoted it to going to hear some lecture or sermon, or attending some meeting. In this way he heard, amongst others, Parker Pillsbury, Newman Hall, O. B. Frothingham, M. D. Conway, Horace Seaver, and Dr Miner. He two or three times attended and spoke at Women's Suffrage meetings, and was invited on at least two occasions to take part in Masonic festivals.

Everywhere he went he made careful inquiries into the labour conditions of the locality, and where possible, he visited mill and factory, and talked with both workers and employers. He also specially studied the workings of the liquor laws in the States where they obtained, and the effect of his observations was to decide him against them. On each visit he wrote home weekly letters for the *National Reformer*, which were interesting for what they told about his own doings and about persons, and invaluable to intending emigrants for the information they gave concerning labour in the different States which he visited. He afterwards published the result of his investigation into labour questions in America as a little booklet entitled "Hints to Emigrants."

## CHAPTER II.

### MRS BESANT

In 1874 Mr Bradlaugh lost a friend and gained one. Between himself and the friend he lost the tie had endured through nearly five-and-twenty years, of which the final fourteen had been passed in the closest friendship and communion, tarnished neither by quarrel nor mistrust. By the death of Austin Holyoake my father lost a trusty counsellor and loyal co-worker, and the Freethought movement lost one who for fully twenty years had served it with that earnest fidelity, high moral courage, and unimpeachable integrity which were amongst his most striking characteristics. In health and in sickness he toiled incessantly to promote the interests of the cause he had at heart, and at no time of his life did he shrink from duty or responsibility.

Austin Holyoake died in the spring of 1874, and was buried in Highgate Cemetery in the presence of a great crowd of sorrowing friends. Just before his death he dictated his "Sickroom Thoughts" to his wife, uttering the last broken paragraph only a few hours before he died. For three years he had known that death was near, and this final statement of his opinions on death and immortality was purposely deferred until the last moment he deemed it prudent, so that he might leave a record of his last deliberate opinions, and as such these

"Thoughts" provoked very considerable comment.<sup>4</sup>

Austin Holyoake, like his friend, lived and died a poor man, and my father pledged himself to him on his deathbed to raise a sum of £650 to purchase the printing and publishing business hitherto conducted by Mr Holyoake in the interests of Freethought literature. The money raised was to benefit the widow and the two children, and the business was to be handed over to Mr Charles Watts. A subscription which was started realised rather less than £550, and the National Secular Society determined to make up the balance out of a legacy left to the President by a Dr Berwick. Unfortunately, however, Dr Berwick's trustee absconded with the money, and consequently, as Mr Bradlaugh had promised his dead friend that the sum of £650 should be raised, he paid the deficiency out of his own pocket, by weekly instalments.

Austin Holyoake, the friend Mr Bradlaugh lost, was steadfast, loyal, unassuming, and unswerving in his opinions; Mrs Annie Besant, the friend he gained, was even more remarkable, though in a very different way.

Having enrolled herself a member of the National Secular Society in August 1874, Mrs Besant sought Mr Bradlaugh's

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<sup>4</sup> "My mind being free from any doubts on these bewildering matters of speculation," he said, "I have experienced for twenty years the most perfect mental repose; and now I find that the near approach of death, the 'grim King of Terrors,' gives me not the slightest alarm. I have suffered, and am suffering, most intensely both by night and day; but this has not produced the least symptom of change of opinion. No amount of bodily torture can alter a mental conviction."

acquaintance. They were mutually attracted; and a friendship sprang up between them of so close a nature that had both been free it would undoubtedly have ended in marriage. In their common labours, in the risks and responsibilities jointly undertaken, their friendship grew and strengthened, and the insult and calumny heaped upon them only served to cement the bond.

This lasted for many years until Mrs Besant's ceaseless activity carried her into paths widely divergent from those so long trodden by her colleague, paths which brought her into close association with persons strongly inimical to Mr Bradlaugh and the aims to which he was devoting his life. For some time before he died, he had, as Mrs Besant herself has written in her recently published *Autobiography*,<sup>5</sup> lost all confidence in her judgment; she had disappointed him, and it would be unworthy of both not to recognise that the disappointment was very bitter, though his desire to serve her and shield her always remained unchanged. For thirteen years she had stood upon the same platform with him; and when she one day said that for ten years she had been dissatisfied with her own teaching, he felt it very keenly, but he neither uttered a word of blame himself, nor would he allow any one else to blame her in his hearing.

Every movement, every cause, has its ebbs and flows; there seems to be only a certain amount of activity possible to men in the mass, and now it flows in one direction, now in

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<sup>5</sup> See page 322.

another. The Freethought movement, when Mrs Besant came into it, had for some years been slowly but surely increasing in activity and prosperity. The National Secular Society, although not so complete an organisation as it was soon to become, was nevertheless to be found in all the great centres of population. The *National Reformer*, the representative organ of Freethought, in the five years which lay between 1867 and 1872 had nearly doubled its circulation, and was read in almost all parts of the world. It was sent to the three presidencies of India, the United States and Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the Cape of Good Hope, the West Indies, Egypt, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Germany. On its staff there were several very able writers, and if it was not exactly a profitable property, it at least paid its way.

People have sometimes deliberately asserted that Mrs Besant's desertion and Mr Bradlaugh's death inflicted an irremediable injury on the cause of Freethought, but this is merely an assertion, and one which will not bear a moment's investigation. Happily for the human race, the growth of public opinion does not depend upon any single man or woman, however able, however energetic, he or she may be. The loss of a leader amongst men may for a moment check the onward movement, and it may be there is even a temporary reaction – a swing back – but never in the history of the world has the loss of one of its pioneers proved an "irremediable injury" to the cause of progress.

If indeed it should be thought, and it is a proposition that I am not in a position to deny, that this is a moment of ebb

in the tide of Freethought, the fact would only be in harmony with the general tendency of the times, and would prove nothing against the ultimate acceptance of the truths of Materialism. The growth of population in our great cities has caused the evils of poverty to press more closely upon general attention, and the public energy is directed towards seeking a solution for these immediately important problems, rather than for those more abstract theorems arising out of religious speculation.

Mrs Besant was herself obeying this tendency when, in 1886 she thought she had found in the optimistic dreams of Socialism a remedy for this most bitter of human ills. This was the point upon which she first diverged from Mr Bradlaugh, and once having separated her thought from his, the breach swiftly widened. Socialism was, as it were, the fork in the Y of their lives. Nothing, I think, will show how far these two had drifted asunder more than that Mr Bradlaugh should first learn of Mrs Besant's adhesion to the Theosophical Society through an article written by her in a weekly paper, and not from her own lips.

Mrs Besant's first contribution to the *National Reformer* appeared in its issue for 30th August 1874, and with that she entered in good earnest upon the work which was to engross her for many years to come. Over the signature of "Ajax" she commenced a series of notes, entitled "Daybreak," which were to mark "the rising of the sun of liberty ... when men should dare to think for themselves in theology, and act for themselves in politics," and these notes were continued weekly for several



years. From August 1874 to April 1891 Mrs Besant remained connected with the *National Reformer*, first as contributor, and then as sub-editor, becoming shortly afterwards co-editor and co-proprietor. The co-editorship was resigned in October 1887 for reasons set forth by Mrs Besant in her *Autobiography*,<sup>6</sup> and the co-proprietorship ceased with the dissolution of the partnership between herself and Mr Bradlaugh, in December 1890.

When my father heard Mrs Besant's first lecture in August 1874, in the Co-operative Society's Hall, Castle Street, upon the "Political Status of Women," it impressed him as "probably the best speech by a woman" he had ever listened to. It was not until the following year, however, that Mrs Besant started definitely as a lecturer upon the Freethought platform, but from that time forward she was indefatigable. She was very fluent, with a great command of language, and her voice carried well; her throat, weak at first, rapidly gained in strength, until she became a most forcible speaker. Tireless as a worker, she could both write and study longer without rest and respite than any other person I have known; and such was her power of concentration, that she could work under circumstances which would have confounded almost every other person. Though not an original thinker, she had a really wonderful power of absorbing the thoughts of others, of blending them, and of transmuting them into glowing language. Her industry her enthusiasm, and her eloquence made of her a very powerful ally to whatever cause she espoused.

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 320.

Mrs Besant had been connected with the Freethought party for about two and a half years when an incident occurred which was destined to have considerable and lasting results. In the winter of 1876 a man, alleged to have an unpleasant reputation as a seller of indecent literature, was convicted at Bristol for selling a pamphlet, written by an American physician of repute, Dr Charles Knowlton. This pamphlet, entitled "Fruits of Philosophy: An Essay on the Population Question," had been on sale in England for forty years, and this was the first time it had been prosecuted. It had been openly sold by James Watson, a publisher of the highest repute, who had been dead only a short time; by Mr G. J. Holyoake; by Austin Holyoake up to the time of his death; and by others both in England and America. Mr Charles Watts had bought the plates of this and other works from the widow of James Watson, and, acting upon Mr Bradlaugh's advice, Mr Watts went to Bristol, and declared himself the responsible publisher of the book. He was himself arrested on 8th January 1877, and on 12th January was committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court. The trial was to be heard on 5th February, but before that day arrived Mr Watts came to the conclusion that the pamphlet was indefensible, and decided to withdraw his plea of "not guilty," and to plead "guilty" instead. Upon learning this, Mr Bradlaugh felt exceedingly angry. "If the pamphlet now prosecuted," he said, "had been brought to me for publication, I should probably have declined to publish it, not because of the subject-matter, but because I do not like

its style.<sup>7</sup> If I had once published it, I should have defended it until the very last." He was strongly of opinion that the matter ought to be fought right through; and differing so widely on a matter of principle with Mr Watts, he determined to sever all business connection with him. He gave his reasons for this course as follows: —

"The Knowlton pamphlet is either decent or indecent. If decent, it ought to be defended; if indecent, it should never have been published. To judge it indecent, is to condemn, with the most severe condemnation, James Watson, whom I respected, and Austin Holyoake, with whom I worked. I hold the work to be defensible, and I deny the right of any one to interfere with the full and free discussion of social questions affecting the happiness of the nation. The struggle for a free press has been one of the marks of the Freethought party throughout its history, and as long as the Party permits me to hold its flag, I will never voluntarily lower it. I have no right and no power to dictate to Mr Watts the course he should pursue, but I have the right and the duty to refuse to associate my name with a submission which is utterly repugnant to my nature and inconsistent with my whole career."

When Mr Watts' case came on for trial he pleaded "guilty," and was released, on his own recognisances of £500, to come

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<sup>7</sup> The late Mr Grote, however, thought sufficiently of this pamphlet to preserve it in his own library. He, moreover, presented a copy to the library of the London University, where it was at the time of this prosecution.

up for judgment when called upon. It was contended at the trial that it was unlawful to publish such physiological details as were to be found in Dr Knowlton's pamphlet, even for a good purpose. Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant (who had now entered into a formal partnership under the style of "The Freethought Publishing Company") determined to republish the pamphlet to test the right of publication.

A great deal was said at the time by way of blaming Mr Bradlaugh for allowing Mrs Besant to associate herself with him in this struggle, and of lauding Mrs Besant for her great courage in this defence. Many were the unworthy taunts cast at Mr Bradlaugh for "sheltering" himself "behind a woman," though not one of those who sneered stayed to reflect that even if this association had some advantages it also had distinct disadvantages. The gain was both to the principles involved, and to my father personally. To see a woman brave enough to stand by the side of a man in defence of the free publication of unpopular doctrines, was an incentive to the public to investigate those doctrines with a view to forming an independent judgment upon them; it was also an inspiration and a constant spur to the man – had he been the one to need spur or inspiration in such a cause. Mrs Besant's unwearying industry in working up the extra-legal side of the case, in hunting up in other works statements of physiological fact exactly similar to or stronger than those found in the prosecuted pamphlet, was invaluable. In the week which intervened between the verdict and the sentence on

their own case, Mr Bradlaugh took the opportunity to express his appreciation of Mrs Besant's work, and this despite the fact that her decision to join in the defence was contrary to his wish and advice. He wrote: —

"I have often faced hard toil, but I have never had to encounter persistent, wearying, anxious labour greater than that of the last three months. And here — while my hand is yet free to pen these lines — let me record my deep sense of gratitude to the woman who has shared my fight, aided me by her help, encouraged me by her steadfastness, and strengthened me by her counsel. It is not alone the brilliant eloquence, patient endurance, and sustained effort manifested for so many hours in the Court — qualities displayed by Mrs Besant, which, coupled with her great tact, won repeated praise from the Lord Chief Justice, and congratulations from almost the whole of the barristers who crowded the Court — so much of Mrs Besant's work has been recorded by most of the press in terms of the highest laudation. The personal acknowledgment from myself is more due for the weeks of unrecognised but most wearying and continued drudgery in analysing a mass of scientific works, searching out authorities, and generally preparing the huge body of materials required for use on the trial. Few can appreciate the enormous labour involved in the careful analysis of medical works, and their comparison, line by line, with the Knowlton Pamphlet. Yet, without this labour, the defence would have been impossible."

The disadvantages of the dual defence were considerable,

but they were known to very few, and were moreover purely personal. Upon Mr Bradlaugh lay the whole responsibility of the defence; his was the mind that planned it, and he had to conduct the fight, not merely for himself, but for the woman beside him; he had to consider two briefs instead of one, and as Mrs Besant was at that time totally unfamiliar with the procedure of the Law Courts, he had to instruct her, not only in the things it was desirable she should say, but also in those which were better left unsaid. He was but too well aware that Mrs Besant risked not alone imprisonment, but also the loss of her child; and in the event of failure, and the imprisonment of both himself and his colleague, the problem naturally presented itself, Who was to edit the *National Reformer*, and to look after the new business? Mr Watts' plea of "guilty," followed by Mr Bradlaugh's indignation, had for the moment produced considerable division amongst former friends, and there had been hardly time to reckon which were friends and which were foes. Nothing could better mark the extent of my father's difficulty than the fact that he had to hand over these onerous duties to us, his daughters, two girls fresh from a dreary country life, and hardly out of our teens. Hence, although he was justly proud that a woman whom he held in such esteem should stand by him publicly at such a moment, it increased his anxieties and his responsibilities enormously that Mrs Besant's risks were so heavy, and there was thus no trusty colleague free to undertake the burden of a weekly journal, and the drudgery of the management of the new publishing business.

Some at least of these difficulties were pointed out to Mrs Besant; friends besought her by every argument they could think of not to risk the loss of her child; but she had chosen her course, and she adhered to it in spite of all entreaties. And such is the irony of fate that she lost the society of her daughter for ten years, and was subjected to the grossest insult from Sir George Jessel, as Master of the Rolls, for defending doctrines she now repudiates.

# **CHAPTER III.**

## **PROSECUTION OF MR BRADLAUGH AND MRS BESANT**

On Friday, 23rd March, Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant went together to the Guildhall, to deliver the earliest copy of the new edition of the Knowlton pamphlet to Mr Martin, the Chief Clerk, with a notice that they would personally attend, at a certain hour on the following day, to sell the pamphlet. Similar notices were left at the chief office of the Detective Department, and at the office of the City Solicitor. On Saturday afternoon Stonecutter Street was thronged with a crowd of persons anxious to purchase copies of the pamphlet from Mr Bradlaugh or Mrs Besant, and amongst these purchasers detectives were easily identified by Mr Bradlaugh's quick eye. A few days later the partners were arrested on a warrant – not served with a summons – and marched off to Bridewell, after a fruitless search for compromising literature had been made on the Stonecutter Street premises. From the Police Court, where Mrs Besant had to endure the indignity of being personally searched, they were conveyed to the Guildhall. Mr Alderman Figgins heard the charge, and remanded the case until the 17th of April.

A defence committee was formed, which soon included the names of many well-known men and women, both in England



and abroad, and a fund was started to meet the expenses of the defence. The long lists of subscribers which appeared week by week in the columns of the *National Reformer* give unmistakable proof of the widespread sympathy.

When the further hearing of the case came on at the Guildhall, the prosecution was conducted by Mr Douglas Straight and Mr Mead, instructed by Mr Nelson, the City Solicitor. Mr Figgins was again the presiding magistrate, and there were several other aldermen on the Bench. At this hearing – which lasted a couple of days – Mr Straight offered to proceed against Mr Bradlaugh alone, letting the charge against Mrs Besant drop but to this the latter would on no account agree. At the conclusion they were liberated on their own recognisances, to appear at the Central Criminal Court on 7th May. The prospect of standing in the dock of the Old Bailey was not very alluring to my father, so he went to the Court of Queen's Bench and made an application to the Lord Chief Justice (Sir Alexander Cockburn) and Mr Justice Mellor for a writ of *certiorari* for the removal of the case to that Court, to be heard before a judge and a special jury. After some argument the Lord Chief Justice said: —

"If, upon looking at it [the pamphlet], we think its object is the legitimate one of promoting knowledge in a matter of human interest, then lest there should be any miscarriage resulting from any undue prejudice, we might think it is a case for trial by a judge and a special jury. I do not say it is so, mark, but only put it so; that if, on the other hand,

science and philosophy are merely made the pretence of publishing a book which is calculated to arouse the passions of those who peruse it, then it follows we must not allow the pretence to prevail, and treat the case otherwise than as one which may come before anybody to try. If we really think it is a fair question as to whether it is a scientific work or not, and its object is a just one, then we should be disposed to accede to your application, and allow it to be tried by a judge and special jury, and for that purpose allow the proceedings to be removed to this Court. But before we decide that, we must look into the book, and form our own judgment as to the real object of the work."

Their Lordships took the book to consider on its own merits, and refused to read the evidence given at the Police Court. A few days later the writ was granted in the following words: —

"We," said the Lord Chief Justice, "have looked at the book which is the subject-matter of this indictment, and we think it really raises a fair question as to whether it is a scientific production for legitimate purposes, or whether it is what the indictment alleged it to be, an obscene publication. We think that is a question which will require to be decided by a judge, and, we think, by a special jury, and therefore there will be a writ of *certiorari* granted."

Mr Bradlaugh's recognisances for £400 for the costs of the prosecution were accepted. He regarded this granting of the writ by the judges, going hand in hand, as it were, with the very plain language of the Lord Chief Justice, as a most favourable

sign; and on the matter of the recognisances Mrs Besant wrote: "They become as we go on small by degrees and beautifully less. We began by arrest on a warrant; from a warrant we passed to liberation on bail, four sureties and our own recognisances being required; from this we proceeded to liberation on our own recognisances only, and now we are free on Mr Bradlaugh's sole recognisance."

The name of the prosecutor had not yet transpired, though at the outset it was assumed that the city authorities were responsible for the proceedings, since at the first hearing before Mr Figgins the name of the City Solicitor had been mentioned, while at the second counsel appeared instructed by him. In May, however, the identity of the prosecutor had sunk into still greater obscurity, for on the 4th of that month Mr Nelson (the City Solicitor) declared in writing that "the Corporation of London has nothing and never has had anything to do with the prosecution." He further stated "in general terms" that the prosecution was instituted by the Police. When, however, Colonel James Fraser, the Commissioner of Police, was applied to, he evaded any direct answer by referring my father to the sworn "information," which of course only gave the name of the detective, Wm. Simmonds, who, as informer, had bought the pamphlet. Simmonds was formally asked if he were the responsible prosecutor, but he merely acknowledged the receipt of Mr Bradlaugh's letter. My father, on 11th May, applied to Mr Justice Lush, at Chambers, for the name of the responsible

prosecutor, but while the judge expressed his opinion that he ought to know, he regretted that he had no power to help him.

At this time the public excitement was further increased by the action of the Government, which commenced to make seizures in the Post-Office of literature sent out from the Freethought Publishing Company's office. Not only were open book packets seized, but in some cases even sealed parcels were suspected of being tampered with.

Not merely was Knowlton's "Fruits of Philosophy" confiscated, but also copies of the "Freethinker's Text-book," and a pamphlet written by Mr Bradlaugh entitled "Jesus, Shelley, and Malthus," as well as a considerable number of copies of the *National Reformer*. Concurrently with this a raid was made upon the shop of that brave old man, Mr Edward Truelove, in High Holborn, and a large quantity of Robert Dale Owen's "Moral Physiology," as well as another pamphlet "Individual, Family, and National Poverty," were seized by persons representing the Society for the Suppression of Vice, who immediately commenced a prosecution against Mr Truelove.

In the last days of the month Mr Bradlaugh made an application to the Court to take the case at an early day; it was fixed for the 18th June, and shortly afterwards it became known that the Solicitor-General, Sir Hardinge Giffard, Q.C., M.P. (now Lord Halsbury) was chosen the leading counsel for the prosecutors – whoever they might be. Up to this point – the eve of one of those great forensic contests which marked

various periods in Mr Bradlaugh's life – he felt that the press as a whole had not been unfair, although indeed there had been some journals coarse and foul in attack, usually on the ground of Mrs Besant's association with himself. As regards the issue of the struggle, he wrote that to predict the verdict would be worse than folly, though, "should the deliverance be against us," he urgently begged his friends to aid his daughters in keeping his journal afloat until he should be free to edit it again. Mrs Besant's descriptive accounts of the various preliminary legal proceedings are all written in a light, often jesting, vein; indeed, I am inclined to think that she hardly realised all the gravity of her situation; a true sense of the possibilities involved was perhaps somewhat obscured by the atmosphere of excitement and admiration in which she was living.

On the trial it was Mr Bradlaugh's object to show that the doctrine of the limitation of the family was to be found in many other works in general circulation dealing with economical questions; and that in medical works, many published at popular prices, and some specially intended for the use of young people, there were physiological descriptions set forth in identical or even stronger language. Amongst other witnesses Mr Bradlaugh subpoenaed Professor and Mrs Fawcett (to formally prove certain statements in Prof. Fawcett's book), Charles Darwin, the Rev. J. W. Horsley (Chaplain of the Clerkenwell House of Detention), and the Rev. S. D. Headlam – the two latter to give evidence as to overcrowding. Prof. Fawcett refused to take his subpoena, and

declared he would send Mrs Fawcett out of the country rather than that she should appear as a witness in the case. A second attempt was made to induce him to take the subpoena in a friendly way, but he again refused, putting his hands behind his back so that the paper should not be surreptitiously put into them – of which he need have had no fear. Charles Darwin wrote his thanks for the courtesy of the notice, saying: —

"I have been for many years much out of health, and have been forced to give up all society or public meetings; and it would be great suffering to me to be a witness in Court. It is, indeed, not improbable that I may be unable to attend. Therefore, I hope that, if in your power, you will excuse my attendance... If it is not asking too great a favour, I should be greatly obliged if you would inform me what you decide, as apprehension of the coming exertion would prevent the rest which I require doing me much good."

As Mr Darwin was going away from home, he gave addresses where he might be found if he was wanted. But of course it was decided to manage without his evidence. Mr Horsley and Mr Headlam were both most courteous, and there was one volunteer witness whose help was invaluable – Mr H. G. Bohn, the founder of the well-known Bohn's Library. Dr Drysdale and Dr Alice Vickery also gave their assistance with the utmost cheerfulness. The trial was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, and extended over four days. The ability of the defence excited universal comment, and the masterly summing-up of the Judge was spoken

of in the papers as being strongly in favour of Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant. But in spite of defence and summing-up the jury, after an absence of an hour and a half, brought in the following verdict: "We are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motives in publishing it."

The Lord Chief Justice instructed the jury that this was a verdict of guilty. The foreman bowed acquiescence. The Clerk asked if they found the defendants guilty upon the indictment. The foreman again bowed, and a verdict of guilty was recorded. Sentence was not pronounced immediately; it was postponed for a week. The jury, however, were by no means so decided at heart and so unanimous as the prompt bow of the foreman led one to believe. One of these twelve "wise men and true" applied to the Associate for £4, 4s. as payment for his attendance; two others returned each their guinea fee to be put down to the defence; one wrote that he did not agree with the verdict, subsequently stating that six of the jury did not intend to assent to a verdict of guilty, and that it had been arranged that if the Lord Chief Justice would not accept their special verdict they should again retire and consult. During the time they were locked in they discussed so loudly that they were heard outside, and their discussion was found to be by no means confined to the offence which they were supposed to be considering, as it included amongst other things the heretical views of the defendants.

