

BRADLAUGH CENTENARY.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## CHARLES BRADLAUGH: 1833—1933

### THE SETTING OF THE SCENE.

FREETHOUGHT in England towards the end of the seventeenth and the larger part of the eighteenth century was well described by Sir Leslie Stephen as being looked on as was hair powder—a prerogative of the “Upper” classes. One of the chief functions of religion on this view was to act as an auxiliary police force, to keep the “lower” classes in order. That view is not quite abandoned to-day, although it is not put so crudely as it once was. The coming of the industrial revolution did not change this view of religion, but rather intensified it. A new order of society was emerging, the working-class, and popular Freethinking was something against which every vested interest had to be on its guard. If Freethought could be crushed so much the better, but if it could not be exterminated, then it must be kept under control. A consequence of this policy was the multiplication of trials for sedition, blasphemy, and treason, as well as the placing of new and repressive measures on the Statute Book.

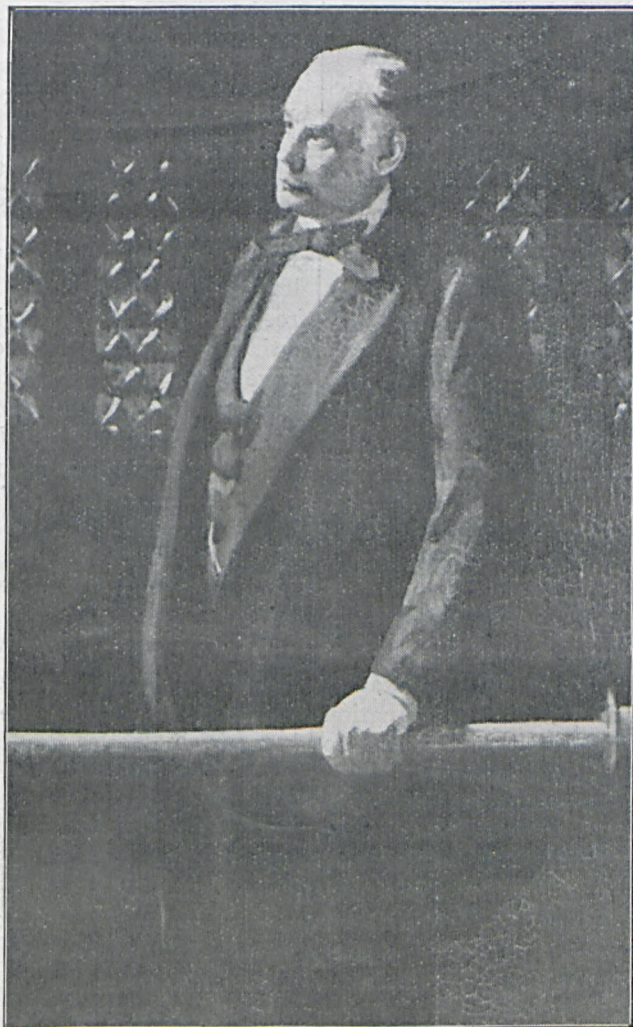
Among the formative and democratic influences of the period there were three that may be selected for special attention. The first was the publication of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), and *The Age of Reason* (1793-4). Paine was already well known, both in this country and in America, for his writings on reform, and he had an audience ready for the two works mentioned. So far as the *Age of Reason* is concerned, it may be admitted that there was little in the work that had not

already appeared in one or another of the writings of the Deists. Nevertheless, Paine is entitled to stand at the beginning of a new epoch, first, because his was one of the earliest attempts to appeal directly to the

“People,” and second, because of the simple and vigorous English used—almost new in English prose writing—and third, because of the actual influence of his works. Paine's books became the Bible of reformers all over the country, and the terror of the Government. Everywhere they were read, individually by those who could afford to purchase them, collectively by small groups of men who formed associations for their study. I do not think there was another man of the time whose writings were so hated by those in power; and the hatred shown may be taken as some measure of their stimulative influence. A summary of the trials in which his works figured would make a lengthy record.

The extent of Paine's influence has never been fully explored, not even in the classic and indispensable *Life* by Moncreux Conway. In this country we have a time-honoured method of slandering the real reformer while he is alive;

and burying him by our silence when he is dead. So it is that a great many writers on the history of reform appear to be quite oblivious to the debt the world is under to men such as Thomas Paine. And even with those who are better informed, it is still not very profitable—socially or financially—to go out of one's way to sing the praise of so notorious a character. Why then run risks?



AT THE BAR OF THE HOUSE.

From a painting by W. R. Sickert, by permission of the Manchester Art Gallery.



One day it is to be hoped that someone will institute a search among the magazines and general periodical literature of the time in order to discover the extent of Paine's influence. In many parts of England and Scotland, even in Ireland, there were formed Zetetic Societies, Corresponding Societies, and other bodies for the purpose of discussing his works.

Another great influence in the creation of the popular Freethought movement, although in this instance it came through the channel of social and educational reform, was that exerted by Robert Owen. He had acquired considerable wealth—always a thing that is likely to obtain respectful recognition in this country—before he set out on his career of reform, and had many friends in high places. For a time he held a position in English society that Paine never enjoyed. And his educational and social work would certainly have received more enduring and wider recognition than is the case to-day, had he been less intellectually honest. But, when he made it clear that he was opposed to all religious beliefs, and described the religions of the world as "so many forms of geographical insanity," he quickly lost caste. His plan of sending out a number of "missionaries," among them George Jacob Holyoake, led to the formation of local societies, out of which the Secular Societies grew, and which provided the material upon which Bradlaugh worked so well.

The third great operative influence was the French Revolution of 1789. The better and more idealistic type of mind saw in this the dawn of a new era for humanity. "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," whatever logical criticisms might be directed against the resonant formula, seemed to hold a greater inspiration than the parrot cry of "For God and the King."

Another and a lower type saw in the Revolution only a threat to power and privilege. It threw the British Government into a perfect paroxysm of terror and reaction, and no method was too bad or too tyrannical to adopt to achieve its ends. Not content with subsidizing the continental powers in order to force back on France a monarchy that had been so tardily destroyed, the British Government strove by might and main to stamp out every spark of revolutionary feeling wherever and whenever it was manifested at home.

The period was one that marked a very low level of English life. It saw the English factory system at its worst, with its child slavery, starvation wages, frightfully long hours of labour, and Combination Laws that made it a penal offence for two or three to join together to ask for any improvements in wages or conditions of labour. The people were forced off the land for the avowed purpose of driving them into the factories. They were herded together in "houses" which were the real creators of our present-day slums, the social and physical consequences of which we have not yet outgrown. It was a period during which, as Lord Beaconsfield said in one of his political novels, the English people lost every shred of real freedom they ever possessed.

It was also a period of intense religious activity. Behind the enslavement of the people, behind the land-robbing and factory-killing and the human demoralization that went on, there was always the accommodating power of the Churches—Established and Nonconformist. It was this combination of mental and spiritual tyranny that was responsible for the close connexion between Freethought and political and social reform for the first fifty years of the nineteenth century.

In all ages the policy of the Christian Church has been to support established powers so long

as the established powers supported the Church. This was done, positively, by preaching the crime of rebellion, negatively by inculcating contentment under wrong and oppression. Wilberforce, about whose fine character so much has lately been said, may be taken as representing one side of the Christian Church in this country. His insistence at all times was that the duty of the poor is to remain quiet in the "lowly path allotted to them by the hand of God." He was the moving spirit in many of the prosecutions against the *Age of Reason*, and in one particularly infamous case he declined to act with clemency even though he knew that the wife and children of the prosecuted man were starving and ill. There is no wonder that Cobbett and others of the reformers of the day spoke with the utmost contempt of this very Christian gentleman.

On the other hand were the Methodists preaching the nothingness of this world, exhorting to thrift and contentment where both partook of the nature of crimes rather than of virtues, and excluding men from their associations for the offence of assisting democratic agitation.