On the 28th June Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant attended the Court of Queen's Bench to receive judgment from the Lord Chief Justice and Mr Justice Mellor. My father had thought it likely that there might be a heavy fine, but unlikely that there would be any sentence of imprisonment. He drew £250 from the bank, and showed me the notes as he put them in his pocket-book, bidding me, in the event of a sentence of imprisonment, take the notes from him and pay them into the bank again; and my sister and I accompanied him and Mrs Besant into Court. The Solicitor-General opened by moving the Court for judgment; some discussion arose on the absence of the *postea*, and then Mr Bradlaugh submitted three propositions to the Court: (1) A motion to quash the indictment; (2) a motion for arrest of judgment; and (3) a motion for a new trial. But the Lord Chief Justice would neither consent to a new trial nor to a rule for an arrest of judgment; he left the decision as to quashing the indictment to the Court of Error, declining, however, to stay execution until error was determined. The arguments over these points took up the whole morning, and after luncheon the Solicitor-General, in order to influence the Judge in his sentence, brought forward two affidavits, one asserting that Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant had continued to sell the pamphlet since the verdict, and the other stating that Mrs Besant, in a speech at the Hall of Science on the previous Sunday, had represented the Lord Chief Justice as being favourable to them, and the verdict as against his summing-up. Sir Alexander Cockburn was



greatly incensed at the alleged reference to himself, and regarded the continued sale in the light of "a grave and aggravated offence." My father offered that if the Lord Chief Justice would stay proceedings until the writ of error was argued, he would pledge himself that no sort of advantage would be taken of the indulgence of the Court to continue the sale of the condemned book; but as yet the Judge was obdurate. "I think we must pass sentence," he said. "Have you anything to say in mitigation?"

"I respectfully submit myself to the sentence of the Court," my father replied in his gravest tones. "I have nothing to say in mitigation of punishment," added Mrs Besant.

The Judge then proceeded to sentence them to imprisonment for six calendar months, to a fine of £200 each, and to enter into their own recognisances for £500 each for two years.

The judgment was delivered towards the end of a long day of hard and wearisome fighting, and my father, who, with Mrs Besant, had of course received the sentence standing, was very white; his voice, however, was quite firm when, the Lord Chief Justice having concluded, he quietly and respectfully asked, "Would your lordship entertain an application to stay execution of the sentence?"

"Certainly not," was the answer. Mr Bradlaugh bowed; the officer of the Court moved forward to take him and Mrs Besant into custody; my father gave me his pocket-book, and bade us follow him as far as we were allowed. We had nearly reached the door when the Lord Chief Justice spoke again. In milder

tones he said: "On consideration, if you will pledge yourselves unreservedly that there shall be no repetition of the publication of the book, at all events until the Court of Appeal shall have decided contrary to the verdict of the jury and our judgment; if we can have that positive pledge, and you will enter into your recognisances that you will not avail yourselves of the liberty we extend to continue the publication of this book, which it is our bounden duty to suppress, or do our utmost to suppress, we may stay execution, but we can show no indulgence without such a pledge."

Mr Bradlaugh replied: "My lord, I meant to offer that pledge in the fullest and most unreserved sense, because, although I have my own view as to what is right, I also recognise that the law having pronounced sentence, that is quite another matter so far as I, as a citizen, am concerned. I do not wish to ask your lordship a favour without yielding to the Court during the time that I take advantage of its indulgence." My father added that he wished it to be quite clear that he only pledged himself to stop the circulation of the book until the decision of the Court of Error. The Judge was satisfied with this assurance, although the Solicitor-General was not, and Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant were liberated on their own recognisances of £100 each.

This "on consideration" of the Lord Chief Justice entirely changed the course of events. In the following February (1878) the case was argued in the Court of Appeal before the Lords Justices Bramwell, Brett, and Cotton, who in a very elaborate

judgment gave their decision in favour of Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant; and the indictment was quashed on the ground that the words relied upon by the prosecution as proving their case ought to have been expressly set out. Two American cases brought forward by the Solicitor-General before the Lord Chief Justice as against Mr Bradlaugh's argument were regarded by the Lord Justices of Appeal as of no weight; while any value they might have had was absolutely in favour of the defendants.

The total amount disbursed in this defence and provided by public subscriptions was £1065. The expenses of the prosecution must have been enormous; but to the end the name of the prosecutor was refused. In March 1878 Mr Bradlaugh wrote: "It is not the Government, we are assured on the highest authority; it is not the Vice Society; and it is positively stated that it is not the city authorities, and yet the City Solicitor instructed counsel, and the proceedings are conducted from the law offices of the Corporation." However, in spite of the positive statement of the City Solicitor, the official report of the Common Council mentioned that the prosecution was ordered by Alderman Ellis; and later, at a meeting of the Common Council, presided over by the Lord Mayor, the Solicitor, in answer to a question, said the prosecution was instituted by the city police and carried on by him under the direction of Alderman Ellis. The actual costs of the prosecution would be, he thought, "about £700." As Mr Bradlaugh commented: "This becomes embarrassing; on 4th May 1877 Mr T. J. Nelson wrote that 'the Corporation of

London has nothing and never has had anything to do with the prosecution.' If so, why do the city authorities pay even £700 towards the costs? And who pays the rest? For with three counsel to fee all through, £700 will most certainly not cover the bill... Why, unless the Solicitor-General, as a labour of love, worked half-price, his fees alone would spoil the £700." And, as my father further asked, "Why did Alderman Ellis direct the prosecution?" for he was not even the sitting magistrate.

In addition to the main proceedings in the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Error there were a number of side issues which were heard before other Courts; points were argued in *banco*; an application was made to Mr Vaughan for the 650 copies of the Knowlton pamphlet seized by the Vice Society at Mr Truelove's. An appeal was lodged at the General Sessions against Mr Vaughan's order for their destruction, a successful application was made to the Court of Queen's Bench to quash Mr Vaughan's order, and a summons heard against Inspector Wood for unlawfully detaining the pamphlets. Not a few were the comments in the press when twice within six months Mr Bradlaugh succeeded in getting quashed decisions given against himself (first, the indictment, and with it the sentence of imprisonment and fine, and next the magisterial order). One journal even suggested that "much loss of time might be avoided" if Mr Bradlaugh were appointed "to consult with our legal luminaries and revise their decisions."

In the meantime Mr Edward Truelove had been twice tried.

At the first trial the jury did not agree; but at the second, which took place in May 1878, he was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and a £50 fine. Scores of purses were eagerly opened to furnish the fine, but no one, alas! could relieve this brave heart from the hardships of a prison. Mr Truelove, suffering for his opinion's sake, was obliged to wear the garb of common felons and to associate with them, and although nearly seventy years of age, he was compelled to pick oakum and to sleep upon a plank bed.

The immediate effect of these prosecutions was to draw public attention to the teaching of Malthus and his disciples. Works upon the population question were eagerly bought and read; and as the subsequent gradual lowering of the birth-rate in England testifies, the idea of the limitation of the family to the means has certainly, if slowly, made some way. The Malthusian League, first started by Mr Bradlaugh in the early sixties, was, in 1877, revived on a much larger scale; its branches and its literature soon spread to all parts of the kingdom, and enormous meetings were held everywhere. In November Mrs Besant brought out a pamphlet to supersede the Knowlton essay, entitled "The Law of Population: its Consequence and its Bearing upon Human Conduct and Morals." It was dedicated to the poor, and was eagerly welcomed by them. Mrs Besant in 1891 withdrew her pamphlet from circulation, a step which matters the less as, since 1877, there have been other books written by medical men dealing with the same subject and issued at popular prices. But

although there was this distinct gain to the public, not only in the stand made for the free discussion of such a question of vital economical importance, and in the sweeping away of general indictments, the cost to the principals in the drama was heavy indeed. Mr Truelove, a man of unimpeachable integrity, was, as I have just said, cut off from his family, and made the associate of felons. In April 1878 Mr Besant appealed to the law to give him the custody of his daughter.<sup>8</sup> The litigation arising out of this lasted many months; Mrs Besant lost her child, was grossly insulted by Sir George Jessel, and at length, the strain proving too much even for her strong constitution, her health gave way, and she was thrown upon a bed of sickness.

Nor was the position much less trying for Mr Bradlaugh. It must not be lost sight of that the ultimate responsibility for the defence, in every detail of these different law proceedings continuing over several years, remained with him: his hand was in it all. He made a great fight, but his days and often the greater part of his nights were spent in constant work and anxiety.

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<sup>8</sup> One of the reasons given for withdrawing Mabel Besant from her mother's charge was that while with her she was liable to come in contact with Charles Bradlaugh.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AN UNIMPORTANT CHAPTER

In the foregoing account of the prosecution of my father and Mrs Besant I have thought it best not to burden the narrative with any side issues not immediately important. As, however, it is my object in this book to picture my father and his surroundings as clearly as possible, so that from the picture a just judgment of his character may be derived, I will now devote a few pages to passing details more or less directly connected with this prosecution or arising out of it.

As soon as Mr Watts decided to plead "guilty," under the circumstances which have already been mentioned, and it became known that Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant had determined to publish the prosecuted pamphlet, it was found that there were would-be prosecutors eager for the fray, and ready to commence on anything else, whilst awaiting the new issue of Knowlton's essay.

One morning I was seated on the floor (chairs were a scarce commodity at Turner Street) in my father's study sorting some pamphlets when a knock was heard at the street door; the landlady opened it, and then came to say that a man had called who particularly wished to see Mr Bradlaugh. "Ask him in," said my father, and I began hurriedly to rise from my lowly position, but a "Stay where you are" nailed me to the floor. "What can

I do for you?" asked Mr Bradlaugh pleasantly, as a thick-set man of middle age, with a reddish beard, entered the room. The man replied that he wished to buy a copy of a book written by my father and entitled, "Man, whence and how." Rather to my surprise, because as a rule he refused to sell any literature from his Turner Street lodgings, and indeed kept none there for sale, my father hunted up a copy of the Freethinker's Text-Book, Part I., entitled "Man, whence and how? or Revealed and Real Science in Conflict," carefully dusted it, and handed it to the man, asking suavely, "Is there anything more I can do for you?" The man replied that that was all, put the book in his pocket, paid for it, and went away. He was hardly outside the door when my father began to laugh. "Did you see his boots, Hypatia?" he asked. "His boots!" I repeated vaguely, wondering rather what the joke was. "Yes; he actually came in the regulation boots," he said. "That was a detective, and those who instructed him evidently think that 'Man, whence and how?' is some book upon the population question." Undoubtedly it is a book upon the population question, but not exactly from the Malthusian point of view; and if it was bought in that idea, the purchasers must have felt rather foolish when they read the first lines referring to the Hebrew chronology and the alleged creation of Adam and Eve!

In 1876 my father was relieved from the pressure of those debts which had been burdening him for so long. First of all a Liverpool friend died, bequeathing to Mr Bradlaugh £100, less legacy duty. This is a "new experience," said my father



on receiving the money, adding, "I owe £90 less than I owed last week." Then in August he received £2500 through a compromised will suit. Mr Henry Turberville, brother of Mr R. D. Blackmore, had a very great admiration for my father; so much so that the year before his death, when my father was about to go to the United States, he felt so anxious not to lose sight of him that he offered to pay the whole of his debts if only he would not go. He made a will leaving the bulk of his property, valued at £15,000, to Mr Bradlaugh, and to simplify matters he also made him his sole executor. Not long after this Mr Turberville, while staying at Yeovil, died suddenly, having a few hours before made his will in favour of a daughter of a chemist of the neighbourhood. Mr Blackmore asked the Court to pronounce for an intestacy, and he joined with Mr Bradlaugh as against the propounders of the new will. At last a compromise was agreed upon, by which Mr Bradlaugh received £2500 in addition to his costs. Like the £90 legacy, the £2500 was immediately applied by my father to the discharge of his liabilities. I was in Court with him when the suits were compromised, and we went straight from the Court to the office of his chief creditor. "That was only just in time, my daughter," he said, as we turned towards home.

As one or other of us girls was now almost continuously with my father, and his books were bursting all available bounds at Turner Street, in February 1877 he decided to seek some more wholesome and more commodious lodging. Turner Street left much to be desired from the sanitary point of view. I remember

one hot summer's evening a kindly, enthusiastic gentleman, who lived in the west of London, came eastwards to speak at one of the working-men's clubs. My father was to take the chair for him, and he came to Turner Street before going to the club. We all walked down together, and this gentleman, turning with enthusiasm to my sister and me, said, "I think your father living here is just the right man in the right place!" My sister and I looked at one another; it had been so hot that day, yet we had not been able to open our windows to let in the air because of the abundance of smells which came in with it. If Turner Street was the "right" place, we, at least, did not appreciate it.

At the end of February we removed to 10 Portland Place (as it was then called), Circus Road, St John's Wood. It was a queerly-arranged house; we had the top floor and the basement, with a bath-room on the first floor, the ground floor and the rest of the first floor being occupied by a firm of music-sellers. In the basement was a very large and dark room, which we used for meals, and in which at first our tiny table and four chairs looked very desolate. On the top floor was one large room given over to my father's study, the other rooms being quite small. The library again outgrowing its bounds, in 1880 it descended to the still larger room on the first floor, whence the books were sold after the death of their owner in 1891.

At Circus Road my sister and I started housekeeping for my father, with one little servant much given to fainting. I was appointed head cook to the establishment, and my father

and sister uncomplainingly devoted themselves to the task of swallowing my experiments in the culinary art. Never once, either while I cooked for him myself, or later when we ordered his dinners for him, do I remember my father grumbling at the food we set before him. His meals had to be punctual to the moment, or, if asked for at an unaccustomed hour, they had to be promptly served; if that was done, he was content with whatever was given him.

We had been only a few weeks at Circus Road when the new edition of the Knowlton pamphlet was printed. Mr Bradlaugh was away in Scotland, and as Mrs Besant's mind was filled with the idea of the possibility of a police raid and seizure of the stock, we hid parcels of the pamphlet in every conceivable place. We buried some by night in her garden, concealed some under the floor, and others behind the cistern. When my father was informed of this cleverness he was by no means pleased, and sent word immediately that there should be no more hiding; and as soon as he came home again the process began of finding as quickly as possible these well-hidden treasures – some indeed so well hidden that they were not found till some time afterwards. He also knew that a search was possible, but he had no wish to look supremely ridiculous – to put it no more seriously – by parcels being found in all these eccentric places.

When the Saturday came on which Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant attended at Stonecutter Street to sell the new edition of the Knowlton pamphlet, my sister and I went with them: not to

sell the book – that my father would not allow – but to help in the mechanical work of counting out dozens or in giving change; for although there had been no other advertisement than the one announcement in the *National Reformer*, the crush of buyers in the little shop was enormous, and in the course of twenty minutes over 500 copies changed hands, in single copies or in small numbers. Several days elapsed between this formal sale and the arrest, but my father had told me that in the event of such an arrest I was immediately to go home and fetch his volumes of Russell "On Crime and Misdemeanours," while my sister was to remain with them to take any instructions at the moment. Mr Bradlaugh notified the police headquarters that he and Mrs Besant would attend at 28 Stonecutter Street from 10 to 11 A.M. for the convenience of the arrest. The police accordingly made their appearance promptly at ten o'clock one morning; I flew off to St John's Wood, collected the great books, and caught the next train to the city. It was a warm morning, I was hot with running, and anxious, for I rather think that I had some sort of notion that "Russell" was a sort of golden key to unlock all legal difficulties. City men in the train, going to their ordinary business, looked at me rather curiously as I sat in the carriage closely hugging those three bulky red volumes (which would slip about on one another, for I had not stayed to tie them together) on criminal procedure, of all things for a girl of nineteen to be carrying about with her on a sunny April morning.

But my sister and I felt very, very lonely and very cold at heart

as we sat in the dreary Police Court at the Guildhall – I hardly know how we got there – listening to cases of drunkenness or assault, and waiting, with a shudder of horror and disgust at the thought, for our father and Mrs Besant to come and take their places in that dock which we had seen occupied by some of the lowest specimens of London low life. The time came for people to snatch what lunch they could get; and a kindly gentleman with a slightly foreign accent came to us and wanted to take us to lunch. He knew us, for he was my father's very good friend, Mr Joannes Swaagman, though we did not know him. However, he talked to us of our father, and found the way to persuade us, so we went with him; and I shall never forget the feeling of gratitude towards him, and the sensation of comfort we felt in seeing his friendly face and hearing his friendly voice. We attended the first day's hearing at the Guildhall, but at our father's wish we were not afterwards present during the trying of the case, either at the Guildhall or at Westminster. After they were committed for trial Mr Bradlaugh proceeded to make his arrangements for the conduct of his paper, and of his new business in case of a hostile verdict. The course he then took proves, as I have said, in a startling way how utterly alone he felt at that moment – old ties were broken, new ones were not yet tested; to whom could he turn to help him in this emergency? There was no one but his daughters – girls with no experience, and in many ways young for their years. But we might be ignorant, we might be stupid; still we loved him so well that we could not help being absolutely faithful

to any trust he might confide to us. I was apt to be more forward than my sister; she was nearly two years my elder, but she was needlessly distrustful of herself, and so I was the one whom my father selected to instruct in the possible editorial duties. I sat with him, note-book in hand, with fainting heart at the frightful prospect, and meekly took note of all his wishes. I was then taken into the bank, introduced to the manager, and recorded my signature, for I was to be the financial agent also!

During the long hours of the four days' trial at Westminster, my sister and I used to walk up and down the great hall, watching for any one to come out with any news of how the case was going on. Melancholy figures we must have looked, nearly always alone, dressed in black gowns – for our mother had died suddenly in the midst of all this – and very frightened at heart at what might happen. There was one person who used invariably to step out of his way to speak to us as he passed up the great hall to his place in the House of Commons, and that was Joseph Biggar, the Member for Cavan. A little kindness at an hour such as this makes an impression on the mind that nothing can efface, and my sister and I never afterwards heard Mr Biggar's name mentioned without recalling how he thus kindly went out of his way to say a pleasant word to a couple of girls miserably walking up and down outside those Law Courts at Westminster. On the fourth day we were summoned inside the Court. The jury had retired, and every one was so sure of a verdict for the defence, that my father thought we should like to hear it – for in spite of all his

worries and anxieties, he could yet think of us at such a moment. When the verdict came it was a shock, the more so that until a few minutes before, when an idea of the truth somehow reached the Court, a favourable one had been anticipated.

On the first day (Monday) of the trial, in giving the history of the Knowlton pamphlet, Mrs Besant, as a matter of course, mentioned that it had been sold by Messrs Holyoake & Co., saying, "One of the firm is Mr George Jacob Holyoake, whose name is probably well known to you. The other is Austin Holyoake," and further, "from Mr Holyoake the book went into the hands of a Mr C. Watts." On Wednesday, the third day, a communication from Mr G. J. Holyoake appeared in the *Times*, in which he attempted to explain away his connection with the pamphlet, adding, moreover, that after the Bristol trial he advised Mr Watts to discontinue its publication. As the only effect of this letter could be to injure the defendants, it may be imagined that my father did not take it as a very kindly act.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Mrs Besant

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<sup>9</sup> From the time when Mr Holyoake refused to continue to publish "The Bible: what it is," there were several instances of a want of friendliness on his part towards Mr Bradlaugh, and sometimes – as at this trial and in the Parliamentary struggle – these occurred at a most critical moment in my father's career. Mr Bradlaugh, of course, generally retaliated; but when his first vexation and anger had passed, he always showed himself willing to forget and forgive. One of the very first things he did on his return from America in 1875 was to join in an effort to buy an annuity for Mr Holyoake, who had been so prostrated by illness that at that time it was thought that he would not be capable of continuous work again. Notwithstanding old differences, some of which had been extremely and bitterly personal, my father joined in the appeal with the utmost heartiness, and expressed his vexation that the readers of the *National Reformer* had not been permitted to be amongst the earliest subscribers to the fund.

put it that the letter was one "carefully calculated to prejudice the jury against us, and sent to the very paper with which one of our jurymen<sup>10</sup> was connected." As Mr Holyoake had been silent so long, "silent while he sold it, silent while he profited by the sale, would it have been too great an exercise of self-control," she asked, "if he had maintained his silence for two days longer?"

The next week my sister and I were with my father and Mrs Besant all day in Court when sentence was pronounced; but in spite of all our vague fears, I do not think we altogether realised what imprisonment could mean until the Judge pronounced the awful words. The whole Court seemed to fade away as I listened, and it needed the knowledge that my father relied upon me to do something for him to bring me to myself. I took his pocket-book from him as he had bidden me, and was with my sister mechanically following him from the Court when we were stopped by the Lord Chief Justice, his mild tones forming a contrast to the last sharply uttered words. It seemed, indeed, as though ages of agony had been lived through in those few minutes.

Apparently Sir Alexander Cockburn had been told of our waiting outside, and had noticed us in the Court, as afterwards some very kindly words which he had said of Mr Bradlaugh and ourselves were repeated to my father.

When, later on, Mrs Besant was directed by order of Sir George Jessel to give up her daughter, my father knew that Mr

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<sup>10</sup> Mr Arthur Walter, son of the principal proprietor of the *Times*, was on the jury.



Besant's advisers would not lose a moment in claiming her. By his instructions we drove at once to Mrs Besant's house and carried off Mabel to Circus Road. We then took her by road to Willesden Junction Station, and there gave her into Mrs Besant's keeping as she was passing through, on her way to fulfil a lecturing engagement at Manchester. Thus the poor mother was able to take her farewell of her child in peace, instead of having her torn from her arms at a moment's notice. Then when Mrs Besant's health gave way we nursed her through her illness, and went with her to North Wales, where she rapidly regained her strength.

Up to the time of Mrs Besant's illness she used to ride with us regularly when time permitted, but after that she gave it up for a while. I was never very strong, and one day the doctor had said to me, "If you were a rich young lady, I should order you horse exercise," to which my father, who was with me, replied, "She is not a rich young lady, doctor, but we will see what can be done." And my riding, which was purely the outcome of fatherly love and a desire for his daughter's health, has been turned by some people into a sort of crime against Mr Bradlaugh!

My sister cared very little about riding, so after Mrs Besant gave it up I used to go out alone, riding a little mare, Kathleen, which Mrs Besant then kept at livery stables. As Kathleen had several little peculiarities of temper, and I was accustomed to ride quite alone, I used to ride her in Regent's Park in the quiet of the morning. One snowy morning in March she bolted with me, and after a considerable run we fell together just within the

Clarence Gate. I was carried insensible to the nearest doctor, and my sister was summoned by a passer-by who recognised me. Mr Bradlaugh had been lecturing in Scotland, and was travelling all night so that he might reach London in time to be in the Appeal Court at half-past ten, where Mrs Besant was appealing against the decision of the Master of the Rolls. When he was near home some one stopped my father's cab, and he came on at once, to find me lying unconscious on the floor of the doctor's parlour. Nothing had been done for me; the doctor could not even say whether any bones were broken; his wife had indeed brought me a cup of tea, but of that I knew nothing. To make up for any lack of attentions to my poor body, they turned their thoughts to my sister's soul, and in the afternoon the doctor's wife wrote to my sister that she would pray to her "Heavenly Father" that "in this great affliction you may be led to know Him as your Saviour and Comforter." If a Freethinker wrote to a Christian who was sick or in trouble that hell was a delusion and heaven a myth, it would justly be considered an outrage, but the zealot has two codes of morality – one for those who differ from him, and another for himself.

It must have been very hard for my father that day in Court; three lectures the day before, travelling all night, and at home a daughter who, for aught he had been able before leaving to learn to the contrary, might be dying or permanently injured.

## CHAPTER V. MORE DEBATES

In April 1874 the preliminaries for a six nights' discussion between Mr Bradlaugh and the Rev. Brewin Grant, B.A., were arranged. It was to be held in the Bow and Bromley Institute, and to commence on the 20th of May. It will be remembered that Mr Grant was no novice in debate, and had in fact several times previously met Mr Bradlaugh on the platform. These encounters had been so unpleasant that my father quite shrank from any renewal of them, and the present debate was brought about mainly through the mediation of the Rev. A. J. Harrison, M.A. On the first three nights Mr Grant was to attack Secularism, and Mr Bradlaugh to defend, and then Mr Bradlaugh was to assail Christianity, and Mr Grant defend. On the first evening the chair was taken by the Rev. Arthur Mursell, and Mr Grant as the opener had the opportunity to set the course of the debate, but so little did he realise his responsibilities that in his opening speech, almost indeed in his opening words, he fell back upon his old tactics of vulgar personalities, and this, of course, provoked some reply from Mr Bradlaugh. On the second night the Rev. Brewin Grant was perhaps not quite so bad, and my father for his part had resolved to try and endure the taunts levelled against himself, and against those with whom he worked. With the fourth night, when the chair was taken by the Rev. Mr Driffield, Rector of Bow,

came Mr Bradlaugh's opportunity, and he made the most of it; this time he was the first speaker, and he opened the debate in a careful and closely reasoned speech, but unfortunately Mr Grant was not content to follow him. The *Eastern Post*, in an article on the first four nights, remarked that if the Rev. Brewin Grant was selected by the churchmen of the district, the choice did "no credit to their judgment." The writer went on to point out that although Mr Grant had the advantage of being able to prepare his speech for the first three nights, he did not show himself capable of speaking with any sequence or coherence, but instead he flung all sorts of opprobrious charges at Mr Bradlaugh, and introduced the most trivial personalities, which had not the remotest bearing upon the subject. "Mr Bradlaugh in his first speech gave his definition of Secularism, which ought to have furnished excellent material for criticism and debate; but his reverend opponent adhered to the system of personal disparagement, and at last Mr Bradlaugh retaliated... Things improved somewhat on the fourth night, but this was perhaps due to the fact that the exponent of Secularism led the debate."<sup>11</sup> This, from the pen of an outsider, will serve to show the impression produced upon those who listened to the speeches. The chairman of the committee of the Bow and Bromley Institute waited upon Mr Bradlaugh after the first night, and told him in the presence of the Rev. Mr Schnadhorst (one of Mr Grant's committee) that in consequence of Mr Grant's conduct they had received a requisition, in which

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<sup>11</sup> *Eastern Post*.

clergymen had joined, asking them to put an end to the debate.