For those who saw the situation properly religion could not be left out of account. Religion would not leave the reformers out of account. To leave religion alone was for the reformer to fight with one hand tied behind him. Religion cannot be left alone to-day with safety, although it has become accommodating enough to permit the social reformer, as he says, to leave religion alone. In reality this means leaving the roughest fighting to be done by someone else, and taking whatever profit accrues from the other person's daring. But in the earlier years of the nineteenth century religion was too much alive for any rebel to leave it alone with safety. Its teeth had to be drawn, its claws clipped. At a later date, when more freedom had been won, it was possible for a differentiation of effort to take place, and different social movements were able to take specialized lines without directly attacking religion. But it ought not to be overlooked that the *freedom* to do this is one of the benefits conferred upon the people by the Freethought fight. Nor should it be forgotten that most of the reform movements of the past century were brought into existence by the militant Freethinkers and nursed by them, until they were able to walk alone.

I am not writing a history of Freethought nor of the times upon which I have touched, but am merely trying to indicate, for the better understanding of his character and work, the nature of the environment into which Charles Bradlaugh entered. For this purpose it is necessary to deal at some length with Richard Carlile, the protagonist of the fight for freedom of thought and publication, and one of the most heroic figures that ever came out of the West. Devonshire has far more cause to be proud of Carlile than it has of Drake. A score of Drakes are born into the world to one Richard Carlile.

For his were the days of oppressive press laws, specially designed to prevent the circulation of "dangerous" literature among the "lower" orders; days of almost arbitrary arrest, with judges prepared to obstruct a defence by every means in their power, and of organizations, headed by men like Wilberforce, very "good," very pious, but ready to break and ruin men and women who dared to criticize the Government or religion. Carlile was not alone in trying to break this villainous combination of Church and Government, but he was the outstanding figure in the fight, no man doing more to weaken the alliance; and when he died the press-laws were poor, shattered and impotent things compared with what they were when Carlile first took up the cudgels.



Like Bradlaugh, Carlile was a staunch Republican, and in the latter part of his life an Atheist, and like Bradlaugh he never concealed his opinions. For about twenty years he poured out a stream of books and pamphlets, many of which were published because they were either threatened with prosecution or had been prohibited. It was enough that the law proscribed a work for Carlile to issue it. His republication of *The Age of Reason* led to a Paine revival. The sales also led to a revival of religious lies about Paine, and the invention of new ones. The publishers were prosecuted, so were many of the agents who were selling Paine's works and other of Carlile's publications up and down the country. Two thousand copies of *The Age of Reason* were sold in six months at either one guinea or 8s. per copy. Whatever profits were made were invested in new publications, and, as Carlile said, every prosecution sent up the sales. Day by day reports of the prosecutions were published under the title *Mock Trials*. There was no attempt to placate the prosecution, it was to be stark defiance to the end. One indictment was no sooner served than another was issued, then another. It was a wonder Carlile did not open a regular office for their receipt. At the end of his first trial, at which Carlile insisted on reading the whole of the *Age of Reason* in the open court, he was sentenced to a fine of £1,000 for publishing the *Age of Reason*, and £500 for publishing Palmer's *Principles of Nature*. He was further sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and ordered to find sureties of £1,000 himself and two others of £500 each for good behaviour during life. Of course, the fines were not paid, nor were the sureties provided. This was one of a series of his imprisonments which were to total nine years seven months and one week.

But Carlile was undismayed throughout. From prison he continued to direct the campaign, and he never lacked helpers. There were prosecutions for selling Carlile's publications in Manchester, in Birmingham, and Leeds. In Plymouth a vendor was summoned for selling copies of Hone's parody of the *Lord's Prayer*, published by Carlile. The indicted passage has some value for to-day:—

Our Lord who art in the Treasury, whatever be thy name, thy power be prolonged, thy will be done, throughout the empire, as it is in each session. Give us our occasional sops and forgive us our absences on divisions, as we promise not to forgive them that divide against us. Turn us not out of our places, but keep us in the House of Commons, the land of Pensions and Plenty, and deliver us from the People. Amen.

The man who was convicted of selling this was a poor cripple, who had not sixpence between himself and the workhouse. But a kindly Government ordered him to be imprisoned till he could find sureties, one of his own of £200, and two others of £100 each. They might as well have ordered him to pay the National Debt.

The extent to which the Government was prepared to go was seen in the case of J. A. Williams, proprietor of the *Durham Chronicle*. He was charged, not with blaspheming God, but by aiming "to bring into contempt the Church of England," "of bringing into public contempt and hatred the clergy," and "particularly the clergy resident in or near the City of Durham." At the assizes the obedient Judge, Baron Wood, laid it down that this was a "very gross libel," and that "this liberty of the press would pull down our institutions." The jury decided that it was not a libel on the Church, but only on a group of individuals. No sentence was passed. This is the only case I know of where one has been charged with speaking contemptuously of a class of men who, for the most part, if they are not created for providing

material for contempt, do not appear to have any justification for their existence.

The Carlile prosecutions went merrily on. His wife took his place in the shop. She was indicted, and went to follow her husband. Carlile had exhibited in the window. "Trial of Mrs. Carlile—Usual result." Her place was taken by her sister. Another trial and another indictment. Several shopmen followed the women to prison. There was no scarcity of fighters. They came from all parts of the country, and soon Carlile had a very lengthy waiting list ready to stand their trial. At first some of those charged were defended by counsel. But Carlile saw that counsel were then, as is often the case now, more interested in their own future before the judges than with the interests of their clients. So he said:—

I'll see no more lawyers; every individual shall make his or her defence in person, and no further prosecution shall necessarily cost me a farthing until the individual prosecuted be in prison; then he or she shall share whatever comforts I can obtain. I will relinquish the sale of no one pamphlet prosecuted until it is out of print, and I will weekly add to the number.

Carlile's manœuvring had two ends in view. One was to make the Government prosecutions ridiculous; the other to show that no amount of persecution could break down the resistance of Freethinkers. He addressed a direct communication to Lord Eldon in which he announced his intention of selling his books at two prices—"To all known friends at the regular price, to all unknown or suspicious persons at a price that will cover the expenses of the prosecution." To him, though he was Lord Chancellor, Carlile also wrote, "You were a mad brute, to reigate the prosecution—a blockhead, a ninny. With me you shall have no peace until you leave me to pursue my own course." And he added a little sound advice which shows how well he had caught his persecutors in their own trap. "You cannot prosecute without agitation. Your strength lies in keeping the people in ignorance, mine in removing ignorance, and that ignorance is not to be removed without agitation. By your prosecutions it is heard wherever a newspaper goes that the Bible and the Christian religion are disputable things, and wherever that sound is heard the first link in the chain of charm that held them in ignorance is broken."

In the end, although the complete freedom of the press was not achieved, still the tyranny was so enfeebled that its demise at the next resolute attack was certain. The long fight from the beginning of the Paine prosecutions to about 1840 had showed the impossibility of legally shackling the press if men and women were determined not to submit to the shackling. The fight had also laid the foundations of a more liberal interpretation of the Common Law in blasphemy, and to greater all-round freedom of discussion.

It may be taken as an instance of the degree to which the ignoring and depreciating of the Freethinkers of the heroic age has gone, and how this affects writers who have no deliberate intention of being unjust, that in a recent history of Freethought, the author, while paying tribute to the "staunch martyr," and to the "bull-dog persistence" of Carlile, and narrating his various imprisonments, ushers him into his history with the remark that his name must not be ignored by those who "value obscure service to human freedom." If a man who created an agitation to the extent that Carlile did, and in the face of what the same writer points out was an increased ferocity of persecution, if a man who spent nine years in prison for publishing, a man who outwitted the cunning Castlereagh, defied Lord Chancellor Eldon and kept the Government in a state of constant agitation, and in



the end achieved his main purpose, besides acting as a source of inspiration to his successors—if these be obscure services, one wonders what distinguished ones would be! Perhaps the phrase was due to a slip of the pen. Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, in his *British History of the Nineteenth Century* is nearer the truth in saying that Carlile "suffered and achieved more for the liberty of the press than any other Englishman of the nineteenth century."

I have singled out Carlile for the purpose above stated, but it must be impressed upon the reader that Carlile was only one of many who worthily fought for the freedom we enjoy—but stand some chance of losing, unless we are very watchful. I cannot give a list of these men and women, even by name. But here are a few of the principal ones, with their sentences up to about 1845. Robert Taylor, author of *The Devil's Pulpit*, three years. James Watson, gallant Freethinker and fighter for the organization of the working classes, twelve months and six months. Henry Heywood, of Manchester, indicted but not imprisoned, for publishing Haslam's *Letters to the Clergy*. Charles Southwell, for publishing an article on "The Jew Book," in the *Oracle of Reason*, twelve months. He was succeeded in the editorship by George Jacob Holyoake, who was sentenced to six months imprisonment for a speech at Cheltenham. He was followed by Thomas Paterson, who was soon relieved of his editorship by receiving three months' and fifteen months' imprisonments. The next editor was George Adams, who was sent to prison for one month for selling the prosecuted issue of the *Oracle*. Matilda Roalfe was given two months for the same offence. So the tale runs. It has never yet been fully told, but if it were, it would prove one of the finest stories of quiet heroism and high endeavour in the history of this country. We who come after them, have not merely the benefit of the larger liberty they helped to create, we have the advantage of dealing with Governments who have had forced upon them the lesson of being a little more cautious in their methods where Freethought is concerned. Slowly Governments and Churches learnt the lesson that the fighting Freethinkers of this country cannot be bribed and will not be bullied into submission, and this has induced caution, if not a larger tolerance. Carlile's "You may break, but you shall never bend me," was justified. It was the Government which bent.

I think enough has been said of the Freethought struggle in the early years of the nineteenth century to indicate the background necessary for an appreciation of the life and work of Charles Bradlaugh. The last remnants of Deism had been eliminated from the Freethought Movement. The press laws had been so battered that only a determined resistance to them was required to remove them altogether. The policy of continuous resistance and no compromise had become part of the settled heritage of the Freethought Party. Small bodies of men and women in different parts of the country were ready to play their parts, and these groups formed the nucleus of the National Secular Society, of which Bradlaugh was the first, and for so many years, President. The Freethought tradition had been established.

### BRADLAUGH—THE BEGINNINGS.

In the language of religious biography, Charles Bradlaugh was born of poor but pious parents in Hoxton, East London, on September 26, 1833. The small salary on which the father lived brought the schooling of Charles, which began in a National School at seven, to a close before he was twelve, when he commenced his working life as an office-boy at five shillings a

week. Very soon after, he "bettered" himself by becoming wharf clerk to a coal merchant at a weekly salary of twelve shillings. Some of Cobbett's political writings gave him his introduction to the radicalism of his day, although there is no evidence that it roused, at the time, anything more than a boyish curiosity.

Like so many of the Freethought speakers and leaders, he appears to have taken a real interest in religion in his early years, and it was this earnestness and directness of character that led to what his parents and his parson regarded as disaster.

The future leader of Freethought in this country was, presumably in virtue of his earnestness in religious matters, officiating as Sunday school teacher at St. Peter's Church, Hackney. When quite a youth, the minister of the Church, Mr. Packer was preparing him for confirmation, and it fell to Charles to study the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Gospels. Those were the days before Christians had discovered that when the Bible said one thing it really meant something else, and the something else was whatever fitted the special occasion. Discrepancies were discovered, and Bradlaugh applied to Mr. Packer to clear up his difficulties. Mr. Packer, wise in his generation, and probably knowing enough of his pupil to discern that his "explanations" were not likely to pass, did not argue but wrote to Bradlaugh senior denouncing his son's views as Atheistical. He also suspended Charles from taking charge of the class for three months. The latter policy merely hastened the end. Not far away were Bonner's Fields, now forming part of Victoria Park, a place in which I gave my first lecture from a Freethought platform. Here were gathered followers of Richard Carlile and also groups of advanced Radicals discussing issues that proved of absorbing interest to the young Bradlaugh. He began to take part in the discussions, not as an opponent of Christianity but as its defender. He had evidently not yet given up the hope of reconciling the Bible with the truth. When he was about sixteen he engaged in a debate with a Freethinker on the inspiration of the Bible. Many other Christians have done the same, but not always with the same result, for Bradlaugh having had his position demolished, promptly gave it up. But only so far as Christianity was concerned. He still championed theism, but with the same result as in the case of the Bible—defeat and admission of defeat. The first is quite common in these discussions; the second is somewhat rare. Conversions to Freethinking occur mostly among the listeners to debate, a fact which makes parsons very shy nowadays of entering into discussions.

From this time on Bradlaugh began to take part in the regular meetings of the Carlile group of Freethinkers, although he does not seem to have, at that period, got farther in his intellectual development than a disbelief in Christianity. But it is indicative of a certain simple sincerity in the character of the youth that he should have suggested to Mr. Packer the reading of Taylor's *Diagnosis*—a critical examination of the New Testament. Had he been more experienced he would have realized that the average Christian minister's task is not to find out what is true, but to prevent others making the discovery for themselves.

This action, however, served to bring about something in the nature of a crisis. Packer induced Bradlaugh's father to take action, and the latter wrote his son's employers—to whom he was acting as security for his son during his employment—that he would withdraw that security unless his son altered his views. There were unpleasant scenes at home, and eventually Bradlaugh junior marched out of the home to face the world alone, save for the new Freethinking friends he had around him.



There have been several versions of this conflict between the parson, the parent and the son, and in my judgment the parson has been over-blamed—considering he was a parson. It may easily be correct that, but for Packer's action from the outset, Bradlaugh might never have become the leader of militant Atheism in this country. It should be a commonplace that while capacity is an endowment, the form taken by this capacity is almost entirely a matter of environmental influences. Different circumstances might easily have led Bradlaugh more directly and more exclusively along political or other lines, and while there would have been the same thoroughness, of loyalty to principle, of courage in fighting, of power of oratory, these qualities would have been expended in directions other than those of an exposition of Atheism and an attack on religion in all its forms.

But Packer was a Christian clergyman, and a clergyman is most likely to have, in view of his profession, a highly distorted sense of duty. I fancy at least ninety per cent of clergymen to-day, if they had a youth in their care who showed inclinations to become Atheistical, would acquaint his parents with their discovery, and ninety-five per cent of Christians to-day would blame the parson if he did not do so. They would say he had fallen short of his duty. To me the greater fault seems to lie with the father, although even here what has been said as to the distorting influence of Christianity applies. In such circumstances a good Christian is almost certain to act badly; a bad Christian is most likely to be the better man. Such cases as Bradlaugh's have occurred by the thousand, and they happen even to-day more frequently than most people imagine. It is probable that if the father had possessed a different son, or if the son had possessed a different father, things might have turned out differently. But a sufficient similarity of character would make for hasty and autocratic action, and the fact is that Bradlaugh *did* leave home in consequence of his declining to submit to dictation in a matter in which he held he was in the right; and that incident was not the last, nor the least important case in which he showed that, once convinced he was right, no consideration of personal comfort or security would be permitted to interfere. So far as the historical position of Bradlaugh is concerned both the parson and the parent may be regarded as two of the "accidental" circumstances that turned his activities definitely in the direction of militant Freethought. We need not bear either the parent or the parson ill-will. It may even be that we of to-day owe them both our thanks.

At just over sixteen Bradlaugh faced the world alone. He endeavoured to earn a living by obtaining orders for coal, a somewhat precarious way of getting a livelihood at the best; but even so he found that his growing connexion with Freethinking propaganda stood in his way.

Commercial enterprise plus Freethinking advocacy, plus religious bigotry opened up but a poor way of getting a living, and before long Bradlaugh found himself at the beginning of that long struggle against debts which never ceased during the whole of his life. Reviewing his affairs he found that he owed the enormous sum of £4 15s., an amount which he saw no prospect of repaying. Some of his Freethinking friends offered to discharge the obligation, but the offer was refused. A way of paying was opened by the East India Company offering a bounty of £6 10s. to recruits. This was taken, and after a preliminary skirmish over a "swopping" arrangement between two recruiting officers, it ended by his selecting the 7th Dragoon Guards, and he found himself sent to Ireland, at the age of seventeen years eight months.

There were other skirmishes with some of his superiors, who soon discovered that Bradlaugh was something out of the ordinary in the way of recruits. He insisted upon his rights, often upon the rights of others, and when the time came for him to leave the army—his discharge was by purchase—it may be assumed that, as the military authorities did not then, and I believe do not now, care very much for men of independence who *will* have their legal rights, no very great difficulty was placed in the way of his resuming civilian life. But as things turned out he would have been far less trouble to the authorities in the army than he proved to be outside.