On the fifth night the North London Railway Company, to whom the Institute belonged, stepped in and closed the hall just as the people were assembling to go in. As there was no proper legal agreement for the hire of the hall, there was no redress. There had been no notice of the closing of the hall, hence Mr Bradlaugh and Mr Grant, the chairman and the committees, were all in attendance at the Bow and Bromley Institute, as well as the audience who had paid their money to hear the debate. It was decided, on taking a vote of those present, to adjourn to the nearest available place and finish the debate there. The Clay Hall grounds were suggested, and there is an amusing account of Mr Bradlaugh proceeding to this place followed by the audience, who were considerably added to from the general public *en route*. The proprietor was at first rather alarmed at the advent of such a besieging party, but a reassurance from Mr Bradlaugh and a payment in advance soon calmed his fears. Mr Grant, however, for reasons best known to himself, did not come to Clay Hall, although the Revs. A. Mursell, W. Schnadhorst, S. Bardsley, and W. Loveridge came, as well as other friends of Mr Grant. Mr M. D. Conway, who was to have taken the chair, also followed the party to the Clay Hall grounds, where he presided at the informal meeting then held. The whole matter was discussed, and the kindly words on both sides cleared away much of the ill feeling which had grown up during the debate; and at the conclusion of the meeting, in replying to the vote of thanks, Mr Conway said:

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"Gentlemen, – I must say that I came to-night with a good deal of pain and apprehension. Though I accepted the invitation to preside at this discussion, I did so in the interests of truth, and from my desire to promote anything like honest discussion. When I read the debate as reported in the *National Reformer* for the first time, I thought that Mr Bradlaugh seemed to resemble St Paul – that is, that he was fighting with beasts; and I came down with a great deal of apprehension that there might be scenes that were not decorous. I quite felicitate you and myself that instead of that, and instead of such recriminations, we happen to be in the presence of gentlemen on both sides who have indicated so much fairness and so much fine spirit. I will say for Christians, that if what has been levelled at Mr Bradlaugh, as it seems to me, has conveyed any impression against the Christian religion, as perhaps it has to some minds, the extremely gentlemanly discourse of some of the Christians we have had here to-night is calculated to recall that."

Mr Mursell spoke to Mr Bradlaugh as to fresh arrangements, but Mr Bradlaugh had never wanted to meet Mr Grant, and now would only do so if a dozen clergymen put him forward as their representative; "then, and then only," he said, he would meet him, "not as Mr Grant, but as the representative of those dozen clergymen." For his part, he would be no party to doing anything voluntarily towards renewing such scenes as they had just had. Strange as it must seem to any one who has read the

pages of these debates, Mr Grant found fifteen clergymen willing to vouch for him as a fit and proper person to represent their views on Christianity, and another (and happily, final) debate was arranged for the following year. My father, in order to show that he did not measure all clergymen by Mr Grant's inches, selected Mr Mursell to represent him in the preliminary arrangements, just as on the previous occasion he had consented to abide by the decision of the Rev. A. J. Harrison. The debate was to be held on one night in each week for six weeks,<sup>12</sup> and by securing South Place Chapel as the building in which it should be held the Committee were ensured against the possibility of intolerant proprietors closing the doors of the hall upon them in the midst of the discussion. The subject to be argued as chosen by the Committee was, "Is Atheism, or is Christianity, the true Secular Gospel, as tending to the improvement and happiness of mankind in this life, by human efforts, and material means?" Mr Grant was to lead on the first three nights, with objections to show that Atheism was not the true Secular Gospel. Mr Bradlaugh on the remaining three nights was to show that Christianity was not the true Secular Gospel. As might have been expected, this debate was only a modified repetition of what took place on the previous occasion; Mr Grant was certainly less free of speech, but with all that he could not keep clear of personal accusations and epithets which at times provoked much unseemly uproar and confusion.

Much has been said at one time or another about Mr

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<sup>12</sup> June and July 1875.

Bradlaugh's adoption of the views of Spinoza, and to leave his position perfectly clear on that head I will quote the words he himself used in answer to his opponent on the third night of this debate. "It is perfectly true," he said, "that the argument as to one existence was adopted from Spinoza... The precise distinction between the views of Spinoza and myself is this: Spinoza contended for the infinite attributes of extension and intelligence. I cannot conceive the possibility of attributes, except as the characteristics of the thing conditioned, the mode thought, and, therefore, cannot conceive infinite attributes at all. Spinoza held one existence, which, to him having infinite intelligence, made him a Pantheist; and I, not able to conceive that, stand to Spinoza in the relation of Atheist, and that is just the distinction between my thought and that of Spinoza."

On the fourth night the Rev. A. Mursell took the chair, and made kindly acknowledgment of the uniform courtesy he had all through received from Mr Bradlaugh. On this, and for the remaining nights, my father, according to the arrangements, had the debate. On each occasion his opening speech was carefully prepared, and was listened to with the most profound attention; but although a man may "lead" a debate, he cannot compel his antagonist to follow, and on the fifth night the Rev. Brewin Grant actually brought a manuscript prepared beforehand, which, unless by the merest coincidence, could obviously be no kind of reply to the arguments Mr Bradlaugh was advancing. This MS. he read very quickly, and often almost inaudibly, and again



his conduct resulted in uproar and confusion. At the conclusion of Mr Bradlaugh's final speech, although there was still one to come from the Rev. Brewin Grant, the audience had become so incensed with that gentleman that the majority determined to leave. Mr Grant thereupon bent down to his own reporter, and read to him from his MS. quickly and in a low tone of voice. As it was impossible to argue upon propositions which he could not hear, Mr Bradlaugh also rose and left the building. On the sixth and last night Mr M. D. Conway occupied the chair. At the very outset considerable confusion was caused by Mr Grant's demand that some rules should be read from a book which Mr Bradlaugh objected to as incorrect and unauthorised. At length the chairman settled the matter by saying to Mr Grant, "If you can give me the Divine Authority for the infallibility of this little volume, I will read it all." When Mr Bradlaugh sat down after his last speech, he had so moved the audience that they called for three cheers for him; but he begged them, if they thought he deserved praise, to show it by remaining perfectly quiet during the fifteen minutes that Mr Grant had still to address them. His hearers responded to his appeal, and listened mutely to the end.

A few words from a speech delivered by the Rev. Arthur Mursell, in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, in the spring of the following year,<sup>13</sup> give some insight into the impression Mr Bradlaugh's eloquence produced, even under such difficult circumstances as those of a debate with Mr Grant. Said Mr

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<sup>13</sup> April 23rd, 1876.

Mursell: —

"I am indebted to one whom the world calls an Atheist, and who accepts the designation, but whom, in social intimacy, I would rather call my friend than thousands of the Christians whom I know; a man who, while casting doubt upon Him I call my Master, has shown more of His spirit in the practical intercourse of life, as far as I know it, than many a champion of orthodoxy; a man of honest, though religiously benighted creed, and eloquent tongue; to such a man I am indebted for a stimulus to fervour in the cause of what I deem the vital truth, which prompts me to attempt to press it home with emphasis upon you now. In public debate upon the principles of Christianity which he opposed, he closed a speech, smarting under what he deemed the too flippant satire of his antagonist, in words something like these: — 'If I believed in a God, which I do not; if I believed in a hell to be escaped, which I do not; if I believed in a heaven to be won, which I do not; do you imagine I could allow myself to rack my brain in coining the paltry jests of a buffoon, and tickling the groundlings' ears with quips and quirks? No! I would exhaust the logic of my brain, and the passion of my heart, in seeking to convince and persuade mankind that they might shun the one and gain the other, and try to seal a testimony which should be worthy of my conscience and my creed.' I felt condemned at my own apathy, as the eloquent sceptic lifted before me the standard of fidelity."

The debate held ten months later with Mr Walter R. Browne,

M.A., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, is both pleasant and instructive reading. The question discussed was, "Can miracles be proved possible?" and the debate arose out of some lectures upon the subject of Miracles, delivered a little while before by Mr Browne in Leeds. The discussion was held in the Albert Hall, Leeds, on two evenings in April 1876. The Mayor (Alderman Croft) presided at the request of the Vicar of Leeds, and on both evenings there was a large audience of earnest and orderly people, who gave the closest attention to the whole proceedings. The report is pleasant reading, because one sees the undoubted intention on the part of each disputant to make his position clear to the other and to the audience; that he was influenced by no mere desire to catch the other tripping for the sake of a moment's applause. The moods of disputants and auditors seemed in complete harmony, and throughout there was not the slightest sign of disturbance or disorder. Mr Browne at the outset expressed his small confidence in the utility of public debates as a means of arriving at truth, and thought they were of little advantage either to the debaters or to the audience; but Mr Bradlaugh met this by remarking that he thought "that every objection which applies to a debate in public between two persons, applies with equal, if not greater, force to an *ex parte* statement made by one person in public, and that the mere delivery of controversial lectures upon such a subject necessitates that the person delivering the controversial lecture should be prepared to recognise at least as much utility in the clashing of

his thought publicly with another man's, disagreeing with him, as in the mere utterance of his own thought where there is no one to check it at the moment."

The instructive character of the debate does not lie in any definite conclusion which might be arrived at by a reader in doubt as to the possibility or impossibility of miracles, but rather in a realisation of the difficulty two capable men with different points of view may have in settling upon a common meaning for certain words. In Mr Browne's first speech he defined a miracle to be "a supernatural marvel wrought by God," but this was a definition upon which they could not agree, because Mr Browne would not accept Mr Bradlaugh's meaning for "nature," as "the totality of all phenomena," and as equivalent to the word "existence," or the word "universe," nor would he himself define "God," for that, he said, was "beyond definition." The meaning of the words "force" and "creation," the idea of "perception," the doctrine of "free-will," and the existence of evil, all proved stumbling blocks to the smooth course of the debate; but as Mr Browne truly said in his concluding speech on the first evening, while it was true that they had not at that time advanced very far in the argument, it was better to make the ground sure as they went along than to attempt too much before their conceptions were clear. Some of Mr Browne's arguments were, for a trained speaker and debater, amazingly feeble. For example, his objection to Mr Bradlaugh's definition of the word "nature" was founded upon "the simple reason that such words as

'supernatural,' 'preternatural,' and 'unnatural,' are certainly used amongst us," and it did not seem to have occurred to him that these might be merely instances of a popular misuse of words. He also thought that the American War, which resulted in the abolition of slavery, showed "conclusively that there was a God who governs the world;" in this case his mind seemed to dwell only on the one fact of the abolition of slavery, and to ignore the waste of human life and the horrors of the war as well as the prior fact of the slavery itself.

Mr Bradlaugh has often been accused of talking about the "unknowable," but a passage from this debate will show in what sense he used the word – if, indeed, he ever did use it. Referring to the allegation of creation, he said: "To me creation is a word without meaning; I only know creation in relation to change. I do not mean by it origination of substance; I only mean change of condition. I do not mean the bringing into being that which was not; I only mean the conditioning existence by characteristics by which I had not hitherto conditioned it. I cannot conceive the possibility of a period when existence was less than it is now. I do not mean that because I cannot conceive it, therefore it is not true. But I do mean that, as I cannot conceive it, you who say you can are bound to give me your conception of it. Understand me clearly, I do not put any such monstrous proposition in this debate as that the inconceivable is therefore the untrue, or that because a position is inconceivable to me, therefore I have a right to call on all other men to reject it. But I do put it, that

you have no right to call upon me to accept any position which is inconceivable to me; that you are bound to tell me how you conceive it before you have a right to ask me to accept that it is possible." I do not remember to have heard Mr Bradlaugh speak of the "unknowable;" and that he should use such a term is quite contrary to the whole of my experience of his careful methods of speech. In any case the above will serve to show that he would not be likely to put "any such monstrous proposition," as that the to him "unknowable" was therefore unknowable to men with wider means of knowledge.

In June of the same year Mr Bradlaugh held a debate with Mr Robert Roberts, a leader of a sect called the Christadelphians. He had challenged Mr Bradlaugh to the discussion, and the subject selected was, "Are the Scriptures the Authentic and Reliable Records of Divine Revelation?" The question was to be argued for six nights, two at Leicester and four at Birmingham. After the two nights at Leicester Mr Bradlaugh avowed his disappointment; he had hoped that at any rate the discussion would bring out some new thought, but after two evenings' experience, he doubted whether that result would be attained. "He may be a good preacher," said my father; "he is most certainly not a good disputant." At Leicester the audience were small; at Birmingham they were larger, but the debate does not seem to have been any more enlightening. Mr Roberts was described by one of the Birmingham auditors as "a man of considerable fluency of speech, and overflowing with religious

enthusiasm," and also "in all respects a courteous gentleman," but unfortunately those qualities did not make him a debater. On each evening a quarter of an hour was occupied by each disputant in questioning his antagonist according to the Socratic method, and this feature of the proceedings seemed specially to attract the audience, although indeed it must require considerable practice and skill before it can be successfully carried out. Mr Roberts challenged Mr Bradlaugh to further debate, but this the latter felt obliged to respectfully decline on the ground of the challenger's "utter incompetency."

A few days later Mr Bradlaugh was at Liverpool discussing the necessity for disestablishing and disendowing the State Church. His antagonist was Mr William Simpson, the working men's candidate at Liverpool at the general election of 1874. The Concert Hall, Lord Nelson Street, was densely packed, and it was said that there were thousands unable to obtain admission. The arguments were closely followed by those present, and although there was no sort of disturbance, the audience were sufficiently excited to give audible expression to their appreciation or disapproval, and such interruptions were generally met by a sharp repartee from the speaker of the moment.

Mr Simpson, while praised for his fluency, courage, and resource, was not thought equal to his task,<sup>14</sup> and in reading the verbatim report of the debate, one is drawn to the conclusion that he scored his greatest successes when making his greatest jokes.

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<sup>14</sup> *Liverpool Post*.

My father had an unusual number of debates this year, and a little later in the summer was at Darlington discussing with a Mr J. H. Gordon on the question of "Atheism, is it rational?" The proceeds, after paying expenses, were given to the Darlington Hospital. There was no shorthand report, but in an article very hostile to Mr Bradlaugh which appeared in a local paper, there is a description of him well worth reproducing. The writer professed to think that my father's Atheism – which he said, with that calm assurance born of ignorance, paid him well "in money and gratified vanity" – was not a matter of conviction, but merely the result of a desire to be in opposition to the majority. He further ventured to prophesy that in Parliament he would be a failure.<sup>15</sup> The following portrait of Mr Bradlaugh sketched by a pen so unfriendly, is a singular testimony to his power: —

"Mr Bradlaugh is a tall, muscular man, who stands firm on his legs, with broad shoulders, between which is a massive, square, powerful head. He dresses in plain black, relieved only by an ordinary display of linen, and a slender watch chain. He is closely shaven as a Roman priest. His features are large and open, his eyes are of a grayish hue, and his hair, which is fast turning gray, falls back from a brow on which intelligence, perception, and power are strongly marked. He has a face which can be very pleasing and very stern, but which conceals the emotion at will. As

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<sup>15</sup> "At the Bar he would be a bully, in the pulpit a passing sensation, on the stage a passion-tearing Othello, in the Press a competent American editor, in Parliament a failure."



he sits listening to the denunciations of his opponent the smile of incredulity, the look of astonishment, the cloud of anger, pass quickly over his countenance. Rising from his seat, and resting one hand upon the table, he commences very quietly in a voice which, until the ear is accustomed to it, sounds unpleasant and harsh, but which, when it becomes stronger, loses much of its twang, and sounds almost musical. His enunciation is singularly distinct, not one word being lost by the audience. He addresses himself to all parts of the house – gallery as well as body. When warmed by his subject, he advances to the centre of the platform, and looking his audience full in the face, and with right hand emphasizing every important sentence, he expresses himself in tones so commanding and words so distinct that his hearers may be hostile or friendly, but cannot be indifferent. One may retire horrified at his sentiments, even disgusted at his irreverence and audacity – from a Christian's standpoint – but no one would go to sleep under him. He can be complimentary and humorous, but is more at home in sarcasm and denunciation. He is never ponderous; nevertheless, the grave suits him better than the gay. Cheering does not seem to affect him, though he is by no means indifferent to it; but he is quick to perceive disapproval, and is most powerful when most loudly hissed. With head erect, face coloured with a flush which has in it a little of defiance as well as earnestness, now emphasising with his right hand, now with folded arms, now joining the tips of his fingers as if to indicate the closeness of his reasoning, as he would have the audience believe it,

he stands defying opposition, even going out of his way to increase it, and revelling in his Ishmaelism."

Then, comparing him with his opponent: —

"Mr Bradlaugh has not much action, but what he has is dignified, which Mr Gordon's never is. He can be severe, even harsh, but never petulant and peevish, which Mr Gordon frequently is. Mr Bradlaugh may abuse his opponent, but it is boldly, not like a bad-tempered school-girl. He can be pleasant, but never assumes the grimaces and gestures of a Merry Andrew. His features are expressive, but he never pulls faces. He is essentially a strong man, strong in his language and his oratory, self-sustained, bold in the way he meets and even avoids the topic of dispute."<sup>16</sup>

There are, of course, some phrases in this description which I should contravene, but apart from these, it is a most vivid and lifelike picture of my father as a speaker. It is, however, a mistake to suppose that Mr Bradlaugh wantonly went out of his way to increase opposition, or revelled in his "Ishmaelism;" what is quite true is, that if in pursuing the path he had marked out for himself he increased opposition, he went on just the same, and did not turn away by so much as a hair's-breadth to avoid it. At heart he might be bitterly wounded, but that did not make him falter. To take, for example, one of the latest cases: when his attitude on the Employers' Liability Bill provoked such a storm of opposition from the very men for whom he worked, he wrote pathetically

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<sup>16</sup> From the *Darlington and Stockton Times*.

to a friend: "It is a little saddening to me to find that in the close of my life I am to be regarded as doing disservice to the men whom I desire to serve." But although he felt the men's distrust thus keenly, he did not hesitate nor turn from his course.

Nor did he revel in his "Ishmaelism;" he had no pride in being an outcast, neither had he any shame in it; the shame of his position was not his, it was theirs who thrust him into it. It shows a complete lack of appreciation of the facts to suggest that a man like Mr Bradlaugh could delight in being regarded as a sort of moral leper by his fellow-men, who indeed neglected no means to exclude him and his from society.

I have noticed these two points because it has been a common error to assume that because my father did not quail before opposition, therefore he courted it, and that because he was not ashamed when the law said, "You are an Atheist, and as such you are outside our protection," therefore he rejoiced in being so distinguished. Both assumptions are equally and entirely without foundation.

In the same year also Mr Bradlaugh held a written discussion with the Rev. John Lightfoot, of Wolverhampton, on the subject of Eternal Torment. This controversy consisted of four letters from each disputant, and was printed in the *National Reformer*; it was afterwards issued in pamphlet form, and is still obtainable.

In 1877 he had too much work to allow him to indulge in public discussions on theological subjects, but in 1878 he held a debate with the Rev. R. A. Armstrong, a Unitarian minister

much respected in Nottingham. This encounter was the result of a lecture given by Mr Bradlaugh in Nottingham in defence of Atheism, and as a reply to some lectures delivered by Professor Max Müller under the Hibbert Trust. Mr Armstrong offered some opposition at the close of Mr Bradlaugh's address, and a debate was suggested. Nothing further was said at the time, but the local Secular Society took the matter up, and pressed Mr Armstrong in such "courteous and earnest terms," that after consultation with his friends, he agreed to accept the challenge. The subject selected for discussion was, "Is it reasonable to worship God?" and the time appointed was the 5th and 6th of September. The debate was a great success, not indeed as furnishing the audience with a cut-and-dried answer "Yes" or "No" to the question argued by the disputants – a result rarely, if ever, attained – but both sides of the question were put forward with a calm and serious earnestness which must have been very pleasant to listen to. Mr G. B. Rothera made an admirably impartial chairman, and the audience, which crowded every corner of the Co-operative Hall long before the hour fixed for commencement, listened throughout with close and appreciative attention.

On the morning of the 5th Mr Bradlaugh had gone early to Coldbath Fields Prison to attend the release of Edward Truelove from his six months' imprisonment in defence of a free press. It had been a dull, close morning, damp with the rain which had not long ceased falling; inside the gaol the chaplain, not seeing

my father and Mr Truelove's son, had sneered at the crowd of Freethinkers waiting in the damp and gloomy street without; had sneered, too, at the Freethinker, the prisoner, within, whose age might have been his protection. This was a sorry preparation for debate, but when the evening was over my father said, "I left London in no mood for debating. Coldbath Fields atmosphere hung about me all day, but the debate, as far as the first night has gone, is the most pleasant one in which I have ever taken part."

The discussion was afterwards republished as a pamphlet, to which Mr Armstrong added, by invitation, a few prefatory words giving his reasons for taking part in it, and suggesting books for study to those who wished to learn more of the positive argument for Theism and Worship.

The last debate in which Mr Bradlaugh took part prior to 1880 was one in the early part of March 1879, with the Rev. W. M. Westerby, a Congregational minister of Burnley. The subject agreed upon, and worded by Mr Westerby, was, "Has, or is, man a soul?" The chair was taken on each of the two evenings by the Rev. R. Littlehales, Baptist minister, and the audiences were large and orderly. "The Rev. R. Littlehales was thoroughly impartial" said Mr Bradlaugh, "quite doing his duty, but scarcely saying a word that was not absolutely necessary." Of his opponent Mr Westerby, he spoke as "an able speaker, with considerable tact and judgment, and showing the utmost courtesy." The proceeds were given to the Blackburn and East Lancashire Infirmary, without any deduction for the expenses of

the disputants. That was all very well as far as Mr Westerby was concerned, for the discussion took place in his own town; but Mr Bradlaugh had to journey from London to Burnley at his own cost, and pay his own hotel expenses. This heavy tax he rightly regarded as unreasonable, and such as should not have been demanded of him, nevertheless he thought the result was worth the sacrifice, and was glad he had made it. Indeed, this debate is regarded by many as one of the best in which Mr Bradlaugh ever took part. Amongst them, the Burnley and Preston papers gave about thirty-five columns of report; leading articles were written and sermons were preached upon the subject, and in that part of Lancashire, at least, the arguments were pretty thoroughly discussed. A verbatim report was published,<sup>17</sup> and in that and in a little pamphlet<sup>18</sup> issued many years before this discussion, Mr Bradlaugh's position on the question of the "soul" is fully set out.

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<sup>17</sup> "Has, or is, Man a Soul?" Two nights' debate with Rev. W. M. Westerby.

<sup>18</sup> "Has Man a Soul?" Theological Essays by C. Bradlaugh, vol. i.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SOME LATER LECTURES

Mr Bradlaugh addressed an audience in Oxford for the first time early in May 1875, when he spoke upon the subject of "Land and Labour." Some difficulty had been made as to the use of the Town Hall, and a smaller hall, known as the Holywell Music Room, was engaged. A number of undergraduates put in an appearance, but as Mr A. R. Cluer, who was also present, observed, it was evident that they had come "more with the intention of attempting to interrupt than to listen quietly. But after the first few sallies of undergraduate wit had been effectively met and replied to by Mr Bradlaugh, in which encounters the laugh always remained on his side, the audience was tolerably peaceful." The Oxford papers gave their different versions of the lecture, but they all joined in the announcement that the chairman was a sweep by trade, whereat my father immediately wrote, "If Mr Hines is not ashamed to again preside for me, I shall be glad to ask him to take the chair at my next meeting." The "next meeting" followed close on the heels of the first, for on the 26th Mr Bradlaugh was again in Oxford, speaking in a room crowded to excess, upon the subject of "One Hundred Years of Tory Rule." The majority of the audience was composed of undergraduates, and the interruption kept up by these gentlemen in embryo was so continuous that "a complete

sentence was almost impossible." Appeals to the good sense and decency of the audience were in vain; cigars and pipes were lit and smoked; shouts, yells, hisses, and insulting remarks were continued throughout the lecture. One of the most prominent of the disturbers was said to be Lord Lymington, son of the Earl of Portsmouth, who not only himself misbehaved, but also encouraged others to do likewise. In January 1877 my father was once more in Oxford, lecturing this time in the Town Hall. Again the undergraduates mustered for a disturbance, and at one time, when a townsman was knocked down by a gownsman, it seemed as though a general *melée* was imminent.<sup>19</sup> This time, however, firmness and good temper brought all things right, and the lecture was allowed to come to a peaceful termination. It was succeeded by a sharp fire of questions, enjoyed no less by the person questioned than by the questioners.

A subject which Mr Bradlaugh lectured upon very much in 1876, especially during the early part of the year, was the Suez Canal. He had only just returned from America when he learned privately of the purchase by the English Government of the Viceroy of Egypt's shares in the Suez Canal. Ill as he was – he was just convalescent from typhoid fever – he at once gave a lecture protesting against the purchase, a protest in which for some time he stood quite alone. He wrote a stirring article asking, "Why

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<sup>19</sup> Although the lecture was purely political, the subject being "National Taxation," the *Oxford Times* attempted to justify this rowdiness by saying, "A man who identifies himself with a creed which denies the doctrine of reward and punishment in the future life cannot reasonably expect toleration here."



should the people of England pay £4,000,000 to the Viceroy of Egypt?" and he lectured against the purchase week after week. About four or five weeks later others also began to protest. Sir Geo. Campbell, M.P., in the *Fortnightly Review*, was one of the first to take ground against the Government. Inspired by Mr Bradlaugh, resolutions of protest were passed in different parts of the country, and so thoroughly did public opinion change that by the end of March the *Standard* itself was corroborating statements my father had made early in January.

An amusing circumstance happened at Darwen when Mr Bradlaugh was lecturing there in the summer of 1876. A foolish Christian challenged him to pay a visit of consolation to an old bed-ridden woman named Peggy Jepson, and offered him a sovereign if he would go. Amidst much laughter and cheering, he took the sovereign, and carried it straight to the old woman, who was of course surprised and delighted beyond measure with the unexpected gift; this was a form of "consolation" which met with her decided approval. Not so with the Christian challenger, however. He was so irritated that he threatened Mr Bradlaugh with County Court proceedings for the return of his pound.

At the end of September in this year my father and Mrs Besant had been invited to lecture at Congleton on two successive evenings, and to be the guests of Mr and Mrs Wolstenholme Elmy, at Buglawton, during their stay. The Town Hall having been refused for their lectures, the Salford Mill, an old silk mill, was engaged. Mr Bradlaugh spoke the first evening on "The right

to speak and the right to think," but a certain section of the inhabitants of Congleton thought so little of these rights that they kept up a perpetual din outside the mill, and smashed the windows by throwing stones. While the attention of those on the platform was distracted by the removal of a little child out of reach of the falling glass, some coward threw something at Mrs Besant, striking her a severe blow on the back of her head. After the lecture the little party had a mile and a half to walk to Buglawton, which they did accompanied by a noisy crowd, which alternately used language of opprobrium and sang "Safe in the arms of Jesus." When the escort got too demonstrative Mr Bradlaugh and Mr Elmy turned about and faced them, and then, like sheep, the crowd turned about too. A woman was struck full in the face by a Methodist shoemaker, whom she had detected in the act of throwing mud and had reproved. At the house the crowd remained yelling outside until midnight. But if Monday (the first night) was bad, Tuesday was worse, because the rioting was more organised. For two hours before the lecture a crowd assembled in front of Mr Elmy's gate, hooting impartially every one seen entering or leaving the house. A cab had been engaged to drive to the mill where Mrs Besant was to lecture, although she was still suffering from the hurt of the evening before, and as they got into the vehicle a volley of stones was thrown, but fortunately no one was hurt. During the lecture eight persons came in together, and it was soon evident that a thorough disturbance was planned. One of the new-comers

shouted, "Put her out," and as this seemed the signal for a fight, my father said sternly that the next one who interrupted should be put out. A man named Burbery, a local tradesman and well-known wrestler who boasted his prize cups, invited Mr Bradlaugh to make the attempt upon him. My father saw that if the lecture was to go on something must be done, and that quickly, so he descended from the platform, and laying hands upon the champion, after a short struggle ejected him, and handed him over to the charge of the police outside. The audience inside cheered and hooted; the crowd outside yelled and threw stones – one of which, striking Mrs Elmy, cut her severely over the right eye. The excitement subsided in a few minutes, however, and the lecture concluded, and discussion was held in perfect quiet and order. An attempt was made at Mr Elmy's house to repeat the scene of the night before, but my father and his host went out, and at length succeeded in frightening the disturbers away.

I was myself present on one occasion when Mr Bradlaugh had himself to put some rufflers out of a hall in Newman Street, London. In June 1877 a meeting on the Population question was held at Cambridge Hall, and was attended by a number of medical students from, I believe, the Middlesex Hospital. There was a crowded meeting, and there were, in addition to my father, several speakers, both men and women. Several of the medical students got up to move amendments, and in the midst of a very coarse speech by one of them, some of his friends at the

side commenced to flourish thick sticks, and emphasize their opinions by bringing these same sticks into contact with the heads of the peaceful members of the audience. A general fight seemed imminent, when Mr Bradlaugh in commanding tones requested every one to keep his seat, and himself going up to the ringleaders, seized three of them by their collars – two in one hand and one in the other – and partly carrying, partly pushing them down the hall, cast them out of the door amidst cheers of delight from the audience.<sup>20</sup> The students who remained ventured on no more disturbance, and the meeting proceeded in peace and order.

In the autumns of 1877 and 1878 Mr Bradlaugh took my sister and me with him on a lecturing tour he was making in Scotland with Mrs Besant. These tours were a sort of combination of work and holiday, in which the work was to pay for the holiday, and they were both greatly enjoyed by us all. We went as far north as Aberdeen, and came south as far as Hawick. In several of the towns we visited – notably at Perth and Edinburgh – we found kind and hearty friends equally eager to make the holiday part of our visit as great a success as the work itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Dr Nichols had an amusing article on this meeting in the *Living Age*. "The juvenile sawbones," he said, "climbed upon the platform and moved their amendments with admirable audacity. They had not much to say, and they did not know how to say what they had thought of saying; but they mounted the breach bravely enough for all that. And the Malthusian majority behaved very well – much better than English audiences usually do when there is opposition. In the sudden charge that swept the forlorn hope out of the fortress, it looked for a few moments as if there might be a case for the coroner, but Mr Bradlaugh's disciples were mindful of his teachings."

The arrangements were all well made, and it was not until the second visit that any serious hitch arose, and that came unexpectedly at Edinburgh. In 1877 Professor Flint had delivered a series of lectures on "Theism," under the auspices of the Baird Trustees. My father wrote some replies to them, and on sending the first to Professor Flint he received this kindly letter in acknowledgment: —

*"Johnstone Lodge, Craigmillar Park,  
Edinburgh, December 25th, 1877.*

"Sir, — I thank you kindly for sending me a copy of the *National Reformer* for December 23rd. I shall read with interest any criticisms you may be pleased to make on my book on 'Theism,' and I shall endeavour to answer them in a note or notes to the volume on 'Anti-theistic Theories,' a copy of which will be forwarded to you. I regret that my time will not allow me to do more than this. — Thanking you sincerely for your personal courtesy towards me, from whose views you so thoroughly dissent, I am, Sir, yours very truly,

*R. Flint.*

*"C. Bradlaugh."*

In the autumn of 1878 Mr Bradlaugh determined to take one of Professor Flint's lectures, "Is belief in God reasonable?" and make some reply to it from an Edinburgh platform. The Music Hall was duly engaged, the lectures were advertised for the 26th and 27th of September, and everything promised

successful meetings both for himself and for Mrs Besant. On the 23rd, however, the directors of the hall cancelled the hiring. As Mrs Besant's subject was "Christianity: Immoral in Theory and Demoralising in Practice," it was thought at the outset that the refusal was on her account, but a special mention of the subject of Mr Bradlaugh's lecture in the letter written by the directors contradicted this impression. The Edinburgh Freethinkers were indignant; they sought legal advice, but found they had no redress, Professor Flint's lectures had been largely attended and fully reported in the Scotch papers, but of course he had argued in the affirmative. The Committee who had arranged the lectures for Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant then went to the Artillery Hall, and explained all the circumstances; the hall was then hired and paid for, but on the same afternoon the hall-keeper returned the money, saying that the proprietors would not let it for the purposes required, and further, that he was instructed to have the place "guarded by police" on the Thursday and Friday evenings. Many fruitless attempts were made to obtain a hall. On Thursday Mrs Besant's lecture had to be abandoned, and we went to the theatre instead, whilst a large number of persons, who had not seen the notices of postponement, assembled at the Artillery Hall. The Society of Arts Hall was obtained for Friday, and when this was known, much pressure was put upon the proprietors to rescind their contract; they held out until the afternoon, then they also gave way and refused the hall, and when the audience came in the evening they found the doors locked and the place under

police protection. At last Mr Bradlaugh wrote to Professor Flint, shortly stating the case, and appealing to his sense of fair play to aid him in procuring a platform in Edinburgh where he might reply to his arguments. To this letter he received the following reply: —

*"Edinburgh, September 30, 1878.*

"Sir, — It appears to me that you have very good reason to complain of the injustice of the persons who, after granting you the use of their halls, cancelled their contracts. I sincerely regret the treatment you have met with in Edinburgh in this respect. I have no influence, however, with the directors of public halls in this city, and therefore cannot do more than assure you that I cordially wish you the fullest liberty you can desire to discuss and criticise my lectures on Theism. The more freely the grounds of religious belief are examined from all points of view the better. — I am, etc.

*R. Flint."*

One immediate outcome of this exhibition of intolerance was an offer, publicly made and advertised in the *Scotsman*, of a sum of £500 towards the building of a hall in which free discussion might be held.

Mr Bradlaugh lectured many times in Edinburgh both before and after this date, but, as far as I am aware, this is the only time on which he had any difficulty about obtaining a hall to speak in.

Many Scarborough people will recall the fuss made over Mr

Bradlaugh's lecture there in the Old Town Hall on "Eternal Hope and Eternal Torment" in April 1879. A protest, signed by nearly every clergyman in the borough, was sent to the Corporation. That Mr Bradlaugh should lecture in a public building belonging to the town was, said these intolerant clerics, "a public scandal," and "a most serious outrage upon the convictions of the rate-payers." The Mayor moved that this protest be entered upon the Minutes, but there were only five votes in favour of his motion, and it was therefore rejected. My father lectured in Scarborough in 1882 on "Perpetual Pensions," and was to have lectured there again in 1889, but this engagement had to be cancelled in consequence of his serious illness.



## CHAPTER VII.

### LUNATICS

I suppose that all public men are more or less troubled with lunatic correspondents and lunatic visitors, so that in this respect Mr Bradlaugh was in no way singular; but perhaps they gave him more trouble than most men because he was so easy of access. Any one who wished to see him had only to knock at the door, to ask, and to be admitted if my father were at home.

Letters from insane persons were of constant occurrence, but they were soon disposed of – the wastepaper basket was large and was always at hand. There was one man, however, who wrote my father daily for years; indeed, sometimes he would write twice in a day. His letters were without coherence, written on scraps of paper of all shapes and sizes, and I do not remember that he ever gave either his name or his address.

But if there was the ever-hospitable wastepaper basket ready to receive a lunatic's letters, a lunatic visitor needed to be treated more discreetly. This was especially the case at Turner Street, where the room was small, and there was not much space in which to move about. When a visitor called he was usually requested to be seated at the side of the writing-table opposite my father. The chairs were few, and if the visitors were many, some had to sit on piles of books or pamphlets.

One day a man called at Turner Street, and was asked to sit

down in the customary way. My father inquired his business, and without going much into detail the visitor explained, with a queer, uncertain look in his eyes, that he had "a mission from God" to kill him; and thereupon he drew out a formidable-looking knife. Mr Bradlaugh examined the man's face, and saw that it was no foolish hoax being played upon him. There was a quiet determination about his would-be murderer that was anything but reassuring.

The chair in which my father always sat was an old-fashioned, high-backed oaken chair, with arms, and from the back at the right hand hung, suspended by a strap, his heavy Colt's revolver; between himself and the lunatic was the small writing-table, 27 inches wide. My father carefully felt behind him until he felt the revolver under his fingers, and then he quietly asked the man if he was quite sure that God had given him this mission. Yes, the man said; he was "quite sure." "Have you consulted any one about it?" "No," was the reply. "Don't you think it would be better to do so?" gently insinuated Mr Bradlaugh; "I should be inclined to talk it over with some one – with the Archbishop of Canterbury, for instance – were I in your place. You see it might be rather awkward afterwards if there should happen to be any mistake about the matter."

This apparently was a view of the case which had not previously occurred to the lunatic, but he promptly accepted it, and announced his determination to go to Lambeth Palace forthwith; and it was with a perceptible feeling of relief that

my father heard the street door close upon his visitor. He knew that there was no danger to the Archbishop, as there was no probability of such a man being allowed to see him.

Mr Bradlaugh had had a case a little before this of which the circumstances were rather peculiar. A man named John Sladen came up from his home in Cheshire on Thursday, March 31st, 1870, and in the evening he went to the New Hall of Science in Old Street, where a social gathering was about to be held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the publication of the *National Reformer*. Before the proceedings commenced, John Sladen made himself known to Mr Austin Holyoake, to whom he was previously an entire stranger, and asked him if he could speak with Mr Bradlaugh for a few minutes. Mr Holyoake introduced him to Mr Bradlaugh, who took him into a private room. In the course of conversation Sladen informed my father that he had determined to kill the Queen, giving as his chief reason (if my memory serves me) that she wanted to marry him. Mr Bradlaugh returned to Mr Holyoake, and explained the state of affairs to him, and they both agreed that the police ought to be informed, so my father went to the police station and saw the inspector, who sent an officer in plain clothes to the Hall. In order to avoid any disturbance amongst the people present, Sladen was allowed to remain until ten o'clock, when, as Mr Holyoake said, the police officer "very adroitly got him away." Sladen was so sensible on most matters that at first the police were disinclined to believe in his madness, but before the night

was out they had more than sufficient proof. On the following morning Mr Bradlaugh telegraphed to Sladen's friends, and went himself to the police station to see that he was properly cared for. Eventually he was sent to Hanwell Asylum, and on the earliest opportunity he wrote reproaching my father. Of course he did not think he was mad, and he told Mr Bradlaugh that as he had been the means of putting him in the Asylum, it was his duty to get him out, or at any rate to send him papers to read. Later on my father communicated with Dr Bayley, the physician to the Asylum, who assured him that Sladen was not fit to be released, and that any political reading would be calculated to excite him and retard his cure. But a few years later I believe he was allowed to have the *National Reformer*. My father never lost sight of him; he used to send to the Asylum to make enquiries, and Sladen also wrote to him occasionally; he always felt Sladen's to be a sad case, and was oppressed by a feeling of responsibility in the matter just because he was the one to hand him over to the police. Of course there was a small public sensation about the matter, which the newspapers did their best to fan into a big one at Mr Bradlaugh's expense. The east end of London was posted with large placards announcing "A Threat to murder the Queen at the New Hall of Science."<sup>21</sup> An evening paper<sup>22</sup> giving a report of the proceedings, told how Sladen "heard Mr Bradlaugh lecture"

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<sup>21</sup> This was done by the *Eastern Post*.

<sup>22</sup> The *Pall Mall Gazette*. Mr Austin Holyoake wrote a short letter contradicting this report, and giving the simple facts of the case, but his letter was not inserted.

at the Hall of Science, and *after the lecture* told Mr Bradlaugh of his determination to kill the Queen. The next morning this report was repeated, but with additional embellishments. Now it was said that Sladen "went to hear a lecture by Mr Bradlaugh, and soon afterwards burst into threats of such violence towards Her Majesty that he was taken into custody as a dangerous lunatic."<sup>23</sup> That there was no lecture at the Hall that evening, that there was no bursting out into threats of violence, that Sladen spoke to Mr Bradlaugh *before*, and not *after*, the commencement of the evening's proceedings, were of course matters of mere detail, without value when compared with the opportunity of raising a prejudice against Mr Bradlaugh. Similarly, when the lad O'Connor tried to frighten the Queen with an empty pistol, it was said that probably a large "share of the mischief was caused by the lad's attendance on the lectures of a notorious Infidel and Republican lecturer, whose inflammatory discourses, falling on a weak, excitable, untrained mind, produced the natural effect and goaded him on to mischief."<sup>24</sup> That there was no evidence that the lad had ever attended any such lectures was apparently of small importance.

At Circus Road I can recall several mad visitors: one in shirt sleeves and leather apron, who offered to reveal a secret to Mr Bradlaugh whereby he might become possessed of millions; another, a little old lady, who told with a mysterious air how

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<sup>23</sup> *Daily News*.

<sup>24</sup> *City Press*.

she was "the Secret History;" another, who was so noisy that he had to be put out, and who then remained in the street below shouting out that Mr Bradlaugh had ill-used him, till he brought out all the neighbours to their doors, and the commotion he raised threatened to hinder the traffic. Then there were some who claimed to be descendants of one or other of the Brunswicks, and as such entitled to the Crown; but provided they were quietly listened to, these gave little trouble save in the time they wasted.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE "WATCH" STORY

There have been some fictions so pertinaciously circulated about Mr Bradlaugh that any story of his life would be incomplete without some reference to them. Lies are so proverbially hard to kill, however, that I dare not feel confident that even an exposure of them here will altogether discredit these old favourites, but at least I hope that it may have some little effect.

I think the most popular of all these is what has come to be known as "the watch story," and for this reason I have taken the trouble to trace back its history, not exactly to its origin, but for the last hundred years or so. The defiance of Deity, which is really only the converse of the prayer, is a very ancient idea, and the old stories mostly ended in the punishment or death of the person who so rashly defied the Omnipotent. The so-called Atheist who, in the time of the French Revolution, defied God to prevent him drinking his cup of wine, was struck dead to the ground, and the cup was dashed untasted from his lips. Even during this century, as late as 1849 or 1850, the story was told of a wicked soldier who rode out of the ranks, and turning his horse's head, faced his companions, exclaiming, "If there be a God, let Him now prove it by striking me dead before you." In a few minutes this rash young man was a corpse – a victim

to the wrath of an outraged Deity and a solemn warning to his comrades.

When this fable is related, not of vague personalities such as the "Atheist" or the "wicked soldier," but of actual living persons, the termination has to be amended,<sup>25</sup> and the moral loses something of its point. The first time that it was told of Mr Bradlaugh was, as far as I can trace, in the year 1867. There was at that time a certain Conservative journal called the *British Monarchy*, the editor of which, desiring to damage the Reform League, expressed his opinion in choice and elegant language that the meetings of the League gave

"An opportunity to the roughs of the Metropolis to sack the shops, ... goaded on by the fool who says in his heart there is 'no God,' which reminds us," he went on, "of a fact related of a resigned leading member of the Reform League, and the supposed projector of the 'Good Friday meeting'<sup>26</sup> of this year. This would-be lawgiver and law-

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<sup>25</sup> As late as January 1884, however, Mr Bradlaugh noted a case reported in several newspapers of a private in the Hampshire Regiment, who cried, "God strike me blind!" and who thereupon "felt drowsy, and stretched himself on his bed, but when he attempted to open his eyes, he found he could not do so, and he has since been wholly deprived of the use of his eyes. He was conveyed to the Haslar Military Hospital, where he remains." As this was tolerably definite, inquiries were made at the Hospital. In answer to these, the principal wrote: "There is no truth whatever in the statement, and the lad who is supposed to have sworn never swore at all. He has a weak right eye; it was slightly inflamed – the result of a cold – but he is now quite well. He is very indignant and hurt at the statement, and, if he did swear, he is not blind."

<sup>26</sup> Mr Bradlaugh was neither the projector nor the advocate of the Good Friday promenade.



maker, travelling on the Great Eastern Railway, was as usual endeavouring to propagate his hateful opinions. He had the presumption to offer, it is said, as a proof of his assertion that 'there is no God,' the fact that if, on taking out his watch from his pocket, he held it in his hand for some minutes and was not struck dead, it would be conclusive evidence of the truth of his opinions. He was not struck dead because of God's long-suffering mercy. He reminds us of Pharaoh; may he escape his fate!"

Mr Bradlaugh never by any chance sought to propagate his opinions in a railway carriage, nor was he ever guilty of "such ridiculous folly," as he contemptuously termed it, as that attributed to him by the *British Monarchy*. Long before this story was attached to Mr Bradlaugh name it was told of Abner Kneeland, the Pantheist and abolitionist in America; indeed, the defiance of Deity in this particular manner is said to have originated in a story told by an American of Abner Kneeland.<sup>27</sup> It was ascribed to Mrs Emma Martin,<sup>28</sup> a Freethought speaker in England, who was eulogised by Mr G. J. Holyoake as "beautiful in expression, quick in wit, strong in will, eloquent in speech, coherent in connection, and of a stainless character, she was incomparable among public women." It was related again and again of Mr G. J. Holyoake, who wrote a denial of it as early as January 1854. Many times also was the challenge ascribed to

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<sup>27</sup> Kneeland died in 1844. The tale was repeatedly contradicted.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Martin died in 1857. In her case also it was contradicted.

Mrs Harriet Law, a lecturer on the Freethought platform thirty years ago; and later, when Mrs Besant came into the movement, she was made to play the part of heroine in this affecting drama, although, as she herself pointed out, "there is one very queer thing about the story; it never appears in any report given at the time of any lecture, and no one speaks of having heard the challenge the day, week, or month, or year after it was done. The pious Christian always heard it about twenty years ago, and has kept it locked in his bosom ever since."<sup>29</sup>

From 1867, when the *British Monarchy* first associated this story with Mr Bradlaugh's name, down to 1880, when my father commenced a prosecution against a man named Edgcumbe, not a single year passed without some repetition of it. Since this prosecution, although it still occasionally shows signs of life, it is not nearly so vigorous. The story was circulated, not merely by vulgar and irresponsible purveyors of slander, but even by persons whose position gave an air of unimpeachable veracity to anything they might choose to say.

The first person to relate the "watch" story orally of Mr Bradlaugh was Mr Charles Capper, M.P., who, as it may be remembered, told it with some detail at a public meeting at Sandwich during the general election of 1868, giving the name of Mr Charles Gilpin as his authority.<sup>30</sup> My father at once wrote to Mr Capper that he had read his speech "with indignation, but

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<sup>29</sup> *National Reformer*, June 6th, 1880.

<sup>30</sup> *Deal and Sandwich Mercury*, Sept. 26.

without surprise, for no inventions on the part of my enemies would now surprise me." He had, he said, "seen Mr Charles Gilpin, and so far as he is concerned, I have his distinct authority to entirely deny that he ever told you anything of the kind, and I have therefore to apply to you for an immediate retraction of and apology for your cowardly falsehood, which has been industriously circulated in Northampton, and which could only have been uttered with the view of doing me injury in my candidature in that borough. Permit me to add, that I never in my life (either in Northampton or any other place) have uttered any phrase affording a colour of justification for the monstrous words you put in my mouth."

But Mr Charles Capper would not retract, and would not apologise, so Mr Bradlaugh, who felt all the more incensed about this, because of the dragging in of Mr Gilpin's name as authority for the slander, brought an action against him. Before it could be brought into Court, however, Mr Capper died.

In the December of the same year, during the hearing of the proceedings in the *Razor* libel case, the counsel for the defendant Brooks asked Mr Bradlaugh, in cross-examination, "Did you not once at a public lecture take out your watch and defy the Deity, if he had an existence, to strike you dead in a certain number of minutes?" "Never. Such a suggestion is utterly unjustifiable," was my father's indignant answer.

In the winter of 1869, the Rev. P. R. Jones, M.A., of Trinity Church, Huddersfield, added the weight of his authority to the

slander. The municipal elections were about to take place, and the cry of "infidel" had been raised against one of the candidates for the West Ward. Hence, on the Sunday immediately before the election, Mr Jones preached a sermon against "infidels" and "infidelity," and, as an "apt illustration of his subject," he charged Mr Bradlaugh with the watch episode. When this came to the ears of the Huddersfield Secular Society, they lost no time in writing to ask Mr Jones whether he had indeed made such a statement concerning Mr Bradlaugh. This, said the *Huddersfield Examiner*, the reverend gentleman had not "the manliness to admit ... nor even the courtesy to acknowledge the receipt of the secretary's letter." The Committee of the local Secular Society waited for seven days, and then appointed a deputation to wait upon the Rev. Mr Jones. The editor of the *Examiner* observed that the explanation then given by that gentleman was "not very satisfactory, and I do not wonder he was so tardy about making it. He had heard the absurd story some years ago, but the person who told it to him had left Huddersfield; and on such slender authority as this he brought a charge of using senseless and blasphemous words against Mr Bradlaugh." The Rev. P. R. Jones, M.A., in the course of his duties must have preached obedience to the ninth commandment, but he evidently did not always enforce his teachings by a personal example.