One important impression was made on Bradlaugh's mind by his experience in Ireland. He gave this experience in the course of a lecture delivered in New York:—

I went there on a November day. I was one of a troop to protect the law officers, who had come from the agent from Dublin to make an eviction a few miles from Inniscarra, where the river Bride joins the Lee. It was a miserable day—rain freezing into sleet as it fell—and the men beat down wretched dwelling after wretched dwelling, some thirty or forty perhaps. They did not take much beating down; there was no flooring to take up; the walls were more mud than aught else; and there was but little trouble in the levelling of them to the ground. We had got our work about three parts done, when out of one of them a woman ran, and flung herself on the ground, wet as it was, before the Captain of the troop, and she asked that her house might be spared—not for long, but for a little while. She said her husband had been born in it; he was ill of the fever, but could not live long, and she asked that he might be permitted to die in it in peace. Our Captain had no power; the law agent from Dublin wanted to get back to Dublin; his time was of importance, and he would not wait; and that man was carried out while we were there—in front of us, while the sleet was coming down—carried out on a wretched thing (you could not call it a bed), and he died there while we were there; and three nights afterwards, while I was sentry on the front gate at Ballincollig Barracks, we heard a cry, and when the guard was turned out, we found this poor woman there a raving maniac, with one dead babe in one arm, and another in the other clinging to the cold nipple of her lifeless breast. If you had been brothers to such a woman, sons of such a woman, fathers of such a woman, would not rebellion have seemed the holiest gospel you could hear preached?

That experience he never forgot. It was the background of his championship of justice for the Irish people, the more disinterested, because the Irish Party under the influence of religion were among those who opposed his entry into Parliament. But it would be well for present-day men and women to remember, when considering the attitude of the Irish people towards England that we are dealing with the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of those who passed through the bitter experiences that Bradlaugh witnessed.

#### BRADLAUGH THE FREETHINKER.

Returning from Ireland and the army Bradlaugh's urgent task was to find employment. After several vain attempts he made application for a clerk's place at a firm of solicitor's in Fenchurch Street. There was no vacancy, but an errand-boy was required. "At what salary?" asked the six-foot Bradlaugh. "Ten shillings." The post was taken, but in a few months, his employer recognizing he had acquired someone out of the ordinary, Bradlaugh was in charge of one branch of the business and his salary had been raised to £65. He had evidently begun to show that capacity



for handling legal issues which was afterwards to make him so powerful an aid to more than one forlorn cause, and which won the compliments of some of our greatest legal authorities.

It was in this connexion that Bradlaugh's influence on the Freethought Movement was most marked. Carlile and his colleagues had set the example of dogged resistance to unjust laws, and so had taught the Government the danger of attacking determined men. Bradlaugh was also ready to play that part when necessary, but he also initiated the policy of fighting within the law, and so, often enough, beat his enemies with their own tools. Governments had learned before Bradlaugh what it meant to fight men and women who were not to be frightened by prison. With Bradlaugh they met with as much resistance as ever, but to this was added a keen legal mind that could turn the weapon in their hand to their own undoing. Over and over again the Government lawyers must have regretted undertaking the task they had in hand. Very few came out of the struggle with their reputations enhanced.

He also recommenced his lecturing, which began to take up more and more of his time. In the *Reasoner*, edited by Holyoake, for 1856, I find a list of about twenty lectures, and he was also doing very much writing. But Christian bigotry was not idle. His employer received numerous letters urging his dismissal. But the lawyer was either not of so bigoted a character as others, or he knew the value of his clerk. The only effect of the letters was the advice to Bradlaugh that he ought not to let his propaganda interfere with his business.

It was this advice that led to Bradlaugh taking up, for lecturing and writing purposes only, the name of "Iconoclast." It must have been a very thin disguise; no one could have had much trouble, from the large number who knew him, in learning his real name, and when he became a candidate for Parliament in 1868, the name was definitely dropped. In legal employment with two different firms he remained for about six years, when the failure in business of his last employer finished his legal (business) career. But his experience, added to a natural capacity for the twists and turns of the law, was to prove of great value in after years. One or two commercial ventures ended in failure, and, indeed, one suspects that by this time preoccupation with propaganda must have handicapped him tremendously in his business life, and Bradlaugh took the definite step of looking to his pen and his tongue for a living—and a very scanty living for some years it proved. He had also married, and there was, in addition, his mother to help. From the death of his father, his mother had been one of the first charges on his small income, and she remained a charge until her death. It was his brother, a bad character throughout, and one who served a term of imprisonment for embezzling, and who ultimately exploited the credulous as an Evangelist—living on his brother's name, and his brother's charity—who showed no consciousness of any filial responsibility.

When Bradlaugh commenced his intellectual pilgrimage it was as a believer in Christianity, and his first questionings were as to some method of reconciling perceived Bible contradictions rather than endorsing them. The fearlessness of his intellect soon caused him to bow to evidence. The rejection of revealed religion followed. But some vague belief in a God, remained, only to pass through the same process of questioning and end in the same result. On another line his belief in democracy led to republicanism.

A further stage was his acceptance of Malthusianism, of the right of man to control his own rate of reproduc-

tion and of woman to be regarded as something other than a mere breeding machine. And when, later, he founded the *National Reformer* he made no secret of, or attempt to conceal, the aims and objects of the paper. The policy of the paper, he said, was to be "Republican, Atheistic and Malthusian." He thus attacked English Society in its most susceptible points—its primitive religion, its stupid hereditary royalism, and its conventional morality.

Other men have, many men still do, "hedge" and compromise in such matters. They stand up in honour of "God save the King," while knowing that it is impossible reasonably to honour an hereditary monarch, whose only claim to distinction is that he is the son of his father, and they disguise the act of self-stultification with the excuse that they are merely paying respect to their country. They mark their dissent from current moral notions and ideals by professing a profound ethical idealization which reinstates on the one side nearly all they have disowned on the other. And they will decline plainly to call themselves "Atheist" because they will be misunderstood, and so they adopt some other name which has no definite meaning at all.

Bradlaugh would have none, and do none, of these things. His motto was "Thorough," and had he been less so, his life might have been easier and his years longer. But he would have ceased to be himself. He did not, as Mr. George Bernard Shaw said once, take the line of greatest resistance, he took the line, as we all do, of least resistance. It is always easier for the brave, honest man to take the road of straightforward speech and valiant action than to tread the path of cowardly and self-seeking conformity.

All of Bradlaugh's early writings on religious topics are written with a meticulous care that is a commentary on both the man and his times. His series of pamphlets on David, Abraham, Jacob, etc., were carefully compiled, and terribly destructive. To-day educated Christians would be the first to reject most of the theses that Bradlaugh attacked in his early writings. But they have had the benefit of Bradlaugh having lived, and if the Christianity of such present-day Christians be *real* Christianity, then these people owe more to Bradlaugh for the right understanding of the Bible than they do to Jesus.

When he assumed the editorship of the *Investigator* in 1858, he said in the first number edited by him, "There is no middle ground between Theism and Atheism." Two years later, and when the ill-judged attempt to run the *National Reformer* with two editors had broken down, there followed the same profession of Atheism; and if readers will turn to his two pamphlets on *Is There a God?* and *A Plea for Atheism*, they will find therein a perfectly clear statement of his position, from which he never once retreated. In all his discussions and writings he declined to accept the word "God" as carrying a definite and universally understood meaning. By itself it meant nothing at all. "It is," he said, "equally impossible to affirm or deny intelligently any proposition unless there is at least an understanding on the part of the affirmer or denier of every word used in the proposition." So soon as the word God is understood to stand for any defined God that is, the "God" of any given person or religion, then there is room for denial or affirmation. But in denying the existence of "God" in this sense the Atheist is in precisely the position of every Theist, who does deny every God but his own. The offence of the Atheist is that he has no God to affirm. His crime is that he is literally without a God. And he is treated as the foxes in the fable treated the one who was without a tail.