Just about the same time another clergyman, the Rev. Dr Harrison of St James's Church, Latchford, in a sermon preached upon that favourite but not very polite text, "The fool hath said

in his heart, There is no God," was reported<sup>31</sup> to have told the story, with a slight variation, of some unnamed person.

"What did they think of a man at Manchester," he asked, "standing up at a public assembly and opening the Bible in the presence of the people, and saying if the Bible was true he hoped God would strike him dead? That was in the newspapers not long ago. A creature, a worm, a being dependent upon the Almighty, raising his puny arm against the Deity, asking God to strike him dead if the Bible were true. It would not have been a wonder if God had struck him dead; the wonder was that God should be so merciful as to let him live."

When the Rev. Dr Harrison was challenged as to the name of the man, the time, and place of the occurrence, and the names of the newspapers which reported it, he could of course give no satisfactory authority for his statements.

In the summer of 1870 the *Christian*, in a tirade against infidelity, stated that "the well-known Atheist Bradlaugh, at a public meeting in London, is reported to have taken out his watch, with these words, 'If there be a God in heaven, I give Him five minutes to strike me dead.'" Upon this being brought under his notice, my father said that he was "really weary with contradicting this monstrous lie."

The *Liverpool Porcupine* in the same year gave a startling variation on the ordinary version. A certain unnamed person –

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<sup>31</sup> Crewe *Guardian*.

by implication, Mr Bradlaugh – "called on the Almighty, if he had any existence, to strike dead *some relative*, and thus prove his power." The *Porcupine* forgot that it is the Christian creed which teaches the doctrine of the scapegoat, and even the sacrifice of a relative. It forms no part whatever of Atheistic teachings.

The Rev. R. S. Cathcart, agent to the Religious Tract Society, in addressing a meeting in the Corn Exchange, Gloucester, in the autumn of 1871, lamented the spread of infidelity in the north of England, where, he said, it was encouraged by a "blatant orator, Bradlaugh, from London." He added that there was even "one poor benighted woman" who "had actually produced her watch and challenged God, if, she said, there be one, to appear before them on the platform at a given time." Mr Cathcart, on being asked as to the when, and where, and the woman, failed to make reply.

The next carrier of the slander was an important one. The *Financial Reformer* for the December of the same year (1871) described Mr Bradlaugh as "the superenlightened gentleman who pulled out his watch at an open-air meeting and challenged Almighty God to strike him dead within five minutes, if God there were." My father was becoming somewhat accustomed to having this accusation made by persons who wished to make out a case against the "infidel," but to find it in the *Financial Reformer* was an unexpected blow. He wrote a courteous letter to the editor, but the editor made no reply; he wrote to Mr Robertson Gladstone, the president of the council publishing the

paper, but Mr Robertson Gladstone left the letter without notice. At length, thoroughly angry, he wrote to the printers, threatening legal proceedings. A proof of an "apology" already in type was sent him, but it was not such as he felt he could accept, and he wrote to the printer to that effect. The apology was then somewhat amended, and with the copy of the *Financial Reformer* containing it the editor sent a letter to Mr Bradlaugh, conveying a frank and full expression of his regret. Upon receiving this my father forgave not only the offence, but the tardiness of the acknowledgment, and, moreover, expressed his sense of indebtedness to the editor for his apology.

The *Stourbridge Observer* of about the same date also repeated the watch story of "Bradlaugh," and, with incredible coarseness, added that "he has been known on another occasion to stop a lame man in the streets, and tell him that he would spit upon such a God as his that would allow him to remain in that deplorable condition." Mr Bradlaugh, at the request of his Stourbridge friends, specifically contradicted both these stories; but, he added, it was too much to expect him to continually contradict every scandalous calumny to which the press gave ready circulation against him.

One of the next places in which the story appeared was Dudley, where, in the winter of 1873, during my father's absence in America, it was related by the Rev. B. M. Kitson, who apparently introduced it into a speech for the benefit of the Additional Curates' Aid Society. He located the episode at

the Hall of Science in Old Street, City Road. As soon as Mr Bradlaugh could obtain the reverend gentleman's address after his return to England, he wrote requesting Mr Kitson to retract, or to furnish him with the name of his solicitor. Mr Kitson retracted the statement, and expressed his regret for having made it.

In the spring of 1874, the Rev. Mr Herring related the tale to some school children at a school near Goswell Road, and in the following August the Rev. Edgar N. Thwaites, of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, carried it to Salisbury.

A month later, the *Weekly News*, in referring to the Northampton election, remarked that Northampton was specially prominent, "because Mr Bradlaugh, the Radical orator who challenged the Almighty to strike him dead, has appeared in person." Anything is fair in war or elections, some people seem to think.

In the following year the Rev. Mr Cripps, of the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Thetford, started a new variation on the old theme. At the end of one of Mr Bradlaugh's lectures, a smith "fresh from work," induced him to go down on one knee (the narrator was extremely precise in unimportant details) and proposed that they should pray to God to "strike him dead in five minutes." This proposal seems to have somewhat disturbed Mr Bradlaugh, for according to Mr Cripps, he "jumped up, picked up his hat, and rushed out of the building." The Rev. Mr Cripps, on being challenged by Mr Bradlaugh, referred him to



another minister as his authority – the Rev. M. Normandale, of Downham Market, Norfolk; and, moreover, refusing to accept Mr Bradlaugh's "unsupported denial," adhered to his statement.

The next person to repeat the watch story – but without naming the "infidel" – was, I deeply regret to say, the Rev. Basil Wilberforce, at Southampton. The local Freethinkers were justly indignant, and Mr J. F. Rayner, the Secretary of the Southampton Secular Society, at once flatly contradicted the tale. The only reparation Mr Wilberforce thought it necessary to make was to say that he was "glad to hear it was not true," and this offhand mode of disposing of the matter did not do much to soothe the irritated feeling of the Southampton Freethinkers. The liberality and kindly-heartedness of the late Rev. C. E. Steward, Vicar of St Peter's, in great measure disarmed their anger; and later on Canon Wilberforce himself learned to hold the Freethinkers of the district, as well as Mr Bradlaugh, in respect, and in consequence taught them in turn to respect him.

A man at Longton in 1876, whose name I do not know, brought the story to a finer point. Hitherto it had always been told on the authority of some second person, but this man appears to have deliberately stated that he *saw* Mr Bradlaugh pull out his watch, and *heard* him defy God to strike him dead. This manner of telling the tale in the first person soon found favour, for only a few months later a phrenologist, calling himself Professor Pasquil, was reported to have said that he was present at Huddersfield when Mr Bradlaugh went through

the performance before several hundred persons. He must have "the bump of falsehood splendidly developed," commented Mr Bradlaugh. "No such event, or anything to justify it, ever took place anywhere; it is a deliberate untruth." The myth was repeated in the same year at Haughley by a Mr Scarff, and in the following year at Bristol, where there seemed to be some confusion as to whether it was Mr Bradlaugh or Mrs Besant who was the chief actor; Mrs Besant's name being now introduced for the first time. "This story is a deliberate lie," wrote my father in a state of exasperation, "and has been formally contradicted at least one hundred times."

At length, in the spring of 1877, the Rev. Dr Parker, of the City Temple, took the matter into his fostering charge. It left his lips, if the report<sup>32</sup> of his sermon is to be believed, in a form the coarseness of which quite equalled, if it did not transcend, all that had gone before. Said he —

"There is a woman going up and down the country lecturing, and may be in London city at this moment, and she proudly cries out that there is no God, and she takes out her watch and says, 'Now, if there be a God, I give him five minutes to strike me dead,' and she coolly stands watching the hand of her watch dial, and because she is not struck dead by the time she stipulates, she cries out that there is no God; and working men run after this woman, and pay for listening to this ginger-beer blasphemy, and the ravings of

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<sup>32</sup> *Northern Ensign*, May 17.

a half-drunken woman."

Mr Bradlaugh offered Dr Parker the use of the columns of the *National Reformer* in which to verify his statement, but, needless to say, Dr Parker did not avail himself of this offer.

In 1878 the fable was told by "H. Clewarth, Esq.," at the Mile End Assembly Hall, of Mrs Besant, and by a revivalist preacher named E. B. Telford of Mrs Harriet Law. Mr Telford also indulged in the effective first person, even mentioning the detail that the watch was a gold one.<sup>33</sup>

Now we come to a still further development. In June 1879, Mr Bradlaugh was lecturing in Huddersfield. He spoke three times on the Sunday, and at the conclusion of his afternoon discourse a man got up, and with the utmost assurance pretended to my father's face that he had heard him defy God to strike him dead in the Philosophical Hall of Huddersfield itself. A Christian gentleman, understood to be the editor of the local *Examiner*, rose and warmly repudiated any complicity in this audacious falsehood. Almost at the same time the story, with variations, was repeated by a preacher of Aberdeen named Marr. He gave as his authority a certain unknown person, John Kinch, who, it was asserted, had been actually present when Mr Bradlaugh thus defied God.

I have been able to note here only recorded instances of the telling of this story, but they will serve to show the astounding vitality of a slander, even when it is one so monstrously absurd

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<sup>33</sup> This person was still telling this story in December 1883.

as this. It will be seen how people of all kinds lent themselves to its circulation, and how reluctant they were to apologise when convicted of error. I am far from asserting that they all uttered the calumny knowing it to be a calumny; that, in the case of such a man as the Rev. Basil Wilberforce, would be unthinkable, but I do say that they did not take reasonable pains to satisfy themselves of the truth of a story which, on the face of it, was in the highest degree improbable and absurd.

When Mr Bradlaugh was elected to Parliament in 1880 the wildest tales were told about him, and, of course, amongst others the old "watch" story came up. A Leicester paper which published it retracted and apologised; but another, the *British Empire*, was less ready; my father, provoked beyond endurance, went to Bow Street and asked for a summons against S. C. Lister, a director, and J. Edgcumbe (or Edgcome), secretary to the *British Empire Company*. Edgcumbe was also the writer of the paragraph in which the episode was dramatically described. Mr Bradlaugh would have proceeded against the author only, but the libel was repeated in the paper on a later date, and therefore he felt that he could not excuse the directors. The summons was granted, and when the case came before the magistrate, after Mr Bradlaugh had made his opening statement, he went into the witness-box to declare there was not a word of truth in the paragraph. In the course of the cross-examination a rather amusing theological discussion arose between magistrate, counsel, and witness, in which the two former seemed quite

unable to follow Mr Bradlaugh's reasoning. "One existence," Mr Vaughan thought, must mean "supreme existence;" failing that, counsel asked was it "mere actual physical existence"? My father was examined as to a number of places where the "watch" episode was alleged to have occurred, and about a man, John Field, then in court, who, induced by Mr Bradlaugh, was supposed to have prayed on his knees to God to strike him (Mr Bradlaugh) dead, whilst my father timed him, watch in hand. When, however, John Field, who called himself a Baptist minister, was in the witness-box, his replies were such that the magistrate said that he had better be withdrawn, as he could not possibly receive his evidence. A witness (Bridge) swore to having heard my father defy God in the manner alleged at Tavistock in 1853; but at the adjourned hearing, when he was wanted for cross-examination, he was not to be found. Amongst the witnesses were three from Northampton, who all swore they had heard my father make the challenge at various times and places in Northampton. Two had travelled to London together, having their tickets taken for them by a local missionary; but at first they swore they knew nothing of each other, and the facts only came out gradually under cross-examination. At the end of the second day's hearing the defendants were committed for trial.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The editor of the *Huddersfield Examiner*, commenting on the evidence, said: "We do not believe it, as we do not think Mr Bradlaugh such a fool as to make such a silly exhibition of himself; and because we know that similar things have been affirmed of him in Huddersfield. For instance, a person called at our office last week, stating that he had heard Mr Bradlaugh utter such a challenge, and saw him pull out his watch in the

Mr Vaughan suggested that the charge should be withdrawn against Lister, as he was only a director. Mr Bradlaugh said, if Mr Lister would give his assurance that he knew nothing of the first or subsequent publications of the libel, he would be content to drop the charge against him. Mr Lister protested that he knew nothing of the matter, and Mr Bradlaugh was about to withdraw the charge when the defendants' counsel coolly asked that it should be dismissed with costs. I imagine, however, that at a later stage my father consented to withdraw the case against Lister, for the name of Edgcumbe only figures in the further proceedings.

The trial, which was removed by the defendants by *certiorari* to the Court of Queen's Bench, was expected to take place at the end of June, and, since prosecutors in Crown cases cannot personally address the jury or argue points of law, my father had to employ solicitors (Messrs Lewis) and counsel (Mr Charles Russell, Q.C., M.P., and Mr Moloney); Sir Hardinge Giffard was briefed to appear for Edgcumbe. After some delays, Edgcumbe was ordered to deliver his pleas within a

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manner stated in the course of the debate with the Rev. Mr M'Cann in Huddersfield. To our certain knowledge no such occurrence ever took place, and yet the man making the statement appeared to be fully convinced that he had heard and seen what he described as having taken place, and he was prepared to give evidence on the subject if called upon to do so... Imagination and feeling play a much larger part than reason in the mental operations of not a few well-meaning persons and allowance must be made for this when we hear such charges as that now made against Mr Bradlaugh. Strong dislike is felt by many against both the man and his opinions on religious subjects, and this exposes him to misrepresentation and injustice."

certain time, so that the trial might come on in November. In these pleadings the episode was alleged to have taken place at The Philosophical Hall, Huddersfield, about 1860 or 1861; The Theatre, Northampton, 1860, 1862, 1863, 1865, or 1866; The Woolpack Inn, Northampton, 1859; The Corn Exchange, Northampton, 1865 or 1866; The Hall of Science, London, 1879 or 1880; The Cleveland Hall, London, 1865 or 1866; The Nelson Street Lecture Hall, Newcastle, 1875; Tavistock, 1853, 1854, or 1860; St George's Hall, Southwark, 1862 or 1863; St James' Hall, Plymouth, 1870; Duke of York Public House, Cardiff, 1868.

As the vagueness of these dates made it almost impossible to get rebutting evidence, Mr Bradlaugh demurred to the plea on this ground, and in March 1881 his demurrer was heard by Mr Justice Grove and Mr Justice Lindley. Mr Moloney argued for Mr Bradlaugh that the plea was not sufficiently particular: it was only necessary to prove one occasion to justify the libel, hence evidence had to be brought to negative every case, and Mr Justice Grove, intervening, said, "If this plea is good, what is to prevent a party from pleading a volume of instances all possibly untrue, and at all events putting it upon the prosecutor to discover the particular instance really intended to be relied upon?" Sir H. Giffard argued that the plea was sufficient, but the Court did not agree with him. It held that the plea was bad, and Mr Justice Lindley further said it was embarrassing and unfair. After some discussion the Court gave the defendant leave to amend within three weeks on payment of costs; otherwise judgment would be

given for the Crown.

Edgcumbe now gave a series of more or less specific dates on which he alleged that Mr Bradlaugh had defied God. He also abandoned five of his former cases and introduced new ones at Bristol, Keighley, Leeds, and Stourbridge. He further stated that on two occasions, at the theatre at Northampton, Mr Bradlaugh had cast a Bible upon the ground and stamped upon it. My father was put to tremendous trouble in procuring witnesses from the different places, but he received help which he greatly appreciated from unexpected quarters – from Christians who had been present on some of the alleged occasions.

When, however, the time came, the defendant did not proceed to trial, as he was bound to under his recognisances. My father might have taken proceedings to estreat the recognisances; but as the *British Empire* had ceased to exist, and the editor had already been heavily fined by having to pay the costs of the demurrer, he was advised to let the matter rest. This course he was perhaps the more inclined to, as he was himself so terribly harassed by the litigation and trouble arising out of the Parliamentary struggle.

He was rewarded for his forbearance by having the "watch" story again repeated of him – notably by Mr Grantham, Q.C., M.P.,<sup>35</sup> – with the addition that he had "not dared to go on with his action."

[*Note.* – Where exact references are not given in this

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<sup>35</sup> At Selhurst, in June 1885.



chapter, the *National Reformer* is cited.]

## CHAPTER IX.

### OTHER FABLES

There are other fables told about my father which have enjoyed a popularity almost equal to that of the famous watch episode. There is the allegation – referred to elsewhere – that he compared God with a monkey with three tails. This was started by the *Saturday Review* in 1867, and was for years continually reappearing in all sorts of unexpected quarters. Indeed, it was repeated as late as 1893 in a book published by Messrs Macmillan.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps next in order should come two, which have seen considerable service as arguments in favour of Christianity. One, which I will call the "cob of coal" story, appeared for the first time, as far as I am aware, in a Leeds paper in 1870 in the following form: —

"Some time ago I heard an amusing story about Mr Bradlaugh and one of his audience at Wigan. After concluding his lecture, Mr Bradlaugh called upon any of them to reply to any of his arguments. Lancashire produces a rare crop of shrewd, intelligent working men, and one of these, a collier, rose and spoke somewhat as follows: 'Maister Bradlaugh, me and my mate Jim were both Methodys till one of these infidel chaps cam' this way. Jim turned infidel, and used to badger me about attending class-

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<sup>36</sup> "National Life and Character," by C. H. Pearson.

meetings and prayer-meetings, but one day in the pit a large cob of coal came down on Jim's 'yeard.' Jim thought he was killed, and ah! man, but he did holler.' Then turning to Mr Bradlaugh, with a very whimsical, knowing look, he said, 'Young man, there's nowt like cobs of coal for knocking infidelity out of a man.' We need hardly say that the collier carried the audience with him."

This was copied into some London papers, and in the course of a couple of years found its way to Belfast; but the scene of action had now become changed from Wigan to Manchester. Two years later still it appeared at Hereford, under the auspices of the Rev. J. W. Bardsley. The "some time ago" of 1870 had contracted to "recently" by 1874, and there were other small alterations of detail. By 1882, my father said he had contradicted this anecdote fifty times at least. It never had the slightest foundation in fact; it is unadulterated fiction from beginning to end; it is absurdly improbable; and yet there are people so credulous that it has been repeated year after year, and even since my father's death. Indeed, the more childish this class of story, the better it has seemed to satisfy those to whom it was addressed — at least, if we may judge of its success by the number of its repetitions.

The next is the "old woman" anecdote, which I find first in the *Christian Age* for November 1871, put in this way: —

"The other day Mr Bradlaugh was lecturing in a village in the north of England, and at the close he challenged

discussion. Who should accept the challenge but an old, bent woman, in most antiquated attire, who went up to the lecturer and said, 'Sir, I have a question to put to you.' 'Well, my good woman, what is it?' 'Ten years ago,' she said, 'I was left a widow with eight children utterly unprovided for, and nothing to call my own but this Bible. By its direction, and looking to God for strength, I have been enabled to feed myself and family. I am now tottering to the grave; but I am perfectly happy, because I look forward to a life of immortality with Jesus in heaven. That's what my religion has done for me: what has your way of thinking done for you?' 'Well, my good lady,' rejoined the lecturer, 'I don't want to disturb your comfort, but – ' 'Oh! that's not the question,' interrupted the woman, 'keep to the point, sir; what has your way of thinking done for you?'

"The infidel endeavoured to shirk the matter again; the feeling of the meeting gave vent to uproarious applause, and Mr Bradlaugh had to go away discomfited by an old woman."

This pious fiction is said to have originated with the Rev. Mr Bradbury, of Openshaw, in the early part of 1871; but then it was Mr Charles Watts who was the "discomfited infidel," and not Mr Bradlaugh. From the *Christian Age* the story was passed on, evidently without the slightest examination or care for its accuracy. In 1872 it was repeated in large type by the *Methodist Visitor*, word for word, "the other day" included. Mr Bradlaugh contradicted this idiotic story again and again; no such incident ever occurred at any of his lectures. In spite of all

contradiction, however, the "old woman" remained as lively as ever, and my father was confronted with her year after year, until I almost wonder he had patience left to write a civil denial of her existence.

An anecdote, reported<sup>37</sup> to have been told by the Rev. H. W. Webb-Peploe at a meeting of the Bible Society at Stroud in 1875, has at least the merit of being amusing, and certainly came as news to no one more than to the persons chiefly concerned. It was said that Spurgeon "went to Bradlaugh's Hall to reply to the Infidel," and to that end "read two or three texts from the Scriptures... This seems to have astonished Bradlaugh, for he arose, and as he went out of the room, he said, 'What the devil is to be done with that man? he is in earnest.'" If the Rev. Charles Spurgeon ever, by any chance, *did* go to "Bradlaugh's Hall," he carefully concealed his visit from "Bradlaugh."

Fictions concerning my father's treatment of various members of his family have been very common. By a painful coincidence, my little brother had only been a few days in his grave when my father was asked to contradict a statement that he had "about twelve months ago deserted his wife and children." Six months after, the story ran that he had "caused his mother to die of a broken heart," had been "drummed out of the army," and was "a man whose morality is of no higher stamp than to suffer himself to be the father of an illegitimate child." It is an interesting point in the study of the evolution of slanders, that this most

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<sup>37</sup> *Stroud News*, May 28.

persistent one of Mr Bradlaugh having caused his mother to die of a broken heart should have been started during his mother's lifetime.<sup>38</sup> The allegation of deserting his children, and throwing them upon the parish, was published by Mr Edmund Yates in the *World* in 1875. A little later Mr Yates announced that Mr Bradlaugh had written him contradicting this, and suggesting that if on inquiry Mr Yates found his allegation untrue, he should contribute £5 to the Masonic Boys' School. The editor of the *World* formally expressed his regret, "unreservedly" withdrew his accusation, and contributed the £5. The suggestion was really the result of the intervention of a mutual friend, as Mr Yates himself acknowledged in 1891, at the same time admitting that the paragraph complained of would have afforded Mr Bradlaugh "ample grounds for appealing to the law, with the likelihood of recovering a large amount in damages."

But the slander thus floated by the *World* could not be effaced from the public mind, even by Mr Yates' "unreserved withdrawal," and later in the same year it turned up in full vigour at Oxford. A Mr Bendall went to the shop of a grocer and town councillor named Laker to make some purchases, and in the course of conversation he mentioned that he was going to London. Mr Laker asked if he was going to hear Moody and Sankey, but Mr Bendall said that he was not; he was going to hear Mr Bradlaugh. The man Laker then said, "Bradlaugh! he was had up for neglecting his family, and leaving them chargeable to

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<sup>38</sup> Mrs Bradlaugh died in April 1871.

the Union. I read it in the *Daily Telegraph*." Mr Bendall denied this, and bet Laker £50 to 5s. that it was not true. Laker took the bet, and Mr Bendall then wrote out the statement, which they both signed. The paper was sent to Mr Bradlaugh, who eventually brought an action against Mr Laker.<sup>39</sup>

The defendant pleaded "Not guilty," but did not attempt to justify his statement or to offer any apology, although Mr Bradlaugh said that, if during the course of the trial an apology had been offered, he should have been quite content.

Mr Grantham, the counsel for the defence, was very coarse in his remarks. He scouted the idea that "Bradlaugh" could be injured by any slander, and told the jury that, if they did give him a verdict, a farthing damages would be "far too much" at which to estimate the damage "Bradlaugh" had sustained. As usual, an endeavour was made to play upon the religious feelings of the jury, and when Mr Bendall was in the witness-box he was questioned as to his belief in Christianity, the Bible, and Jesus Christ, until Mr Justice Field, who heard the case, interfered and reproved the counsel for importing these questions into the case. Mr Grantham suggested the whole thing was a "plant," but this accusation, the judge later on pointed out, might rightfully increase the damages awarded.

Mr Justice Field, in summing up, complimented Mr Bradlaugh on the temperate manner in which he had stated his case, and warned the jury not to allow their judgments to be

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<sup>39</sup> Tried 25th April 1876 at Nisi Prius, before Mr Justice Field and a special jury.

warped by topics of prejudice which had been introduced into the defendant's case. The jury returned a verdict for Mr Bradlaugh, with £40 damages, which my father at once handed over to a charity.

But even this did not quite kill the slander, and a few years later it began again to show signs of life.

There was no limit of any kind to the fictions circulated about my father, nothing was too vile, nothing too absurd, and nothing too wildly impossible to say about him. As an example of the last, I think it would be difficult to find anything to compare with one written by the London correspondent of the *New York Herald*, during the illness of the Prince of Wales from typhoid fever. I discovered an allusion to this story in looking over a file of the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* for 1872; reference was made to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, from which I learned that the London correspondent of the *New York Herald* professed that he had been informed by a mysterious person "well posted" as to the doing of the different European Secret Societies, that "a certain leader of the English Revolutionists whom he designated 'The English Delescluze,' has over and over again declared from public platforms that the Prince should never sit on the throne, and that lately, when Queen Victoria was seriously ill, the same man had said in an interview with the reporter for a London paper, that although the event of the Sovereign's death occurring just then would without any doubt find the Society not quite prepared to act, yet that they could never lose such an opportunity to



advance their cause." "This," commented the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "is, of course, an atrocious libel on Mr Bradlaugh." "The poison," continued the informant to his gaping listener, the *Herald's* London correspondent, "was a new and most subtle one. How the Prince was actually dosed he did not pretend to know. The emissary of the International charged with the execution of the sentence of death was left to himself, and was simply bidden to take as few innocent lives in carrying it out as possible; but it was suggested to him to mix the poison with the contents of the Prince's pocket flask, and this it was probable he had succeeded in doing." This marvellous story was received in England with the condemnation and ridicule it deserved, and I only give it here now to show to what lengths prejudice and a disordered imagination will lead a man.

I suppose it is only in the natural course of things that an Irish paper<sup>40</sup> should have the funniest story, and one too that seems really original. This journal discovered that in the summer, when Republican agitation was slack, Mr Bradlaugh took up "the more useful – if less profitable – occupation of a bagman." Presumably this was intended to be severely sarcastic; it was only ridiculous and untrue.

At intervals throughout my father's career he has, of course, been constantly accused of being in the pay of some one or other. This kind of accusation is common to most public men, so it was not likely that he would escape. In 1872, when it was

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<sup>40</sup> *Belfast Times*, April 8, 1872.

asserted that "Bradlaugh and Odger" were sold to "Gladstone and Morley," the *Saturday Review* thought it no shame to suggest that "perhaps after all there is some truth in the story."<sup>41</sup> A few months before, said my father, it was "Bradlaugh was sold to the Tories, now it is the Whigs who have made the purchase;" and he mockingly regretted "that neither party have even paid a deposit." At other times he was charged with being in the pay of the Prince Napoleon, of the Commune, of Sir Charles Dilke, of the Carlists, and, last of all, in that of the Maharajah of Cashmere. This was so much believed in, that a gentleman belonging to a prominent Liberal Club actually told me that it was a good thing my father died poor and in debt, as it, at least, discredited that rumour.

I do not profess to have by any means exhausted the list of fables associated with Mr Bradlaugh's name. I have merely taken a few of the more persistent or more remarkable as examples of the whole.

To expose the misstatements and the travesties of Mr Bradlaugh's opinions would require a whole volume. What he thought and what he taught on theological, political, and social questions will be found in his own writings, and his own words must necessarily be the most effective contradiction or confirmation of the "hearsays" of prejudice.

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<sup>41</sup> *Saturday Review*, September 14, 1872.

## CHAPTER X.

### PEACE DEMONSTRATIONS, 1878

During the Russo-Turkish War great anxiety was shown by the Tories to drag England into the struggle; war songs were sung in the music halls; the old hatred of Russia was fanned into a blaze, and the new love of Turkey nourished into some sort of enthusiasm. The "Jingo" fever ran high, and the more peacefully-disposed seemed quite overwhelmed by the noise and clamour of the war party. Some of the working men of London, however, determined to make a public protest in favour of peace, and against those who were seeking to increase the burdens of the nation at a time when there were people dying of starvation in Wales, in Sheffield, and in the Forest of Dean. A meeting was consequently held on the afternoon of February 24th, in Hyde Park, in response to a general appeal made by the Hon. Auberon Herbert, Mr Ackrill, and Mr Bradlaugh on behalf of the working men's committee to the working men of the metropolis to resist the effort then being made to drag the country into an Eastern war.

There had been so much rowdyism at former meetings on this subject, that it was resolved to enrol a special force to prevent this one from being broken up by ruffianism. Mr Bradlaugh's special contingent was to consist of fifty marshals and five hundred deputy marshals, who wore his Northampton colours, and were

furnished with "wands of office." It was not thought right to ask unarmed men to confront the brutality of the war-at-any-price men, who came armed with all manner of weapons; yet it was not desired to provoke an attack by any show of force, so after some deliberation it was decided that the marshals should be armed with short staves similar to the constables' truncheon. These the men were instructed to keep concealed, unless they were required for purposes of defence. Mr Herbert's special adherents were similarly armed, and wore a green favour.

Fearing a fight, my father would not allow us to go with him to the meeting, and would not be happy about our going at all, until we had promised not to get into the crowd. So we went to the Park early to watch the great masses of men gathering quietly together, with neither bands, banners, nor procession, unless the clubs coming up in bodies could be called coming in procession. The mauve, white, and green rosettes – which we with a committee of ladies had so lately made – were soon conspicuous by their number; above them were smiling holiday faces, while below lay the formidable staves which we had helped to serve out that very morning, but of which not a sign could be seen, although we, who knew they were there, looked attentively for them. The platform was set up, surrounded by a ring of men with locked arms three or four deep. By and by groups of young men passed us armed with sticks, long and thick; these joined together in gangs, and amused themselves by making a series of brutal rushes, after the stupid aimless fashion of the "roughs" on

Lord Mayor's Day. But these medical students – for the hospitals had been whipped up to turn out in aid of the Tory and the Turk – unlike their honoured exemplars, deliberately intended to injure.

The meeting was tremendous, orderly and quiet at first, and the applause which greeted Mr Herbert when he rose to preside showed that the majority were favourable to peace. Every facility had been given to the war-party to move an amendment; every courtesy had been shown them, and everything possible done to avoid a pretext for disturbance. But no pretext was necessary. Mr Herbert had barely begun to speak when an attack was made simultaneously on three sides of the ring; sticks flashed in the air, and staff replied to stick with such energy that the attack on two sides was repelled; that at the back, however, was successful, the ring was broken through, and the platform destroyed. In spite of all this, Mr Bradlaugh succeeded in putting the resolution, and all those within hearing voted for it; but the tumult was so great that it was impossible to guess how much was heard or understood.

My sister and I stood by the water breathlessly watching a dense mass of men with sticks in air struggling slowly towards the gate, feeling sure that Mr Bradlaugh must be the centre of a great display of enmity; and people even cried to us, "Your father is there. He will be killed! he will be killed!" And while we were watching, we ourselves nearly became involved in a rush of the war-party from another direction. Frantic cries of "Duck him! The water! Duck him!" made us glance round, and we found we had only just time to escape. When we had reached a place

of safety, and were able to look round again, the fighting mass was broken up; and learning from some one, whom my father had told to seek us, that he was unhurt and had gone home, we also hastened to make the best of our way back. We learned that none of our own friends were seriously hurt; and the hearty and repeated bursts of cheering at my father's appearance where he lectured that night marked the relief felt at seeing him safe and unhurt.

Mr Bradlaugh had held many meetings in Hyde Park, but he had never had one broken up. He had had a magnificent gathering in 1875 to protest against the grant of £142,000 to the Prince of Wales for his journey to India, but all had been quiet and orderly. Now, neither he nor those with whom he was acting liked the idea of their demonstration for peace ending in this way, so it was determined to make another attempt. The war party, however, who stood at nothing, determined to break up this meeting also. An assault upon the leaders of the Peace movement was deliberately planned, and Mr Bradlaugh afterwards obtained the names of certain Tories who had paid and instigated the assailants. On this occasion – Sunday, the 10th of March – no attempt was made to set up a proper platform, but there were human volunteers for a living one – no light matter when it came to bearing a man of Mr Bradlaugh's inches. Mr Herbert briefly stated the object of the meeting, and called upon my father to move the resolution, and from the shoulders of his living platform he moved "that the meeting declares in favour of peace," and the

resolution was forthwith seconded, formally put, and voted upon with but few dissentients. So far all was well, and the meeting was dissolved. Upon this, however, there immediately began a series of regularly-organised attacks by paid roughs, militia-men, medical students, and "gentlemen." Armed with sticks, pieces of twisted gas-piping, sharpened iron, loaded bludgeons, and other weapons, they were a truly gallant company. Some of the defending staves were ominously cut and dug into by the sharp and pointed instruments used by the attacking party. For a few minutes the fighting was severe; my father for an instant was taken off his feet in the struggle, and his upraised arm caught the murderous rain of blows intended for his head. Up again almost at once, and having the fight thus forced upon him, he struck five blows in reply, which were said to have sent as many men to St George's Hospital. Those were the only blows he struck that day, the rest of the time he merely warded off any aimed at himself. One man attacked his head with some sharp iron instrument fastened to a long stick, which cut his silk hat through from crown to rim. A brave little party of "swells" attacked him at the back, but these were attended to by his working-men friends. This assault by the war party was as wanton as it was vicious, because the meeting was over, and had already begun to quietly disperse.

A few weeks later stories were current that Mr Bradlaugh's staff was taken from him by a young man "half his size;" and a couple of Scotch papers seriously reported that he had had to pay

£72, 11s. for breaking the head of another young man. He never heard of any one who had persuaded a court to value his broken head even at the odd 11s.; and as for the staff, Mr Bradlaugh gave it to us after the meetings, and I have it now, together with a number of torn Jingo flags and broken Jingo sticks that were brought to us as trophies of the fight.

The blows showered down upon Mr Bradlaugh's arm had injured it very severely; a dangerous attack of erysipelas set in; he was very ill, and for sixteen days he was confined to the house. Even then he went to the Old Bailey in Mr Truelove's case before he ought to have gone out. He was ill and depressed; the nation seemed so eager for war; the wanton ferocity exhibited and encouraged in Hyde Park in the cause of war made him for the moment almost hopeless. He looked on "in sadness while the people suffer a Tory Government to create the possibilities of debt, dishonour, and disgraceful defeat, or still more disgraceful victory;" and once more he raised his personal protest in favour of peace. Although, as matters fell out, we did not go to war, we nevertheless decided upon having the pleasure of paying for it. As it was aptly put, the game as determined upon by Lord Beaconsfield was "Pay first; fight next; afterwards, if you have time, you can fix upon the object to be attained."



# CHAPTER XI.

## THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

I am now closely approaching the end of my task, and as yet I have only mentioned the National Secular Society incidentally. To leave it without further notice would be doing scant justice both to my father and to the association with which he worked so actively, and with which his name must ever remain connected, whatever its future history may be.

The National Secular Society has sometimes been confounded with the London Secular Society, of which Mr George Jacob Holyoake and Mr Bradlaugh were successively presidents; but that was merely a London Society, and not a general association. Indeed, I believe there had never been any general association of the Freethinkers of Great Britain until 1866, when it was felt that some endeavour should be made to organise them. There were local secular Societies all over the kingdom, there were isolated Freethinkers to be found everywhere, but hitherto there had been no attempt to unite them into one general federation. Without organisation much propagandist work had been done: in a single year, for instance, 250,000 tracts were distributed; with organisation it was believed that much more might be accomplished. But propaganda was by no means the only object to be gained by uniting Freethinkers in one general society. In September a provisional programme for the proposed National

Secular Society was put forward. Mr Bradlaugh by consent assumed the office of President of the Society until the first Conference. In the programme it was stated that the objects of the Society would be: —

To form an Association for mutual help for all the Freethinkers of Great Britain.

To conduct in the United Kingdom a more vigorous Freethought propaganda, especially in districts where Freethinkers are few, and Freethought lectures rare.

To establish a fund for the assistance of aged or distressed Freethinkers.

To promote Parliamentary and other action in order to remove all disabilities on account of religious opinions.

To establish secular schools and adult instruction classes in connection with every local society having members enough to support such schools or classes.

The idea of a National Society was well taken up, and members were enrolled in all directions. It was intended to hold a Conference early in the following year, but this was postponed, partly on account of Mr Bradlaugh's ill-health, and did not actually take place until the end of November, when it was found that the Society had made a very successful start in life — a success which was fully confirmed by the time the Conference met again a year later. A special Lecturing Fund was established in 1867, and by the aid of this the accredited lecturers of the Society went into places where the Freethinkers were too poor and too few to themselves bear the whole expenses of a meeting;

and in this way towns and villages were visited by a Freethought lecturer where before Freethought was almost unheard of. The provisional statement of the principles and objects of the Society was very soon amended in some minor details, and ten or twelve years later a Revision Committee was appointed and the rules newly stated.

In 1869 the Society brought out the first Secular almanack ever published. It was edited by "Charles Bradlaugh and Austin Holyoake," and met with an immediate and complete success, transcending even the hopes of its promoters, the first edition being sold out in one day. This almanack has been continued without intermission until the present time. At Mr Austin Holyoake's death, Mr Charles Watts became co-editor with Mr Bradlaugh, and in 1878 he was superseded by Mrs Annie Besant. When Mr Bradlaugh resigned his office as President of the National Secular Society – in 1890, after his serious illness of the previous winter – the new President, Mr G. W. Foote, became editor of the almanack in conjunction with Mr J. M. Wheeler.

With the exception of the year 1872, when Mr Arthur Trevelyan, J.P., was elected President, Mr Bradlaugh held the chief office of the Society from the time of its foundation until his resignation, and it was always a source of immense pride to him that he was chosen representative of the Freethinkers of Great Britain and Ireland. He laboured untiringly for the Society; not merely for the organisation as a whole, but for the separate branches and for the individuals which comprised it. "During

thirty years," he said on the day he resigned, "I think I may say I have never refused any help to any branch that I thought was justified in asking for help."

He never held any paid office, but on the contrary often paid money out of his own pocket for the purposes of the Association. He estimated that the sum he had earned and given in actual cash to the Society and its branches during the time he was connected with it amounted to £3000. The Society, on its side, released him and Mrs Besant from a payment of £420<sup>42</sup> due to it at the time of his resignation.

His yearly Conference reports, although they make no pretence at being detailed records, are yet landmarks, as it were, of the work accomplished by the Society; his yearly Conference speeches<sup>43</sup> often give the most vivid glimpses of himself, of his pride in work accomplished, and his aspirations for work yet undone. Often, too, their terse and moving language reveals the truest, most unstudied eloquence.

The National Secular Society proved itself an organisation of the utmost value, not merely as a propagandist association, but in all cases in any degree connected with the Freethought movement where combined action was required. When Mrs

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<sup>42</sup> At his death in 1879 Mr William Thomson of Montrose left £1000 to Mr Bradlaugh as President of the National Secular Society, which sum he was at liberty to invest in the Freethought Publishing Company, on condition that he paid the Society £5 a month while it lasted. This he did regularly from 1879 until February 1890, when the Society generously released him from the remainder.

<sup>43</sup> See Speeches by Charles Bradlaugh.

Besant was deprived of her child; at the time of Mr Bradlaugh's Parliamentary struggle, with its countless phases; during the prosecutions for blasphemy, and on many other occasions, meetings were held or petitions were got up simultaneously all over the country. The members of the Society were and are nearly all poor men and women; but what they have lacked in riches they have made up in energy; what they could not contribute in money, they have given eagerly and cheerfully in work.

Many people misconstrued Mr Bradlaugh's reason for resigning his office as President of the National Secular Society. Some said he made a choice between his Freethought and his Parliamentary work, and selected the latter; others said he had long been gradually subordinating his anti-theological work to his political work, with a view to dropping the former; others, that his action was entirely due to a modification in his heretical opinions; and others again said that he was not in harmony with the members of the Society. The truth was so obvious and so simple that all seemed loth to accept it, and searched for complicated motives under the plain facts. At the special Conference summoned to receive his resignation, Mr Bradlaugh gave his reasons in a voice which was low and faltering, as much from the feelings which overcame him as from his recent illness.

"With very slight break," he said, "I have led in this movement for over thirty years – a fairly long period in any life. I have been President of the Society, with the same slight break, since the

Society began, and I am very sorry, very sorry, to resign office this morning. Unfortunately, while the work was never easy, it has become much harder since 1880, with the Parliamentary struggle and the litigation in which the struggle involved me. I have felt for the past three or four years – and I think I have conveyed that feeling to you in my annual speeches – that the pressure must sooner or later bring a breakdown. Last October that breakdown came, and the wonder is that I am here to tender you my resignation at all. I was then brought face to face with the difficulty that I could no longer do all the work I had done... No resource is then open to me but to resign. Some kind friends have suggested that I might hold the office nominally... But I could not do that; I must be a real President or none. My fault has been that I have sometimes been too real a one, but it is no easy matter to lead such a voluntary movement as ours... I don't want to leave you. I could not take any other office in the Society after having been so long your President; but if you thought it right to elect me a member for life, I should be grateful to you for doing it."

In this statement from Mr Bradlaugh's own lips is contained the whole and sole reason for his resignation. To be a "real" President of the National Secular Society involved the performance of a vast amount of labour, the greater part of which was unrecognised and unseen. This he felt had become beyond his powers; it was not in him to bear the name and let others do the work; in giving up the duties of his position he must also give up its honours. Only those who knew the pride he had always felt

in holding this office of President of the associated Freethinkers of the nation knew the pain it cost him to lay that office down.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAST CHAPTER

The year 1880 saw the last of the long struggle in Northampton and the beginning of that in the House of Commons. For twelve years my father fought prejudice and misrepresentation in Northampton, for six years longer he had to fight prejudice and misrepresentation in the House of Commons. But the shorter fight was the harder one; it was carried on incessantly, without the slightest intermission. It was a terrible six years. The litigation alone is something appalling; in that time eight suits were begun and ended.

First there was the libel suit against Edgcumbe, which dragged on for more than a year, and ended in nothing.

Second came *Clarke v. Bradlaugh*. This was an action for penalties against Mr Bradlaugh for having sat and voted without taking the oath. Commenced in July 1880, it came before the judges six times, and was ultimately decided in favour of Mr Bradlaugh in April 1883.

Third – *Bradlaugh v. Newdegate*. An action for maintenance brought by Mr Bradlaugh against Mr Newdegate, and decided in favour of the former in April 1883.

Fourth – *The Queen (Sir Henry Tyler) v. Bradlaugh, Foote, and Ramsey*. An action for blasphemy, decided in Mr



Bradlaugh's favour in April 1883.<sup>44</sup>

Fifth – *Bradlaugh v. Erskine*. An action against the Deputy-Sergeant-at-Arms for assault, in removing Mr Bradlaugh from the lobby of the House of Commons on August 3, 1881.<sup>45</sup> Commenced in April 1882, this suit was decided against Mr Bradlaugh in January 1883. In March the Government enforced their claim for costs against him.

Sixth – *Gurney v. Bradlaugh*. A suit entered upon by Mr Gurney of Northampton, to try the validity of the conduct of the majority of the House in preventing Mr Bradlaugh from taking the oath and his seat in the House. Mr Justice Mathew discharged the jury, refusing to hear the case on the ground that it was a collusive action.

Seventh – *Bradlaugh v. Gossett*. In July 1883 Mr Bradlaugh applied for an injunction to restrain the Sergeant-at-Arms from using physical force to prevent him from entering the House. Decided against Mr Bradlaugh in the February of the following year.

Eighth – *Attorney-General v. Bradlaugh*. An action for penalties against Mr Bradlaugh for having sat and voted without having subscribed the oath. This case was heard at bar, and judgment given for the Attorney-General. This was appealed

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<sup>44</sup> In the case against Foote and Ramsey the jury disagreed. The prosecution then entered a *nolle prosequi*.

<sup>45</sup> Mr Bradlaugh applied for a summons against Inspector Denning, but this application was refused.

against, and the matter settled in October 1880; Mr Bradlaugh paid his own costs, but nothing further.<sup>46</sup>

All these lawsuits, each involving the discussion of points of the greatest intricacy, and in which my father's brain was pitted against those of some of the greatest lawyers in England, would have been enough to tax the powers of any ordinary man, even if he had had no other struggles. But in these six years there were many other struggles; there were six elections, most of which were carried on under extremely harassing conditions. It was one constant battle within the walls of the House and without, and in the blind fury of their rage his antagonists spared neither my father nor any one whose name was associated with his. Sir Henry Tyler proceeded against Mr Foote and Mr Ramsay for blasphemy, only because along with them he hoped to be able to drag Mr Bradlaugh down. Sir Henry Tyler tried to deprive my sister and myself, as well as Mrs Besant and Dr Aveling, of our right to teach under the Science and Art Department, only because he hoped to wound Mr Bradlaugh by an attack upon his daughters<sup>47</sup> and his friends. The Somerville Club (at the

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<sup>46</sup> These proceedings – except the libel case, which has been already noticed – will be found fully dealt with by Mr J. M. Robertson in Part II., in his account of Mr Bradlaugh's Parliamentary struggle.

<sup>47</sup> This attack upon Mr Bradlaugh through his daughters, insignificant and inoffensive though we were, was no new idea. In 1877 an attempt was made to introduce female students into the classes of the City of London College. At my father's suggestion my sister and I, who at that time took little interest in the matter, joined Mr Levy's Class on Political Economy. I went up for the examination at the end of the term, and, to my surprise and my father's delight, I took a second-class certificate. But

instigation of Miss Eliza Orme) refused to accept the daughters of Charles Bradlaugh as members.<sup>48</sup> University College would not permit my sister Alice – a woman of stainless honour and of the highest character – and Mrs Besant to study botany within its walls;<sup>49</sup> the National Liberal Club, having actually invited Mr Bradlaugh to become a member, insulted him by refusing to elect him.<sup>50</sup>

The country was flooded with literature making the most infamous charges against him, and in the name of religion men went from town to town to preach against him. Even Cardinal Manning, a prince of the greatest Church in Christendom, was not too exalted to stoop to cast his stone at the despised Atheist.

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the City of London College were divided upon the subject of the admission of female students, and, after much acrimonious discussion, Mr Armytage Bakewell, a member of the Council, carried his intolerance so far as to turn the dispute upon the admission of my sister and myself. He wrote to the *City Press* that "though the ostensible subject of controversy has been whether females should attend the young men's classes or not, there was well known to be a wider divergence," and that was "best indicated by the fact that Mr Bradlaugh's daughters attended Mr Levy's classes." It is only just to the City of London College to add that the Council, while repudiating any responsibility for Mr Bakewell's conduct, expressed "their regret that any allusion had been made to Mr Bradlaugh's daughters" in the letter alluded to. The City of London College decided against the further admission of women, and within a few days of their decision had to listen to Lord Houghton's congratulations upon their liberality in admitting women when he presented me with my certificate! He had not been informed that the College had just come to the contrary resolution.

<sup>48</sup> March 1883.

<sup>49</sup> May 1883.

<sup>50</sup> 1884. Five years later the National Liberal Club spontaneously elected Mr Bradlaugh, without his knowledge, a member paying his first year's subscription.

Within the precincts of the great Commons House itself he had to sit in silence, with no right of reply, whilst he heard his character assailed, and those who worked with him basely slandered. Within those same historic walls he was set upon and terribly ill-used by officials, ordered to their work by gentlemen claiming to represent the nation. I was at Westminster on the day which witnessed this strange example of the boasted "English love of fair play." I tremble as I recall it.

We went to Westminster by train, my sister and I, with Mrs Besant and some friends of hers. The sight which met our eyes as we came out of the station was one not to be readily forgotten; immense masses of orderly men and women kept easily within certain limits by a thin line of police. There was a quick recognition of us as we passed along by friends from all parts of the country, who gave us grave and serious greeting. At the gates of Palace Yard we were challenged by the police, but allowed to pass on presenting our petition, and going on to Westminster Hall we found it occupied by little groups of men from all corners of England.<sup>51</sup> These groups grew and grew, until the great hall seemed full, and voices were heard on all sides crying, "Petition," "Petition." At the head of the steps near the door leading to the lobby we took up our position. By-and-by an agonising rumour flew through the Hall, "They are killing him; they are killing him!" and swift on the heels of this came the angry cry, again and again repeated, "To the House!" and

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<sup>51</sup> Seven persons were allowed to enter with each petition.

with this, the surging forward of the crowd. So few police had been spared to guard this entrance that they would have been absolutely powerless to resist these men – not London "roughs," but the pick of the London clubs, and, more formidable still, men from many a Midland town, and from many a North country pit and factory, whose hearts were bound up in my father, and who had come to London that day to petition for justice. The police command, "Keep back!" fell upon deaf ears. My sister and I involuntarily put ourselves in front of the doors, facing the crowd. Mrs Besant sprang forward, and in a few impassioned words she begged them to consider what Mr Bradlaugh's wishes would be. The effect was instantaneous. The foremost fell back, and kept others back till all were self-controlled once more; but the white, set faces told of the struggle in their hearts. "But we *can't* stay here and know he is being murdered, and do nothing to help him," said one in a choking voice. Some terrible minutes passed, but there was no further attempt to pass through the doors. By-and-by a message reached us from my father that he was gone to Stonecutter Street, and that we were to join him there. At Stonecutter Street we found him quite calm and self-possessed, but his coat hanging in rents, his ashen face and still quivering flesh telling the tale of the struggle he had just passed through.