The only criticism that can successfully be passed on Bradlaugh's statement of his own Atheism lies in his adoption of the Spinozistic, "One existence with infinite modes." This was really not necessary to his Atheism, and it did not help his exposition. Existence can never be more than a general term standing for the sum of individual things. To say, therefore, that you believe in "infinite modes" (phenomena) and to say that you believe in existence which is the sum of these modes is to say the same thing over again. There is not one existence with infinite modes, there are only phenomena which are all lumped together under the one term existence. "Existence" stands for no more than a serviceable short-hand symbol. Existence and phenomena mean the same thing, phenomena are not modes of existence. On the hypothesis they are the existences we know and the only existences with which we are concerned. There is no such thing as "Man" of whom individual men are expressions; there is only the distinction between the abstract and the concrete, the particular and the general.

The truth is, I think, that Bradlaugh, who was not a close student of philosophy, did not realize that this "one existence" with infinite phenomenal "modes" was really the ghost of a God that had been permitted to intrude into philosophy. The gods begin as existing in the phenomenon as the man's "soul" or "double" is in the body. Later the God who is in the phenomenon becomes the God who is behind and responsible for it. But by this time the philosophic epistemological problem of the nature of our knowledge and what the world (existence) is like apart from the transforming character of our sense-organs has arisen, and as the primitive religious belief in gods weakens and the philosophic analysis of the nature of knowledge develops, the two quite distinct questions—the religious and the philosophic—are allowed to become confused. They are still confused by both the "Agnostic," for whom confusion generally spells social ease, and by the religious apologist who tries every method to disguise the real nature of his Theism.

Spinoza, wonderfully clear thinker though he was, was too near the medieval world, and too saturated with medieval terminology, to realize that his one existence as the cause of phenomena was of no greater use than the God which the orthodox religionist believed to be controlling the world. A "one existence" manifesting itself through infinite phenomena is not substantially different from one God manifesting himself in everything around us.

The irony is—and there is much irony in philosophy for those who have the wit to see it—that Spinoza's whole philosophy is quite independent of God, so long as we use "God" with reasonable regard to its proper and intelligible significance. But it says much for Bradlaugh that he did seize on Spinoza as one that was substantially Atheistic. Spinoza's God is one who desires nothing, who works for nothing, he is without passion, or will, or intelligence, he is, in fact, nothing. And the reader may do with Spinoza's God exactly what he may do with Spencer's "Unknowable"—drop it altogether without losing a single iota of the teaching. It has as much to do there as the wooden Scotchman outside the old-fashioned tobacconists had to do with the flavour of the cigars sold within. I say this as one whose Atheism was powerfully influenced by Spinoza, long before I came into contact with the Freethought Movement, and as one who has an admiration for Bradlaugh which only stops "this side idolatry."

Bradlaugh's insistence upon Atheism and his identification of Atheism and Secularism were, I think, due to more than a mere desire for a dialectical victory.

There was, of course, his ingrained dislike to half-hearted words and indefinite phrases which serve not merely to leave others in doubt as to one's exact position, but also by their use serve to muddy one's own stream of thought. But on the more "practical" side there was the perception that if political and social life were to be cleared of the confusing and contaminating influence of religious beliefs, the issue between Atheism and Theism as being really fundamental must be made clear. His writings and his speeches make it quite plain that religion was really a "dope," (although he never actually used that term) and had always been used to keep the people in subjection, and to buttress up all sorts of vested interests and stupid privileges. He knew also that no social movement could be certain of achieving its end once religious influences were strong enough to influence its conduct. If people misunderstood Atheism or if they misrepresented it, the greater the necessity for fighting for its proper understanding. Nothing was to be gained seeking to placate the religious world by adopting a new terminology at its dictation. Nothing has ever been gained by that policy.

His fight for Secularism, for the complete elimination of supernatural or semi-supernatural considerations in social and political life, was really a struggle for social sanitation. He had realized that no social reform was safe so long as religious opinions were allowed to exert a decisive influence on life. Had he been less interested in the political and social side of life he would have been less insistent upon his Atheistic Secularism. He was a great Humanist because he was a staunch Atheist. He was a staunch Atheist because he was a great Humanist. And his life showed, by his readiness to lend a hand to Spain, to Italy, to India, to Ireland, to struggling causes in this and in other countries, that his Humanism was no mere theory to be placed on one side when the opportunity for manifesting it in practice arose.

Bradlaugh's introduction to the groups of Freethinkers, after his break with the Church, has already been described. His lectures in connexion with Freethought, interspersed with other subjects, became more numerous, and with a rapidly growing influence among advanced thinkers all over the country. Of necessity his followers were chiefly among the better class working-men, but others, friends and foes, were quick to detect his powers, some with growing admiration, others with growing fear and hatred. The meetings were held under every possible discomfort, often in face of positive danger and were faced with the most bigoted opposition. At some places he was mobbed, at others the windows of the hall in which he lectured were broken, at others the halls were closed to him after they had been engaged; this lecturing was done not merely under these discomforts, but often with the very meanest of travelling and "hotel" accommodation, and only a few shillings in his pocket. Those who wish to follow these journeys in greater detail, including the various legal actions that arose out of them, must refer to the *Life*, written by his daughter and J. M. Robertson. I have but a small space in which to tell a very long and absorbingly interesting story. I shall be content if I am able to present a general picture of the man and his work and indicate its results. To do this I shall have, to some extent, to ignore chronological sequence.

#### CHRISTIAN LOVE—IN ACTION.

To a man of Bradlaugh's character, opposition, particularly of the kind described, stimulated rather than deterred. In the long run he conquered the bullies in the Churches and in the street as he so often con-



quered the legal bullies in the courts. In every town where these disturbances took place, he ultimately secured attentive and crowded audiences.

As a sample of the abuse to which Bradlaugh was subjected I take the following from a poster that was displayed in Dewsbury, where he was billed to lecture:—

Grand discovery! To be seen to-morrow, Sunday, not one hundred miles from the Public Hall, a fine specimen of the gorilla type, standing seven feet six inches in height, imported into England from Sheffield, the capital of the Hollyhock settlement, in the interior of Africa, and brought to this town for public exhibition by Mr. Greenfield. This gorilla is said to be one of the finest of its tribe. It presents a bold front, is impudent in its demeanour, and growls fearfully at the approach of a debt-collector, magistrate or any Government Officer. Having been some time in England under an assumed name, it has acquired a smattering of the language, and will address visitors on the origin, purpose, and future prospects of the gorilla type. As the animal will be properly secured, parties need be under no apprehension of danger.

There were, of course, all the stock slanders that have met Freethinking speakers at all times and under all conditions. He had deserted his wife and children, he had left his mother to starve, he was a drunkard, etc., etc. The avidity with which a Christian public swallows these stock stories helps to lessen one's wonder at the prevalence of Christianity. There were as well—often enough—insults from those in office—magistrates to whom he had appealed, if not in the hope of getting justice, at least with the certainty of making the injustice patent, and so helping to get it removed, less frequently these insults came from those in higher legal positions.

Some excuse for the Christian rowdyism that existed—experience was to show it as much at home in the House of Commons as in the streets of Wigan—was found in the lie that Bradlaugh's speeches were coarse and offensive, and consisted either of "blatant" (a very hard-worked word, that!) defiance of the deity, or ignorant and illiterate attacks on the Bible. This has always been a very good card for Christians to play. First, because it keeps some Christians from going to listen, second, it keeps timid unbelievers from assisting. The same game was worked, and still has its influence, in connexion with G. W. Foote, one of the most genuinely cultured men who ever figured prominently in the Freethought Party. I have met Freethinkers—of a type—who have never read anything of Foote's or never listened to his speeches, who have informed me that he was coarse and rough and uncultured. Their sympathies have—in action at least—been enlisted on behalf of the poor sensitive Christian. It was his feelings that had to be considered; those of the Freethinker did not matter.

A sample of this method of depreciation may be found—it is only a sample—in Mrs. Byrne's *Undercurrents Overlooked*. She went to hear "Iconoclast" lecture in 1859, and her description of the man is not unflattering; she was evidently impressed by his personality. But her report of his speech, is deliberately vicious, and quite pious in its untruthfulness. I have space for only a small passage:—

Moses, a worthy messenger 'e was, to threaten not only the King but 'is 'ole people with vengeance. Why? What 'ad the people done? Call this justice? . . . Then my friends, what were the miracles this same Moses performed? You 'ave hall of you 'eard of the Wizard of the North. Well 'e really does do wonderful things, but the miracles of Moses fell far short of his power. 'E went to the King and 'e threw

his rod down before 'im, and the rod changed 'itself hinto a serpent, yes it did.

This kind of thing had evidently got itself quite well established, for much later we find the same sort of report published in the *Aberdeen Free Press*, which paper Bradlaugh himself described as "a respectable, long-established journal." But this very Christian paper adds, to its distortion of Bradlaugh's diction and subject, the remark that Bradlaugh's admirers at the meeting were "very dirty boys, about fifteen." It ought not to be overlooked that the people, then as now, who shriek the loudest against Freethinkers for their coarse and abusive language are precisely those who are responsible for the manufacture of the really coarse, abusive and lying stories about every Freethinker who has stood prominently before the public. What lies at the bottom of the slanders and misrepresentation connected with Bradlaugh was stated plainly enough by a Judge in the case of an Atheist lady who in 1860 had brought a suit for damages. She was asked by the judge, "Do you believe in a God who can punish you for telling a lie?" The answer was "No." Then, said the Judge, "I cannot hear you. I nonsuit the plaintiff with costs for defendant's advocate. If people will insult public opinion in a court of justice, they must take the consequences."

In his review of the *Life of Bradlaugh*, by his daughter, Mr. Augustine Birrell says:—

The ruffians who in times past slandered the moral character of Bradlaugh will not probably read his *Life*, nor if they did would they repent of their baseness. The will to believe everything evil of an adversary is incurable . . . Now that Bradlaugh is dead no purpose is served in repeating these accusations. But the next Atheist who crops up must not expect more generous treatment than Bradlaugh received.

But there is every religious justification for repeating these accusations against Bradlaugh. They form the stock weapons of attack with every generation of Christians, and have done so since New Testament times, varying only with the necessity for adapting them to changed conditions. I, for one, do not agree with the policy of permitting the Christian slanderer, whether in low or high position, to reap all the advantages from his blackguardism and protecting him from any kind of penalty for indulging in it. I can assure Mr. Birrell that the "next Atheist" never expected any treatment different from what he received. The lower class religionists will always act as "ruffians," and among the higher class believers only one here and there will protest for fear of shaking off the allegiance of the "ruffians." Long after Bradlaugh's death there were to be found well-placed religious personages who could be trusted to cast their protective influence over some religious adventurers who were doing and saying only what the Atheists' enemies were doing and saying in 1860. The Christian liar, as a distinct variety, is not killed by exposure however complete, and Mr. Birrell really must not expect the Atheist to foster its growth by remaining silent as to its nature.

Just a word on the assumption underlying most of these slanders as to Bradlaugh's matter and style and that he was entirely concerned with the lowest kind of "Bible-banging," or even exclusively with the discussion of religious subjects. This is not the case, but it was the case that the ill-will shown him was far more due to his opposition to religion than to aught else. And in the long run this, so far as Bradlaugh was concerned, defeated its own aims. For it was the form taken by the opposition that made the "Atheist Bradlaugh" one of the best known men in the country. Religious opposition gave him a platform that his political work alone could not have given,



But from the earliest years Bradlaugh had a keen interest in political and social matters. He lectured and wrote constantly on them. He took a prominent part, and sometimes a leading part, in the political movements of his time until the tremendous Parliamentary struggle compelled a narrowing of his activities. On this head more will be said later.

I have already mentioned the many Freethought Societies that were established in different parts of the country, originating in the joint influence of the Robert Owen propaganda, and in the later activities of Holyoake and others. In 1866 a proposal to effect an organization of these separate bodies was put forward, and the new organization, The National Secular Society, was the result. Bradlaugh was its first President, and, with one brief interval, remained its President until the breakdown in health forced his resignation in 1890. His retirement naturally gave rise to a crop of rumours. It was said that he was losing his interest in Freethought, and that he wished to drop that work to attend to political duties. Neither statement was true. Naturally, the terrible strain of the fight over the oath question, with the lengthy legislation it involved, had taken up much of his time, as it had absorbed his strength and broken even his abnormal physical powers. But his attachment to Freethought remained as strong as ever. It was, as he had said, the cause he loved, and he had shown in countless ways that nothing was to be permitted to stand in the way of his work for a cause of which he was justifiably so proud.

The only cause for surprise is that the breakdown and the resignation did not come earlier. In addition to constant lecturing in all parts of the country, fighting election after election, and activities in other directions, his daughter, in the *Life* of her father, has thus summarized the principal legal actions fought by Bradlaugh from 1880 until 1886:—

Libel suit against Edgumbe, which dragged on for more than a year, and ended in nothing.

Action against Bradlaugh for penalties 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 Bradlaugh in April, 1883.

Action for maintenance brought against Newdegate, decided in favour of Bradlaugh in April, 1883.

Action for blasphemy (the *Freethinker* prosecution, in which it was attempted to implicate Bradlaugh, with the object of preventing his entering Parliament) decided in Bradlaugh's favour in 1883.

Action against the Deputy-Sergeant-at-Arms for assault in removing Bradlaugh from the lobby of the House of Commons in April, 1881. Decided against Bradlaugh, 1883.

Suit entered upon by Mr. Gurney of Northampton

to test the validity of the House in preventing Bradlaugh taking his seat in the House. Case discharged.

Application for an injunction to restrain the Sergeant-at-Arms from using force to prevent Bradlaugh entering the House. Decided against Bradlaugh.

Action against Bradlaugh by the Attorney-General for penalties against Bradlaugh for having sat and voted without taking the oath. Judgment was given for the Attorney-General. This was followed by an appeal, but the matter ended in 1886 by Bradlaugh paying his own costs.

When one bears in mind that in all these cases, involving lengthy and often abstruse discussions on obscure points of law with some of the finest Judges

in England, and in opposition to the keenest legal brains that the Government could employ, there is no wonder that Bradlaugh's health broke down. Not one man in a thousand, even given the ability, would have had the endurance to carry it all through, and at the same time engage in a mass of work in other directions.

If the reader will glance at the two portraits I have placed on page 623, one showing him at the beginning, and the other at the end, of the Parliamentary struggle, he will realize what that fight meant, merely in terms of physical strain.

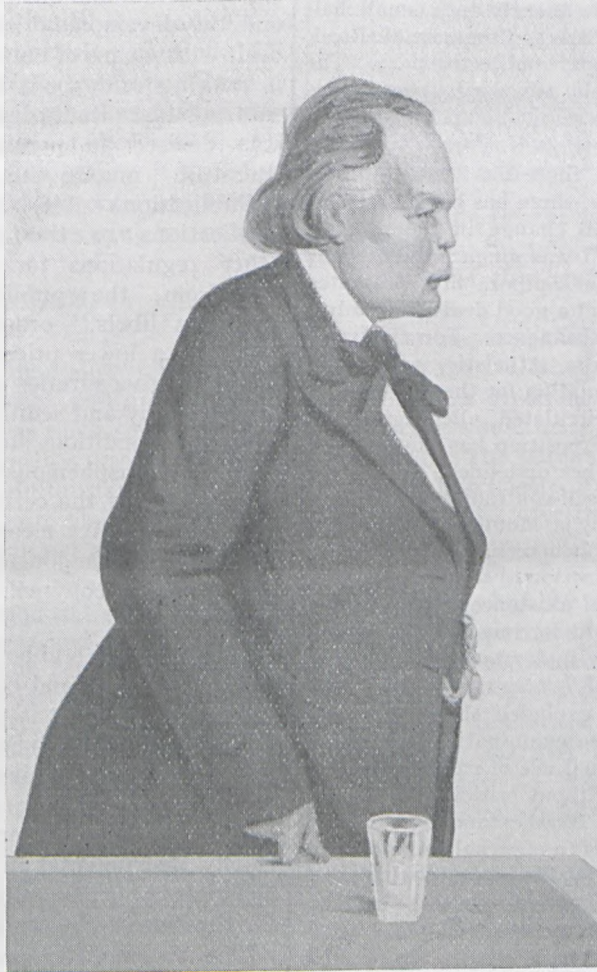
There is no reason whatever for looking for any other reason for Bradlaugh's retirement than the one he gave to the special meeting called for the purpose of receiving his resignation. He said, amid the hardly restrained

tears of the men and women who crowded the hall:—

I have been President of the Society since the Society began, and I am 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 . . . No resource is 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 could not take any other office after having been so long your President; but if you thought it right to elect me member for life, I should be grateful to you for doing it.