In a few days he fell very ill. The small muscles of both arms were ruptured; erysipelas supervened, and the left arm was very bad indeed, needing constant attention by day and night. All day long from early morning to the small hours of the next day

there were people calling, some friendly and some very much otherwise, besides press men and persons on business. My father had no rest, and one day the physician said, "You will never get well, Mr Bradlaugh, if you don't get out of this room."

"You wish me to go away?" asked my father.

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once."

"I will go to-day," was the characteristic reply.

I packed up the necessary baggage, a fly was ordered to take us to the station, and at Mrs Besant's suggestion it was decided to go to Eastbourne. I was nursing my father, so I went with him, while for a day or so my sister remained behind to attend to things at home. Mrs Besant accompanied us. On the way to the station my father, who was feeling very ill and very depressed, said he did not care to go to Eastbourne – it was too fashionable; so I took the map from the railway guide and called over the names of places on the South Coast until he stopped me at Worthing, and then we turned about to go to there instead of to Eastbourne. My father had both arms in slings, and at the station Mrs Besant and I had to walk one each side of him to protect them from the impertinent and the unfeeling who crowded round to stare at him. Arrived at Worthing, we got into a cab, asking the driver if he could recommend us to a quiet hotel; he looked compassionately at the only too evidently sick man, and said he thought West Worthing would suit us best. Whilst he was getting the luggage,

a clergyman whom we had seen inside the station came out, and walking up to the open cab stared rudely at my father, and as he turned away said loudly, for us to hear, "That's Bradlaugh; I hope they'll make it warm for him yet."

West Worthing did suit us, as the cabman surmised; my father's health daily improved, and indeed there is little doubt that his timely removal to this quiet spot saved his life for the time. After a few days my sister joined us, and we all felt the better for the change, as much from the momentary respite as from the fresh air and sea breeze.

The expenses of the litigation and the various elections were enormous, both directly and indirectly. Although eventually Mr Newdegate had to bear the whole of the costs in the suit which he brought against Mr Bradlaugh, yet the latter had to find several hundred pounds – about £725 in all – to pay into court at different times. These sums were ultimately repaid to him, but liabilities had to be incurred to produce them at the required moments. The shorthand notes in the three days' appeal from the trial at bar alone cost him £50. In the case of *Bradlaugh v. Erskine*, in which the House of Commons defended its officer, the Government made Mr Bradlaugh pay the costs, under the circumstances a very harsh and unusual proceeding. Very little time was allowed to elapse before the claim was insisted upon, and to find the money my father had to choose between more borrowing and selling his library. Yet if the motion carried unanimously and "amid cheers" on the 27th January 1891 means anything, it is

an acknowledgment that the House was in the wrong when it instructed its officer to prevent Mr Bradlaugh by force from obeying the law. It was not merely the direct cost, however; there were the indirect penalties also. For instance, in February 1885, after the appeal from the trial at bar (which, with its subsequent proceedings alone covered thirteen days), my father spoke of the worry and uncertainty which had "for months arrested nearly all my means of earning money." People were always subscribing in an endeavour to pay for him the expenses they knew of, and many were the sacrifices some of them made in their eager desire to help. One old Yorkshire miner, who had been sorely troubled that times were so hard with him that he could spare nothing, one day came triumphantly to his friend saying, "I have made it all right; I will go without the half pint for a week, and send it to the lad."<sup>52</sup> Many cut down their usual allowance of tobacco, and some went altogether without. One poor man sent his silver watch, the only thing of value which he possessed; some people in London, touched at hearing of this sacrifice, offered to join together to buy him a gold one in acknowledgment of it, but he would not hear of it. Several times I have known a cabman refuse to take his fare.<sup>53</sup> Many poor people sent their small subscriptions weekly or monthly. But my father always worried about these

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<sup>52</sup> *National Reformer*, April 27, 1884.

<sup>53</sup> I have lately heard a touching story of a cabman who drove Mr Bradlaugh several times. He greatly admired my father, but was too shy to speak to him. Every time he took a fare from him he gave it away to some charitable object. He said he could not spend Mr Bradlaugh's money on himself, he felt that "he must do some good with it."



funds; he could not bear the thought of his poor friends denying themselves their little luxuries, or even perhaps their necessities, and he always promptly closed a fund when it had been open some fixed time or directly the specific sum was reached.

A constant accusation brought against Mr Bradlaugh was that of living in aristocratic style,<sup>54</sup> and of having a most enormous income.<sup>55</sup> As a matter of fact, he had no income other than what he earned from day to day, and his habits and mode of life at Circus Road were of the simplest possible kind. His bedroom was very small, about 10 feet by 9 feet, with just room for his bedstead, chest of drawers, wash-stand, and a couple of chairs. His library, on the first floor after 1880, was a very large room with five windows to it; but spacious as it was, it was by no means too large for his books. The room was shelved all round to the very edges of the windows, except just over the fireplace; and there were also three sets of movable shelves on the floor of the room. The furniture was quite simple – just a desk, writing-tables, cane-seated chairs, my father's two old oaken arm-chairs from Tottenham, and an easy chair, which was bought specially for him one time when he was not well. There was no other "easy" chair in the house, and only one small sofa – really a bedroom lounge – which my sister bought for me one morning when I was

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<sup>54</sup> The *Plymouth and Exeter Gazette* (April 1878) reproved Mr Bradlaugh for the glaring inconsistency of his practice with his democratic principles, "by living in the most aristocratic style."

<sup>55</sup> The *Leeds Daily News* (July 1883) said his income was £12,000 a year.

ailing. I doubt whether the whole of my father's furniture would have fetched five-and-twenty pounds at a sale. Our meals we had downstairs in a very dark basement room under our landlord's music shop, and here the blue books were also stored.

My father's habits were as simple as his surroundings. He was an early riser, and at whatever time he got home at night he was in his study soon after seven in the morning. Even when he was not home from the House of Commons till four o'clock in the morning, it was seldom he lay in bed after eight. He had a cup of tea as soon as he was down, and he worked at his desk until breakfast-time, which he liked punctually at eight. If he was more than usually busy or worried, he asked for his breakfast to be brought to his study, and he would take it as he worked; but my sister and I always affected to be vexed if he did this, because we liked to get him away from his work and into another room for his meals. About the middle of 1877 his ever-increasing correspondence obliged him to have regular clerical assistance, and his secretary came at nine. He was in to callers until ten or half-past. This was the time he saw people who wanted to consult him on legal or private matters: he listened patiently to their troubles, and often gave them most helpful advice how to get out of them. All sorts of difficulties were confided to him – family troubles, dissensions between husband and wife, between employer and employed; great troubles and small were brought to him, and those who brought them were sure of a sympathetic and patient listener, and a confidant to whom they could unreservedly

open their hearts.

If Mr Bradlaugh did not have to attend a Committee of the House he would have his dinner (or "lunch," as it was indifferently called) at half-past twelve, and this was followed by a cup of tea in his library; if he were in all day, he had his afternoon tea (just a cup of tea and a crust of bread and butter) at four, and his supper about seven or half-past seven. At his dinner and supper he drank hock or burgundy.<sup>56</sup> Often after supper there would be a little pleasant chat, sometimes a game of chess, and, more rarely, whist with a dummy. If my father was too tired or too worried for any of these, he would go to bed as early as half-past eight or nine, lie and read for a while, and then sleep soundly until morning. Of course it was not often he could do this, for his evenings were usually spent in lecturing or at the House of Commons.<sup>57</sup> The only time during the session which he could rely upon for seeing callers, answering letters,<sup>58</sup> and earning his living, was from seven A.M. until the time he left for the House. Saturday evening and Sundays were generally employed in lecturing. Until 1884 his holidays were of the rarest and the shortest. In that year he first went fishing at Loch Long. At the

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<sup>56</sup> He was frequently charged with drinking expensive wines, but the hock he had straight from Bensheim at a cost of 1s. 3d. per bottle (including carriage and duty); the burgundy came direct from Beaune, and cost a trifle more.

<sup>57</sup> During the time he was not allowed to take his seat he attended the House constantly, sitting under the gallery in a seat technically outside the House.

<sup>58</sup> One year he calculated that he had written 1200 letters of advice in the twelvemonth – this, of course, in addition to general correspondence.

suggestion of some Scotch friends, a cottage was taken for a month that summer at Portincaple, a lovely and secluded spot just opposite Loch Goil. My sister and I and a Scotch lady, Miss Lees, stayed the whole time; different friends came and went, and my father spent a week fishing. The cottage belonged to Finlay M'Nab, fisherman and ferryman, and had belonged to his father and grandfather before him. On nearly all Mr Bradlaugh's fishing expeditions Finlay M'Nab was his boatman. They would go off just after breakfast, or sometimes even earlier, get dinner at Carrick Castle or Ardentinnny, and come home at sunset with a big bag of fish. After 1884 we went to Portincaple several summers in succession, and then Mr Bradlaugh took to going there in the Easter and Whitsun recess, and for a few days after Parliament rose. On these occasions he went alone, but Mrs M'Nab attended to all his comforts indoors as though he were at home, and outdoors her husband looked after the bait and the boat – except on Sundays; then, my father had to content himself with the dangerous amusement of fishing from the rocks, whilst Finlay looked wistfully on.

Mr Bradlaugh was a very even-tempered man, and those who waited on him usually served him eagerly. He never found fault unnecessarily, and provided an attempt was well meant, it mattered little, as far as his behaviour went, if the result was not equal to the intention. He was most generous and tender-hearted, except to those who had wantonly taken advantage of the confidence he reposed in them to deceive him. Such persons

called him hard and unrelenting, for even if he forgave them they never again held quite the same place in his esteem. Some critics have said he was a man of unrestrained passions; others have said he was absolutely passionless. Neither is right. He was a man of very strong feelings, but he had an iron will. At a critical moment in his life, when he was greatly tempted to follow a certain course, a friend urged upon him that if he did he would injure the work he had at heart. My father replied by stretching out his arm, and closing his fingers over an imagined object. "I have not a passion," he said, "that I could not crush as easily as an egg within my hand if it were necessary for the good of the cause I love." And he was true to his word.

In 1877 when Mr Bradlaugh severed his business connection with Mr C. Watts, he started, as I have said, a publishing business in connection with Mrs Annie Besant, under the style of the Freethought Publishing Company. The business premises were at Stonecutter Street, E.C., and here, with small premises, a small staff, and a small rent, the Company did fairly well. In 1882, however, my father was induced against his better judgment to lease a shop at the corner of Fleet Street and Bouverie Street (now occupied by the Black and White Company). Here the premises were large and the rent heavy. To make matters worse, about a couple of years later, owing to the financial difficulties of his landlord, he was reluctantly obliged to take up the remainder of the lease of the whole building, and thus he became saddled with the rent and taxes – amounting to more than seven hundred per

annum – and the responsibility of a great house in the city. In order to raise the capital required to meet these expenses, Mr Bradlaugh with Mrs Besant issued debenture stock to the amount of four or five thousand pounds, the interest on which was paid with unfailing regularity until my father's death.

But as he had feared, the business at Fleet Street did not thrive sufficiently to support so large an establishment; the greater part of it had always been, and was then, a postal business, hence it could be carried on as well in a little shop in a side street as in a large corner shop in such a thoroughfare. The details of the managership of the publishing department were in the hands of Mrs Besant and my sister Alice, but as both were without the least experience in business, my father was the final referee on all matters, and it was he of course who had to provide for quarter-day with its heavy rent, taxes, and debenture interest.

In 1884, unable to let the upper portion of the building, Mr Bradlaugh decided to utilise it himself by setting up a printing-office, and doing his own printing. This department was put under the control of Mr Bonner, to whom I was then engaged to be married. As my husband was already familiar with the management of a printing-office, Mr Bradlaugh's only trouble with this branch of his business was in finding the money, and this was not a great anxiety, as it paid for itself from the very first. It is true the profits were never great, for the prejudice against giving work to any establishment connected with the name of Bradlaugh at first limited the work almost to the printing

of his own publications. My father was very glad to be saved responsibility, even in this small matter for, as he often said, he had never intended to become a publisher, and he had never intended to become a printer; he had so many things on his hands that he had time neither for one nor the other; he had, in fact, no inclination for commercial pursuits: they had always been forced upon him by circumstances.

When it was known that I was going to attempt some story of my father's life, there were many things I was told that I must not fail to mention. Amongst others, one friend said: "You must not fail to notice that Mr Bradlaugh was an essentially grateful man; he never forgot the smallest favour or the smallest kindness that was shown him." That is absolutely true; he could forget most injuries, "his heart was as great as the world," but it was not large enough "to hold the memory of a wrong;" a kindness he never forgot.<sup>59</sup> When John Bright pledged himself in the House

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<sup>59</sup> The following extracts, taken at hazard from New Year's addresses to his friends in the *National Reformer*, will show how grateful he was to them for their help and what support he found in their love and trust:—"Women and men, I have great need of your strength to make me strong, of your courage to make me brave. I am in a breach where I must fight or go through. I will not turn, but I could not win if I had to fight alone" (1st January 1882). "1883 has freed me from some troubles and cleared me of some peril, but it leaves me in 1884 a legacy of unfinished fighting. I thank the friends of the dead year, without whose help I, too, must have been nearly as dead as the old year itself... I have had more kindnesses shown me than my deservings warrant, more love than I have yet earned, and I open the gate of 1884 most hopefully because I know how many hundred kindly hearts there are to cheer me if my uphill road should prove even harder to climb than in the years of yesterday" (6th January 1884). "The present greeting is first to our old friends; some poor folk who early in 1860 took No. 1 [of the

of Commons for my father, the latter was greatly affected, and speaking to us in private about it was quite overcome. He had disagreed often with John Bright, and had sometimes spoken his disagreement with the utmost frankness; later on they were opposed upon the subject of Home Rule, but after the day when that lion-hearted old man so unexpectedly and so courageously spoke on his behalf, Mr Bradlaugh never mentioned his name save with the most profound respect and gratitude. And yet this trait of gratitude, so strong in himself, he never seemed to expect in others; or at least he seldom showed surprise at its absence. He once helped to Baltimore a Russian prisoner, escaped from Siberia, who had come to him with letters from Continental friends. The months rolled by, and nothing further was heard of the man. A great deal had been done for him, and one day I expressed myself very strongly on his ingratitude. My father stopped me by quietly saying that I must learn to do a right thing just because it was right, and not because I expected gratitude or any other reward for what I did. I felt the rebuke keenly, but I had nothing to say, for I instantly realised that he preached to me no more than he himself practised.

It is remarkable how quickly Mr Bradlaugh made his personality felt when once he was allowed to sit quietly in Parliament. Some persons had sneeringly said that he would "soon find his level," or that he would "soon sink into obscurity,"

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*National Reformer*], and have through good and ill report kept steadily with us through the more than a quarter of a century struggle for existence" (3rd January 1886).



but he rapidly proved that he at least did not regard the House of Commons merely as "the best club in England." His patience in mastering details, his perseverance and persistence in what he undertook, and the work he accomplished, were all so notable that he had sat in the House barely one year when the possibility of a seat for him in the next Radical ministry began to be discussed.<sup>60</sup> His constant attendance at the House and at Committees – and he was rarely absent – interfered greatly with his lecturing in the provinces during the session, although almost every available evening was utilised for London and suburban lectures, many of which were given away.<sup>61</sup> In consequence of this he was driven more and more to rely upon his pen as a means of earning money. It was always easier to him to speak than to write upon a subject. His style was terse and direct; his thoughts and his words came so fast that a verbatim report of an hour's speech filled several newspaper columns. His gestures, his expression, the modulation of his voice, pointed and explained his spoken words. But it nearly always irked him to write long upon a subject; his letters were for the most part models of brevity, and he tended to make his articles brief also. If a magazine editor asked him to write an article of six thousand words, and he had said all he wanted to say at that moment in

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<sup>60</sup> *Bognor Observer*, February 1887.

<sup>61</sup> One at the Shoreditch Town Hall in May 1884, on behalf of the Hackney United Radical Club, realised as much as £40. The hall was packed in every corner, and hundreds were unable to gain admittance.

four or five thousand, he hated to add to it, and often, indeed, he would not.

By incessant labour my father earned a fair income, but he could not keep pace with his heavy expenses, and the burden of his debts each year weighed upon him more and more heavily. He would sigh regretfully that he was not so young as he used to be, and these things troubled him more than formerly. At the end of August 1888, writing his "Rough Notes" in the *National Reformer*, he said: "Many folks write me as though now Parliament stood adjourned, I could be easily taking holiday and rest. I wish this were possible, but in truth I have to work very hard to reduce my debts and live. I shall, I hope, have four and a half days' fishing in Loch Long from mid-day on Monday, September 3rd, to the morning of Saturday the 8th, but this short holiday is more than counterbalanced by the heavy lecturing work of the recess. This week, for example, I address seven meetings; next week eight. Many write to me to give lectures in aid of branches, clubs, and associations, and I do help very often, but surely it is not necessary for me to constantly repeat that my only means are those I earn from day to day by tongue and pen. My great trouble now is lest I should be unable to earn enough to meet my many heavy obligations, in which case I should be most reluctantly obliged to relinquish my Parliamentary career."

This "Note" had a most unexpected result; it was reproduced with generous comments in the press, and a committee was formed to raise a fund to clear off the balance of £1500 of

debt still remaining from the six years' Parliamentary struggle. This fund was only open one month, until October 1st,<sup>62</sup> and in that short time £2490 was subscribed in sums varying from 1d. to £200. Now at last my father seemed to be getting into smooth waters; the only financial burdens left upon him were in connection with his business, and these he hoped to gradually lighten. But within a few weeks he had to face a new trouble. On the 16th November my sister Alice was taken very ill with typhoid fever at Circus Road; for the sake of greater quiet, we moved her to my rooms at 19 Avenue Road, where, meningitis having supervened, she died on 2nd December. She expressly asked that in the case of her death she should be cremated, and we were most anxious to carry out her wishes, but the Woking Crematorium was then undergoing structural alterations, and it was not possible to do so. This short and unexpected illness, with its fatal termination, was a great shock to Mr Bradlaugh, and I went to him at Circus Road the next morning as soon as I could get away. I found him terribly depressed, working in his room in a bad atmosphere, with the gas alight and all the blinds down. Knowing how he ordinarily shrank from any outward display of his feelings, and especially how much he disliked mere form, I said, "Why, how is this? Why have you pulled all the blinds down?" He said brokenly, "They [the servants] did it; I thought it might be your wish." I put out the gas, drew up the blinds, and opened a window for a few moments to let in a little fresh air.

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<sup>62</sup> Mr Bradlaugh asked for it to be closed on 26th September.

He was himself out of health, and I did not like to see him sitting there in that close and heated atmosphere. I asked if he was going to the House? No; he did not think he should, he replied. I urged him to go, believing it was the best thing he could do. He did go, but he could not stay long; somehow an announcement of my sister's death had got into the papers, and Members sympathised with him in his sorrow in such kindly fashion that he was obliged to come away lest he should break down. A night or two later he made his speech in reply to Mr Broadhurst on the Employers' Liability Bill, and if his words had in them somewhat more of acerbity than usual, I often think that it was in a measure due to the biting pain of his own grief.

On the 5th my sister was buried at the Brookwood Necropolis, where already some members of our family lay. Many who had known her, and whose lives had been helped by hers, begged that there might be a public funeral; but my father shrank from exposing his sorrow even to the most sympathetic of friends, and we quietly and silently laid her in her last resting-place, where, alas! she was so soon to be joined by her stricken father. Her death was not allowed to pass without the Christian commonplaces as to "the miserable barrenness of the sceptic's theories" in the presence of domestic calamities; and Mr Bradlaugh asked what would be thought of him if at a similar hour he should obtrude upon some Christian some mocking word upon the horrors of the theory that "many are called and few are chosen"?

My husband and I now went to live at Circus Road, and as my father was suddenly without a secretary, I filled the post while he was seeking a fresh one. I had given up the class teaching, in which I had been for many years associated with my sister, having thus a certain amount of leisure, and finding I could manage all that was wanted, I begged him to let me continue his work. I liked to feel I was helping him, if only in the mechanical way of writing at his dictation.

During the later years of his life, Mr Bradlaugh was often out of health and suffered a great deal, especially in the arm so badly injured on the 3rd August 1881. The strain – mental as well as physical – of the six years 1880-85 had been tremendous.<sup>63</sup> But a week at Loch Long with Finlay M'Nab and his rod and line seemed to restore him to health again; we never thought of anything serious, he appeared so big and strong. In October 1889, however, he fell ill – so ill that for some time it seemed doubtful whether he would recover, but thanks to the skill of his old physician Dr Ramskill, and the assiduous care of his friend and colleague on the Vaccination Commission, Dr W. J. Collins, he gradually struggled back to life once more. It was thought that his health would be greatly benefited by a voyage to India, and therefore he decided to attend the Fifth National Congress in Bombay. Mr M'Ewan, M.P., who was then enjoying a holiday

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<sup>63</sup> This I think has been recognised by most people. In December 1884 the *Weekly Dispatch* spoke of the "great strain" put upon Mr Bradlaugh, "under which a man less vigorous in mind and body would long ere this have broken down."

abroad, sent Mr Bradlaugh a cheque for £200 so that money difficulties should not hinder him from following the doctor's advice; and with the cheque, Mr M'Ewan sent a most delicately worded letter, which touched the sick man to the heart.

The shadows of death lay very close to him, and he had a hard fight back to the light again, but he longed ardently to live. There was so much that he had put his hand to, which the position he had now won in the House would enable him to do with comparative ease. As he lay in his bed in his study<sup>64</sup> he turned over and over in his mind plans by which he might economise his strength in the future. It was quite clear that he must do less lecturing, and must depend more and more on his pen. He resolved to try and sell the remainder of the Fleet Street lease, and to give up his publishing business; he also planned to gradually pay off the debenture-holders, and when it was free from all money entanglements, to hand over the printing plant to my husband to carry on the business in his own name and on his own responsibility. One thing he felt he could do immediately. After he had been lying very quiet for some time, he startled me one day by suddenly saying that he had determined to resign the Presidency of the National Secular Society, and he bade me get pen and paper, and take his instructions for a letter to the Secretary. I tried to argue the matter with him and begged

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<sup>64</sup> The doctors would not allow Mr Bradlaugh to remain in his bedroom; one of them told him indignantly – albeit with some exaggeration – that he would have better accommodation in the workhouse!

him to reflect upon it, to do nothing hastily, and reminded him that people would say if he resigned then, in his illness, that he had recanted. His face, which all along had been set and stern, darkened as I said this. People must think what they choose, he said, he could no longer do everything; something must go; the Presidency entailed a great deal of work, and he must give it up. I tried to say something more, but he stopped me, saying sharply that he had made up his mind. I was disconcerted by the tone and manner, so unusual from him to me, and left the room a moment to recover my equanimity. I was back almost immediately, and went to the desk to get the note-book to take down the letter to Mr Forder (the Secretary). I heard my name spoken gently, and turning, saw my father holding out his hand to me. I went to the bedside. "Now, my daughter," he said affectionately, "I want you to tell me what you were going to say just now." He listened patiently whilst I urged upon him that, although he was strong enough to despise the misrepresentation that would surely follow the abrupt and unexplained announcement of his resignation, it was hardly fair to his friends who would have to bear taunt and sneer, and would be unable to quote a word out of his mouth in reply. He replied that the reason for his immediate resignation was that he could not be a President in name only, and, without himself taking part in the work, be held responsible for the sayings and doings of others – with whom he might or might not agree – on behalf of the Society. He thought, however, he might leave his formal resignation until his return from India, although

he would at once intimate his intention. He added with a tender smile, "I promise you that I will make a statement which shall not leave any one in doubt as to my opinions." The religious question troubled him so little that he had not even thought about it until I spoke of the possibility of misconstruction. The severity and sternness of his demeanour in making the announcement of his resolve was due solely to the pain it had cost him to give up an office he valued so highly, and which he had hoped to retain until the laws relating to Blasphemy were erased from the Statute Book.