At the same meeting Bradlaugh nominated, as his successor, G. W. Foote, who continued in the Presidency until his death in 1915.

Bradlaugh thus remained a member of the National Secular Society until his death (1891). He had nursed the organization into strength, he had endowed it with his own fighting spirit, and he had established the tradition, to which it has always re-



From *Vanity Fair*, by (Spy) Leslie Ward.



mained gloriously true, of "Thorough." It has never known the spirit of compromise, and I think to-day it is the one really democratic body in the country. This it owes to the inspiration of Bradlaugh, and in return the Society placed at his service a number of bodies of men and women in all parts of the country who could be completely relied upon when their beloved leader called for service.

As to his opinion on religion at the close of life, I do not think that I could do better than cite here some portion of the address he gave in November, 1890 (a few months only before his death), "My Heresy Now and Thirty-six Years Since :—

It was in 1855 that I first spoke as a received Free-thought advocate in the old John Street Hall, and in the old Hall of Science. I had previously spoken in various small halls, more frequently in a small hall at the corner of Philpot Street, Commercial Road, than in any other, as a debater and lecturer . . . The three years' break from public advocacy, spent by me in the army, was very useful in compelling me to think out my new views for myself. From 1854 to the present time, while I hope there has been improvement in manner of advocacy, there has been, so far as I am conscious, no material change in the propositions advocated. In 1855-6 I was much influenced by the glimpse of the Ethics of Spinoza first presented by George Henry Lewes, and a good deal of my advocacy shows traces of this influence. For thirty-six years my position has been Atheistic, and I am totally unaware of any foundation for the rumours recently very industriously circulated, alleging modifications of these views. My position has always been that the word "God" is either undefined, or that the attempted definitions are self-contradictory or incoherent . . . I am essentially a Monist; to me existence is sufficient for all phenomena, and I find it difficult to appreciate the position of those who invent a second existence or plural existence, in lieu of explanation, in order to account for imperfectly comprehended phenomena. I can understand the habit of using such words as "God," "Spirit," "Soul," by those whose training has excluded them from submitting these words to close examination and analysis. I know that the habitual use of particular words involves firm acceptance without criticism and assertion without evidence . . . Reacceptance of my Sunday School standpoint seems to me wholly impossible. I cannot understand the healthy mind—which has once analysed, and after analysis rejected, the theologic implications of these words—readopting dualism or pluralism. I, of course, recognize the possible domination of a weak mind, or strained physique, by the head of a great church, by an Ignatius Loyola, by a Mahdi, by a Joseph Smith, and I further recognize that whilst a mind is not free from dualism or pluralism there are very wide possibilities for conjectural imaginings. It is also certain that men of strong mind and marked character have sometimes fallen easy victims to gracefully assisted illusions. At present, so far as I am concerned, the closest examination of my Atheist position does not enable me to detect any weak link in the chain, and I cannot conceive the possibility of my remaining sane and yet joining any of the many conflicting teachers of dualism.

And Bradlaugh remained sane to the end.

#### PERSECUTING THE "REFORMER."

In the early years of the nineteenth century the British Government was driven to a frenzy of reaction by the growth of Freethinking and radical opinion. The Prince Regent, afterwards George the Fourth, a walking monument of vice, ignorance and general rascality, had urged upon Parliament the need for new laws to "check the dissemination of treason and impiety," and Lord Chancellor Eldon spoke of :—

Waggons filled with seditious papers in order to be distributed throughout every village, to be scattered

over the highways, to be introduced into cottages. Such things were formerly unknown; but there was now scarcely a village in the kingdom that had not its little shop in which nothing was sold but blasphemy and sedition.

The picture is, of course, exaggerated, but it is good enough to indicate the state of mind of the Authorities. And it must be noted that Eldon's indignation was caused by the kind of literature described as being circulated among the *people*. The hair-powder view of heresy was still in the ascendant.

An immediate consequence of these fears was the passing (1819) of the famous or infamous "Six Acts." The Six Acts were a group of Acts engineered by Eldon, Lord Castlereagh and Lord Sidmouth to meet the dangers imminent in the rise of the working class and the development of popular education. They all dealt with means of curbing the new democracy, (there is nothing said about Bolshevism now that was not said against Radicalism then), but one of them was devised to prevent the circulation of cheap literature among the people. This Act, the "Publications Act, or Act to subject certain publications to the duties upon, and to make other regulations for restraining the abuses arising from, the publication of Blasphemous and Seditious libels," ordered that any periodical published at a lower price than sixpence should be required to give sureties of £400 against the appearance of blasphemy and sedition in its columns. Bearing in mind the conditions under which these same "seditious and blasphemous" journals were produced, to say nothing of the certainty of sureties being quickly forfeited, the Act meant the practical suppression of advanced popular journalism. There was a penalty of £20 for every copy sold in the absence of compliance with the Act.

Thanks to the stubborn resistance of Carlile, Hetherington, Watson and others the Act had been broken down, and by most it was regarded as quite obsolete, if not dead. This "Security Act" has been revived for use in India during the past few years, and one would have much enjoyed Bradlaugh's remarks concerning the resurrection of an Act which he had been chiefly instrumental in getting repealed in England. Religion is not the only out of date article we export for the benefit of "natives."

The *National Reformer* was started in 1860, and for the first eight years of its existence had to combat only the malignancy and misrepresentations of political and religious bigotry. But its Republicanism and Atheism, added to the growing prestige of its editor, was a cause of increasing alarm to the Government. It and he could not be suppressed, but they might be harassed. To harass must have been the only object of the prosecution; for one cannot conceive even a gang of Government officials being sufficiently stupid and blind to experience as to imagine that they could either frighten Bradlaugh or prevent the appearance of Freethought journals. The decision to institute a prosecution was the more remarkable, as it was well-known that the Act itself was in course of being completely repealed. A Bill for the repeal of the Security Law had already passed the House of Commons, but had been rejected by the Lords.

At any rate, in May, 1868, the readers of the *Reformer* received the news that a prosecution was imminent under the Security Laws. The Commissioners of the Inland Revenue had demanded a surety from the *National Reformer* against the appearance of blasphemy and sedition in its columns, and acquainted Bradlaugh of their determination to collect £20 for every copy that had been published. The total under the latter head would have amounted to many millions



of pounds, and the Government stood about as much chance of collecting these millions as they had in breaking down Bradlaugh's determination in a fight where freedom of publication was concerned.

The case was fought by Bradlaugh with his usual step-by-step doggedness, and, on the authority of legal experts, with extraordinary ability, and an acquaintance with Acts of Parliament that left the Crown lawyers floundering. The Judges were very sympathetic to Bradlaugh and his exposition of the ignorance and carelessness of the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General was complete and telling. It would take too much space to tell the whole story here; I must refer readers to the chapter in his daughter's *Life* for information as to the complete discomfiture of the prosecution. In the end the Government was completely beaten, the prosecution lapsed, and in 1869 the Act in question was completely repealed. Mr. C. D. Collett says in his *History of the Taxes on Knowledge* that Bradlaugh's defence was "the most valuable ever made to the liberty of the press." And John Stuart Mill wrote to Bradlaugh, "You have gained a very honourable success in obtaining a repeal of a mischievous Act by your persevering resistance."

### MALTHUSIANISM.

Another instance in which Bradlaugh found himself pitted against the Government, and in which the rights of cheap publications was the essential issue involved, was the famous Knowlton case. Bradlaugh had been an advocate of Malthusianism from his earliest years. He had said quite plainly, many years before the issue became a common and a respectable one:—

There can be no permanent and enduring freedom for humankind, no permanent and enduring equality amongst men and women, no permanent and enduring fraternity, until the subject which Malthus wrote upon is thoroughly examined, and until the working men make that of which Malthus was so able an exponent the science of their everyday life.

And later, in 1863:—

Unless the necessity of the preventative or positive checks to population be perceived, unless it be clearly seen that they must operate in one form if not in another, and that though individuals may escape them, the race cannot, human society is a hopeless and insoluble riddle.