It was generously offered to pay my passage to Brindisi so that I might care for my father during the first days of his journey, but my own health did not permit me to accept so delightful an offer. He seemed really too ill to go alone, and the memory of his face, so haggard and so grey, as I last saw it at the vessel's side, was an abiding pain. He sent back a pencilled note by the pilot, and a letter from every port, to tell how he was gaining strength each day. On board the steamer every one was kind to him. At Bombay every one was more than kind; all seemed to vie with each other in showing him attentions – Indians and English residents alike. A house and attendants were put at the disposal of himself and Sir William Wedderburn, President of the Congress, and the latter made things easy for the invalid by many a courteous act. Although it had been announced that Mr Bradlaugh could not stay long enough in Bombay to receive addresses, yet a large number were presented to him, of which about twenty were in



caskets or cases of worked silver, carved sandal wood, inlaid ivory, and other beautiful specimens of native work. The duty alone on these amounted to about £19, and was paid by the Congress Committee.

Mr Bradlaugh's interest in Indian affairs, and his comprehension of the needs of the people, were recognised both at home and in India. In India he was joyfully called the "Member for India," and at home his views on Indian matters were listened to with growing respect. Lord Dufferin sought an interview, and afterwards had considerable correspondence with him, and before Lord Harris set out for Bombay he also made a point of seeing the acknowledged representative in Parliament of the Indian people.

Mr Bradlaugh returned from Bombay at the end of January (1890), much better in health than we had dared to hope, and we now quite believed that with care he would become thoroughly strong again. The birth of my little son in the April of this year prevented me from attending to my father's correspondence, and at my request, my place was filled by a friend of mine and of my sister's, Mrs Mary Reed. My father soon grew very fond of my little boy, and would now and then put aside his writing and take him on his knee, protesting that he had never before left his work to nurse a baby, and sometimes wondering whether, when the boy grew up, he would go fishing with him.

The advent of the baby and all his paraphernalia made us feel more crowded for space than ever, and as the music publishers

had a room on the first floor which they used as a stock-room, my husband arranged to rent this, and we furnished it as a sitting-room. We made it look as pretty as we could, and it was ready for us at the end of September. On my father's birthday (the 26th) I persuaded him to take us to the theatre, and we went to the Lyceum to see *Ravenswood*. On coming home we had supper in the bright new room instead of the dark place underground, and many were my father's jokes about the unwonted splendour of his surroundings. Alas! it seemed that that room was furnished only for him to die in three months later.

The winter of 1890 set in early and severely. In November it began to snow, and snow and fog continued well into the new year. With the cold weather my father began to feel ill again. He thought of going to Paris to spend the New Year, but he could not afford it. I was sorry he could not go, for he always came back the better for a few days in Paris. He was a welcome visitor to the French capital; he had never been made to feel himself an outcast from society there. Coming home with him one fearfully foggy night in December<sup>65</sup> from a lecture he had been delivering at the Hall of Science on behalf of a testimonial to Mr Forder, the Secretary of the National Secular Society, the conversation turned upon the value of his books, and he mentioned two or three which he thought – erroneously, as it turned out – very

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<sup>65</sup> Wednesday, 10th December. This was the last lecture Mr Bradlaugh ever delivered. The subject was "The Evidence for the Gospels," in criticism of Dr Watkin's Bampton lectures.

valuable. I asked him if he would not sell them; if he could get a holiday and health with the money they would fetch, they would be well worth the exchange. "Ah, my daughter, when I sell my books – " he began, and his unfinished answer told all the sadness of his thought. Twice he would have had to sell them if friends had not come to his aid – once, as I have said, to pay the Government costs in *Bradlaugh v. Erskine*, and next in the *Peters and Kelly* case. He loved his books; to part with them seemed like parting with his heart's blood.

On the 10th January my father went out in the afternoon; it was densely foggy and bitterly cold. When he returned a few hours later I ran down to him as usual, and was horrified to see his face – it was the same face that I had seen in the worst of his sickness of the previous winter. This was the first attack of the spasms of the heart, although we did not then know it; it was comparatively slight,<sup>66</sup> and after a little my father seemed himself again. The improvement, however, was more apparent than real; in less than a week from that day he was compelled to keep his bed, and in less than a month he lay in his grave. He died on the 30th January, firm in the convictions in which he had

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<sup>66</sup> A person writing in the *Swansea Journal* for 7th February 1891 said that some time previously Mr Bradlaugh *had told him* of his sufferings from *angina pectoris*. This is utterly untrue; my father never suffered from this complaint, nor until his fatal illness was he ever conscious that he had anything wrong with his heart. In a private letter to a friend written on the 14th – almost the last written with his own hand – he says distinctly, "I have never suffered from heart or lungs before." The mania for invention is extraordinary.

lived, and was buried on the 3rd of February, next my sister in the Brookwood Necropolis. The funeral was a silent one, without speeches and without display,<sup>67</sup> but people attended it from all parts of England – one miner even came from Scotland. People of all sorts and all conditions travelled to this remote spot to show their respect for the man who had given his life in the service of his fellows.

At Mr Bradlaugh's death his assets were not nearly sufficient to meet his liabilities, but amongst these liabilities there was not a single personal item; they were every one in connection with the Fleet Street business. Most of the creditors cheerfully agreed to accept a composition of ten shillings in the pound; of this £1700 was raised by public subscription, and the remainder was furnished by the sale of the library,<sup>68</sup> Indian presents,<sup>69</sup> and the lease of 63 Fleet Street. It was a wonderful testimony to the regard in which my father was held that people should join together to help in paying his debts after his death. Four other memorials to him have been projected, of which three are

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<sup>67</sup> This was exactly in accordance with Mr Bradlaugh's wishes. In a will dated 1884 he said: "I direct that my body shall be buried as cheaply as possible, and that no speeches be permitted at my funeral." His last will, which consisted of a few lines only, contained no directions on this matter.

<sup>68</sup> The library included some 7000 volumes, in addition to about 3000 Blue Books, and a large number of unbound pamphlets. The books were sold by post from the catalogue, and went to all parts of the world. They realised £550 after all expenses were paid, and about 1000 volumes remained unsold.

<sup>69</sup> Through the generosity of "Edna Lyall," I was able to buy these for myself.

now complete. The first to be finished was the monument at Brookwood. It consists of a bronze bust of Mr Bradlaugh, by Mr F. Verheyden, on a red granite pedestal. It was erected at a cost of £225; and the money was subscribed absolutely spontaneously, without a single appeal or one word of request. Then came the statue of Mr Bradlaugh erected by his constituents in Abington Square, Northampton, and unveiled on the 25th of June 1894, in the presence of the greatest crowd ever assembled in that town. Lastly, there is the memorial which was organised in the House of Commons, and energetically promoted by the daughters of Richard Cobden, one of our country's noblest men. This took the form of making some provision for myself, and to that end a house has been bought with the money subscribed.

There is one other memorial which from its nature is not likely to be completed for some years. It is a project to build a hall, to be called the "Bradlaugh Memorial Hall," to be used for the purposes of promoting the great causes with which Mr Bradlaugh was identified. It took close upon a hundred years to build a Memorial Hall to Thomas Paine; it remains to be seen how long it will take to erect one to the memory of Charles Bradlaugh.

# **PART II**

**BY JOHN M. ROBERTSON**

# **CHAPTER I.**

## **PHILOSOPHY AND SECULARIST PROPAGANDA**

It may here be well to give a general view of Bradlaugh's teaching on the great open questions of opinion and action, taking separately the old provinces of religion and politics. When he came most prominently before his countrymen he had a very definite repute on both heads, having spoken on them in nearly every town of any size in the country; but neither then nor later could it be said that anything like the majority of the public had a just or accurate idea of his position. The obstacle was and is partly prejudice, partly incapacity.

### **§ 1**

To begin with, even the distinct title of "Atheist" may mean any number of things for any number of persons. Ill-informed and even some well-informed people commonly describe an Atheist as one who says "There is no God," and that "Things happen by chance." To say to such persons – as has been said a thousand times – that for an Atheist both phrases are meaningless, seems to give no help: we must begin at the beginning, and show how the dispute arose. And it is useful

to keep in view that Bradlaugh's Atheism, in the evolution of English Freethought, is only a generation removed from the Deism of Thomas Paine, which is much the same as the Deism of Voltaire. Deism or Theism is to-day reckoned a quite "religious" frame of mind; but it was the frame of mind of men who in their day were hated and vilified by Christians as much as Bradlaugh in his. Explicit Atheism is only in our own day become at all a common opinion. The men so described in former ages, so far as we know (if we set aside the remarkable developments of the Italian Renaissance), have nearly always been Deists or Pantheists, of whom the latter of course tend logically to coalesce with Atheism, but who have in their own names alike professed to repudiate Atheism. Thus Hobbes and Spinoza, who last century were constantly called Atheists by Christians, always professed to have a God-idea; and the Freethinkers who showed head in England in the first half of the eighteenth century were all professing Deists. Systematic Atheism began to arise among the more penetrating or more trained thinkers of the latter half of the century. Thus Hume, after professing Deism throughout his life, left for posthumous publication his "Dialogues concerning Natural Religion," which amount to the surrender of all forms of Theism. Of Voltaire in his latter years, when he strongly attacked the Atheism of Holbach, it was said by the more high-flying talkers of the Paris drawing-rooms: "Why, he is a bigot; he is a Deist." But even Voltaire, as Mr Morley has shown, was somewhat less of a Deist after the earthquake of Lisbon;



and "Candide" is not a good Theistic tract.<sup>70</sup> Diderot, again, reached explicit Atheism; and his friend Holbach wrote, in the "Système de la Nature," the first systematic and straightforward Atheistic treatise of modern times.<sup>71</sup> In England the movement was less rapid. Bolingbroke went pretty far towards a Lucretian or Agnostic Theism; and the upper-class Deism which on his lines held out against the opportunist orthodoxy of Butler, necessarily tended to make its Deity a very remote and inaccessible Power. But Freethought, to get any hold on the general mind in the thickening populations of the latter half of last century and the first half of this, had to begin again, and more effectively, on the lines of the first Deists. The incredibility of the sacred books had to be made clear before more abstract issues could be settled. In this task Voltaire, the pupil of the English Deists, was the

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<sup>70</sup> This is all that can be pleaded in favour of the deliberate representation of Voltaire as an Atheist by the late Archbishop Thomson, at the Church Congress of 1881. But the ignorance of the upper English clergy in general on such matters is amazing. In January 1881, Archdeacon (then Canon) Farrar, preaching in Westminster Abbey represented Robespierre's Reign of Terror as a "reign of avowed Atheism;" identified the Deistic cult of the "Supreme Being" with that of the "goddess of Reason;" and accounted for the fall of Robespierre by the statement that, "God *awoke once more*, and with one thunderclap smote the sanhedrim of the insurrection, prostrated the apostate race." This orator once expressed horror at the thought that Disestablishment might enable Bradlaugh to speak in St Paul's. Bradlaugh might have remarked on what the Establishment permitted at Westminster Abbey.

<sup>71</sup> The English translation, in the original issue, is in parts completely perverted to the language of Theism, whether out of fear or of Deistic prejudice on the part of the translator. Even the edition prefaced by Bradlaugh – who did not think of checking the text – preserves the perversions of the first translator.

great performer for all Europe. It was Paine however who first, in the turmoil of the Revolution, brought home to thousands of English artizans and other plain men the incredibility of what had so long passed as divinely-revealed truth. He could do this the better because of the power and fame of his work in politics, and because of his constant profession of a devout belief in a beneficent God, on whom he declared the Bible narratives to be a libel. It probably needed this element of popular religion to keep up any continuous current of popular Free-thinking in England throughout the great reaction which followed on the French Revolution. But the argument of Butler held good against Paine as against the earlier Deists. If the Bible stories were irreconcilable with the idea of a "good," omnipotent God, equally so are the operations of Nature. And though there are many people who can be led by that argument to believe or make-believe in the Bible (though it makes no more for the Bible than for the Koran), there were others who felt bound to take the logical alternative, and decide that the "good God" of popular half-faith is a dream.

Such progress is a question of time. Atheism in a psychological sense began with the beginning of physical science. Pure Theism, in its early form of polytheism, saw in all natural movements and forces the expression of a personal power or powers, analogous to man; and its gods were and are simply magnified projections of humanity. Thus the sun, moon, and planets, the winds, the thunder, the lightning, the rivers, the fountains, the seas,

were all figured as ruled and moved by personal deities. As soon, however, as astronomy made certain the perfectly regular movements of the sun and stars, Theism was to that extent logically limited, and Atheism to that extent logically possible. Astronomy was strictly godless in so far as it showed the universe to move by undeviating law. Of course this perception is but a small part of human consciousness and daily life; and the habit of theising, so to speak, easily overrode the habit of atheising. But every advance in exact knowledge of Nature, and in the capacity for exact thought, tended to encourage the atheistic view, and to discredit the theistic. Hence the spread of Atheism and Agnosticism among the Greeks in their progressive and scientific period. It needed the constant reform and modification of theistic doctrine, and later the complete arrest of all scientific thought, to keep the theistic view of things in power and place. And there had to be a revival of science and exact thinking before there could again be talk of Atheism.

It follows, however, that all early Atheism, so-called, was only the rejection of theistic ideas from some part of the business of life. The Christians were "Atheists" for the Pagan multitude, because they rejected the only God-ideas which the Pagan multitude harboured. In the same way the Christians who later scouted the worship of images of God (as Persians and Jews had done long before) were Atheists for those Christians who could only conceive of an imaged God. Prejudice has its own logic. When again medical men rested more and more on

inductive method and rational (even if mistaken) procedure, and less and less on sorcery and invocation, they were naturally called Atheists, because they excluded "God" from an important and perilous province of action. Logically, the more a man is a Theist, the more of "God's" intervention he sees in life. No man is a Theist in all things; but in the ages of ignorance men were theistic in most matters. The kingdom of God, in a practical sense, is a sphere in which man is confessedly ignorant or impotent. "God's will" is the name for the forces which man cannot control, and does not understand. It covers a storm, a pestilence, a good or bad harvest, a stroke of luck, but not an indigestion, or the breaking of coal when struck by a hammer. Thus it is that every new advance of science, every new explanation of a body of facts in terms of law and innate tendency, is at first denounced as Atheistic. After the physicians came the physicists. The great Kepler, in keeping with his idealistic method, was so steeped in Theism as to fancy that the planets were kept up to time by guiding angels. Newton, however, was flatly accused of Atheism for explaining the universe in terms of the law of gravitation. He had driven God out of the world, it was said; and so far as his physics went, it was true. Yet he himself was an ardent Theist; and he even sought to make good his Theism by the theory that "matter" was first without gravitation, and that God added the attribute. With or without this safeguard, however, Newton's generalisation was sufficiently abstract to leave popular religion intact; and practical Theism even assimilated and gained by his science. It was not

till geologists began to explain the formation of the earth in terms of law and tendency that the great shock came. God had hitherto been generally conceived as shaping the earth, were it only because there was no other explanation at hand; and, above all, geology clashed with Genesis. Hence a much more serious resistance, and a much more general imputation of Atheism; though the first geologists were mostly Deists, and believers in the special creation of animal life. The next and the most serious shock was that given by Darwinism, which removed "the divine idea" from biology. Over this came the loudest outcry of all; and the odium would have been overwhelming were it not for the number of naturalists who took up the new doctrine as a matter of special science. "God" is now for scientific people practically removed from the sphere of all the "natural" sciences; and the results attained in this connection by educated people are slowly being attained by the ill-educated; the mass of the clergy having gradually assimilated the conclusions of biology as their predecessors did those of geology and physics.

The inevitable next step is the reduction to scientific order of the lore of human affairs. This step was taken in a large part by Buckle, somewhat out of the due order of time, just before Darwin issued the "Origin of Species;" and Buckle has had on the whole more of religious enmity than even Darwin, though, significantly enough, he expressly insisted on Theism while Darwin kept it vaguely in the background. Buckle's Theism so plainly leaves his Deity nothing to do in human affairs that

his belief, however fervid, could avail nothing to propitiate the class whose function is to explain history in terms of divine interference. Buckle, a professed Theist, is for all practical purposes in the position of an Atheist, save in respect of his personal and emotional belief in a future state. A God who in no way comes in contact with men, for good or for ill, is too thin a conception to count for much.

Atheism, then, is only a development of a process of thought that began ages ago under Polytheism. It has been reached in the past by isolated thinkers; there seem to have been Atheists at the time of composition of parts of the Vedas; and each one of the great steps of scientific generalisation has been anticipated by men who were not able to bring the idea home to their own age. It is the giving the step its name that creates the greatest shock. And when a reformer does not even wait to have his position named for him, does not merely undermine Theism by a new scientific treatment of a province of fact, but goes to the logical root of the matter and declares that the latest Theism is at bottom no more true than the oldest, though stripped of certain crudities – then it is that the maximum of odium is evoked. The Atheist, in reality, does but carry negation a step further than does the Theist himself. As Bradlaugh used to point out, the modern Theist denies the existence of any type of "God" save his own. Whatever he may see fit to argue about the folly of denying the possibilities of the unknown, he is quite confident that there is in the universe no Being even remotely resembling the fabled

Zeus, or Moloch, or Osiris, or Venus, or Huitzilpochtli. He is sure that these are only imaginary existences. Similarly, he begins in these days to be sure that the conception of Jahweh is as purely a dream as that of Bacchus – the mere projection of man's own image (however magnified or even idealised) on the background of nescience. Nay, the latter-day Theist begins to repudiate the conceptions of the "Deists" of last century: he will have no "Great Artificer," no "Overruling Providence." The latest treatises expressly reject the arguments of the earlier for proving the "existence of God." Thus the Theist himself "denies the existence" of a thousand Gods.<sup>72</sup> The Atheist, as Mr Bradlaugh put it, merely denies a thousand and one.<sup>73</sup> He argues that the most advanced Theism (as distinguished from mere Pantheism) is only a modified form of the oldest; merely a civilised fancy instead of an uncivilised; it is always a male person in the image of man, with passions, emotions, limitations, qualities; loving, hating, planning, punishing, rewarding; always the "magnified non-natural man" of the primeval worshipper: a conception flatly and absurdly opposed to the first philosophic requirements of

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<sup>72</sup> This fact is entirely ignored by Professor Flint in his defence of the old plea of Foster and Chalmers against Mr Holyoake in "Anti-Theistic Theories," App. ii.

<sup>73</sup> John Mill, after stating that his father held that "concerning the origin of things nothing whatever can be known," remarks that "Dogmatic Atheism he looked upon as absurd; as most of those whom the world has considered Atheists have always done" ("Autobiography," p. 39). It is difficult to guess what is here meant by "dogmatic Atheism;" but certainly no statement made above is more "dogmatic" than the proposition cited from Mill, senior. It clearly involves rejection of all Theism.

the very doctrine which embodies it. The God of Theism must always be the analogue of the Theist. Hume, passing out of Theism, concluded that the "Power" of the universe could only have a faint and remote analogy to human personality. Further reasoning forces the conclusion that it can have no conceivable analogy.

This very conclusion has actually been reached by many professed Theists and professed Christians. Professor Max Müller has collected instances in his lectures on "Anthropological Religion." But those thinkers, like Dr Müller himself, have always in practice relapsed into the personal conception which they philosophically affect to repudiate. As Dr Müller puts it, the abstract Theism which allows to Deity no human attributes whatever is too "cold" for popularity; and Dr Müller is not ashamed, after smoothing the way with a trivial fallacy, to recur to the doctrine and terminology of the multitude, giving the Deity male sex because "we" cannot think of "Him" otherwise than as male. The Atheist simply stands honestly to the conclusions which such Theists have avowedly come to and then feebly let go.

This is so obvious to steady-minded people that in all philosophic ages there have been some who, shunning the name rather than the reality of Atheism, have formulated the doctrine and name of Pantheism. Between *logical* Pantheism and Atheism, however, it cannot be too strongly affirmed, there is no difference save in name. An Atheist believes in a "going"



and infinite universe, the totality of which he cannot pretend to understand; and which he flatly refuses to pretend to explain by the primitive hypothesis of a personal "Spirit." He calls the universe "infinite" by way of avowing that he cannot conceive of its coming to an end, in extension or in duration. This recognition of endlessness represents for him the limit of thought: and he declines to proceed to give further attributes to that, the very naming of which leads him to the verge of the capacities of rational speech. He declines to give to the going universe the name of "God," because that name has always been associated by nearly all men with the primitive conception of a Personal Being, and it is a mere verbal stratagem to make it identical with Universe. So irresistible is the effect of the immemorial association of the name that it serves to carry nearly every professing Pantheist back chronically into mere Theism and Deism, even if he so formulates his Pantheism to begin with as to make it answer to the name. A logically consistent Pantheist, using the name, would be hard to find. Hence the necessity, on all grounds, of repudiating Pantheism as distinctly as Theism. The only consistent course is to use the privative "*a*," and stand to the term which means "without Theos, without God-idea."

## § 2

This preamble, it is to be hoped, may make it easier to appreciate the technicalities of Bradlaugh's doctrine. He was not

the untrained Atheist of the theistic imagination, who may be confounded with a quotation from Kant by one of the personages of Mrs Ward's religious vaudevilles. He knew that Kant, reduced to plain language, gives the whole answer to Kant. Beginning as a boy to defend his Theism in debate, he saw it demolished by one of those born debaters who are found every now and then among the working class, men far superior in native power and intellectual sincerity to those cultured acceptors of other men's obscurities who look down on them.<sup>74</sup> But he did not trust to "mother-wit," his own or another's. He read all the philosophic literature he could lay hands on; in particular he became a close student of Spinoza. A clergyman of my acquaintance maintains that to the end he was a Spinozist. It would be less misleading to say that he employed much of the method of Spinoza to establish the Atheism to which Spinoza's doctrine practically leads,<sup>75</sup> while always scrupulously recognising that Spinoza formulated Pantheism and professed only to modify the God-idea. Here are Bradlaugh's own words: —

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<sup>74</sup> One of the most capable metaphysicians I have personally known was an inferior stone-mason.

<sup>75</sup> It was not merely the orthodoxy of past ages that saw virtual Atheism in the position of Spinoza. Jacobi expressly and constantly maintained that Spinozism and Atheism came to the same thing. A God who is not outside the world, he argued, is as good as no God. At the same time, he admitted that the understanding had no escape from the logical demonstration of the impossibility of a personal God; and that the Theist must throw himself "overhead into the depths of faith." See Pünjer's "History of the Christian Philosophy of Religion," Eng. tr., p. 632.

"The logic of Spinoza was directed to the demonstration of one substance with infinite attributes, for which one substance with infinite attributes he had as equivalent the name of 'God.' Some who have since followed Spinoza, have agreed in his one substance, but have denied the possibility of infinite attributes. Attributes or qualities, they urge, are attributes of the finite or conditioned, and you cannot have attributes of substance except as attributes of its modes. You have in this distinction the division line between Spinozism and Atheism. Spinoza recognises infinite intelligence; but Atheism cannot conceive intelligence except in relation, as quality of the conditioned, and not as the essence of the absolute. Spinoza, however, denied the doctrine of freewill, as with him all phenomena are of God; so he rejects the ordinary notions of good and evil."<sup>76</sup>

The position here taken up is frequently met by an outcry against the "denial of intelligence" to the highest power in the universe. The protest is pure irrelevance. Atheism "denies intelligence" to an infinite existence simply as it denies it whiskers and dyspepsia. The point is that intelligence cannot be conceived save as a finite attribute; every process of intelligence implying limitation and ignorance.<sup>77</sup> Infinitude must transcend

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<sup>76</sup> Pamphlet on "Heresy: its Utility and Morality. A Plea and a Justification," 3rd. ed. p. 35.

<sup>77</sup> It is unnecessary here to put the further argument that if we infer intelligence behind the universe by human analogy, we are bound in consistency to infer organism for the intelligence. Dr Martineau in his "Modern Materialism," takes refuge from this argument in declamation, treating the demand for consistency as if it had been

the state of "intelligence." The "intelligence" of "omniscience" is a chimæra. And when the Atheist is accused of making himself the highest thing in the universe, the plain answer is that it is precisely the Theist, and nobody else, who does so. That is to say, the Theist makes his own mind and personality the type and analogue of an Infinite and Eternal Power. The Atheist admits that he can form no conception whatever of Infinite and Eternal Power. The Theist rushes in where the Atheist declines to tread. And nothing is more remarkable in the modern history of religion than the retreat of all theistic argument to some form of the sub-rational position so laboriously formulated by Kant – that the God-idea is established, not by any form of reasonable inference from knowledge, but by the moral needs and constitution of human nature. That doctrine is not only the formal bankruptcy of all philosophy, logical and psychological, but is the stultification of every religious system which adopts it, inasmuch as it is equally valid for each against all the rest, besides being finally annihilated by the simple fact of persistent scientific Atheism, which proves that human nature does *not*

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a substantive plea.

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