But Malthusianism was to the "Victorian mind" an "unclean" subject, as was only natural to that essentially unclean mind which made everything connected with sex impure, which greeted every reference to it with a suggestive snigger or an incriminating blush. Politicians were afraid to talk about Malthusianism, writers on sociology mainly ignored it, and the clergy referred to it only to intensify the atmosphere of authoritative "indecent" which their teaching had already created and perpetuated.

Nevertheless, Bradlaugh's appearance in the courts in connexion with Malthusianism was, as I have said, actually in connexion with the rights of publication, and not, essentially, with the population question.

For over forty years a pamphlet, *The Fruits of Philosophy*, had been on sale. It was written by an American doctor of standing, and had been sold by James Watson, that great champion of a free press and cheap newspapers. It had also been sold by G. J. Holyoake, Austin Holyoake, and Charles Watts, who at the time of the trial was the actual publisher of the work. A man of no high reputation was, in 1876, summoned at Bristol for selling the pamphlet, and the seller and the publisher were both arrested. Acting on Bradlaugh's advice the publisher declared himself

responsible for the pamphlet and was committed for trial. On reconsideration he found that he could not defend the pamphlet and entered a plea of "guilty." He was released on his own recognisances of £500 to come up for judgment when called upon.

Bradlaugh was not the man to let the matter rest here. He had been in no way responsible for the appearance of the pamphlet; he said that he did not like its style, and had it been brought to him he would not have published it. But:—

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 Free Thought Party throughout its history, and so long as the Party permits me to hold its flag, I will never voluntarily lower it.

Mrs. Annie Besant was by this time associated with Bradlaugh in his publishing, and together they issued an edition of the *Fruits of Philosophy*, at the price of sixpence.

The anticipated consequence followed. Notice was served at the Guildhall that the new edition would be on sale at a given date, and that Mrs. Besant and Bradlaugh would at a certain time be present to sell the work. The pamphlets were sold, to an enormous crowd of purchasers, and to several detective officers, and a few days later Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant were arrested on a warrant. At the Guildhall hearing the prosecution offered to withdraw the charge against Mrs. Besant, but she declined. As a matter of fact this would have made the matter easier for Bradlaugh, because—as both defendants managed their own cases in court—the preparation of his own defence and that of Mrs. Besant fell upon Bradlaugh.

The case was first heard at the Central Criminal Court on May 7. Bradlaugh at once applied for its removal to another Court. Finally the case came on for hearing at the Court of Queen's Bench, before the Lord Chief Justice and a special jury, Sir Hardinge Giffard (later, Lord Halsbury), being the leading Counsel for the prosecution. The trial was a lengthy one, and was contested with Bradlaugh's usual power of pleading and mastery of legal technique. Bradlaugh was easily able to prove that the words complained of in the *Fruits of Philosophy* were all to be found in highly-priced books, and were circulated without complaint. The case for the prosecution was mainly that the publication of certain physiological details was in itself an offence. The actual crime was that publishing information at a price within the reach of the "common people." Reading between the lines it was a fair assumption that the judges were strongly sympathetic to both the defendants. But the jury in a very middle-headed fashion brought in a 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 motive in publishing it." But the strength of their unanimity in the verdict of "guilty" may be indicated by the fact that two of the jurors gave their fee to the defence as their contribution to the expenses of the action, and one explained afterwards that he did not agree with the verdict, and that it had been arranged by the jury that if the Lord Chief Justice did not accept it in the sense of an acquittal, they would again retire and reconsider their decision. In other words, their verdict was only to be taken provided it brought about the acquittal of the





### "KICKED OUT." (P)

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defendants. But the Judge pointed out that their verdict was tantamount to one of guilty, and the foreman, in the name of the jury, at once accepted this decision. The sentence, in the end, was six months' imprisonment for each, and each to enter into their own recognisances for £500 for two years.

There is every reason for believing that if the defendants had undertaken not to re-issue the book, they would have been let off at once. But that had not been the Freethought way of finishing a fight, and it was certainly not Bradlaugh's way. That method had always been a fight to the finish, and I have the best reasons for knowing that the authorities even to-day bear this Freethought tradition in mind when entering a campaign against the militant Freethinkers of this country.

Bradlaugh was not at the end of his resources, even then, and the verdict was finally annulled owing to a technical error in the indictment. Once more the lay lawyer had beaten the best legal wits in England with their own weapons.

The Knowlton pamphlet continued to be sold for a little time, and then, it having served its purpose, it was withdrawn from circulation, and a new publication, written by Mrs. Besant, *The Law of Population*, issued in its stead.

I had made a collection of the coarse slanders which Christian bigotry circulated about Bradlaugh, owing to his defence of free publication in connexion with the Knowlton trial, and his

advocacy of Malthusianism. These doubtless served their purpose in some cases—such things always do. But unless I make this issue of the *Freethinker* about three times its usual size I must refrain from too many quotations. The kind of abuse lavished on Bradlaugh had not merely the effect of gratifying and "rationalizing" Christian bigotry; it also served to prevent a timid kind of non-Christian from becoming too helpful or too publicly appreciative of the work of men such as Bradlaugh. Thus, Mr. A. W. Benn, the author of a *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, in two bulky volumes, has achieved the feat of not discovering either Bradlaugh's great work for Freethought, or the existence of the National Secular Society, which is the one outstanding Freethinking organization of the century with which he is dealing. Bradlaugh does receive a passing notice in connexion with the Parliamentary oath; there is a very inadequate criticism of Bradlaugh's Atheism; while three lines are devoted to the information that, but for a technical error, Bradlaugh would have served a term of imprisonment for the "publication of an offensive neo-Malthusian pamphlet." The most charitable conclusion is that Mr. Benn has a somewhat elaborate non-acquaintance with an important side of the subject with which his history deals, and that he had never read the Knowlton pamphlet. But in its bearing on what has now come to be known as the Birth-Control Movement, and apart from its value to the cause of freedom of publication, the Knowlton case was of the utmost importance, and in any other hands than those of Bradlaugh's might have had very different consequences. The sale of Malthusian pamphlets and books went up all over the country. Multitudes were led to take an interest in the subject who would never have bothered about it. It placed the Birth-Control Movement in a position of comparative legal security, and those who have made reputations since in advocating birth control might never have done so had the social atmosphere not been changed by the trial of Bradlaugh and Besant.

Mrs. Besant it was that paid the highest and hardest price. Her husband, from whom she had been separated for some years, entered an action, and her child (a daughter) was taken from her, the only grounds being her opinions on Atheism and Malthusianism. The child returned to her as soon as she had the legal power to do so.



BATTLEDORE AND SHUTTLECOCK.

Reproduced from *Judy*.



**PARLIAMENT AND THE OATH.**

Engaged as Bradlaugh had been for years, with but small respite, in legal fights—either in his own behalf, or in that of others—the greatest legal fight of his career, if not the greatest of the century, was that over the Parliamentary oath. Once more I must apologise for roughly summarizing the story of the great fight of a great man. I wish I could say it was against a great enemy, but the enemy was great only in the sense of being large and powerful—it was the massed forces of threatened vested interests and ignorant superstition against which he was contending. In order to get the proper perspective it must again be stated that Bradlaugh had affronted a powerful sec-

bad influence in a civilized State. It is a great machine for the manufacture of snobs and sycophants, two of the most offensive species of human nature, and no less pernicious than offensive, since they infect the moral air with their low ideals." Mankind will never be able to stand erect so long as it bends before a mere title.

In the next place he had offended the smug "morality" of the day by his open advocacy of Malthusianism, and by his championship of the right to issue cheap literature on the subject for the use of the masses of the people. Either one of these things would have been enough to arouse hostility in an English constituency; in combination they "raised the very devil."



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tion of the British public in three ways. By 1880 he was by far the most powerful advocate of Atheistic Freethought in this country. No other man could command so large a public to listen to him; no other man had so many followers and admirers. He was also a declared Republican—a position from which he never retreated, and he only ceased to devote the time he might have given to it because, he said, the English people lacked the self-respect and independence necessary to a Republic. He had written an *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick* depicting without mercy, but with absolute justice, the history of the reigning royal family, with its greed, its vices, its stupidities, its uselessness for good, and its corrupting influence. He was at one with John M. Robertson, when the latter said, in regard to the lame defence that the monarchy does no harm, "Monarchy is always a

His first attempt to realize his long-cherished ambition to enter Parliament was made in 1868, Northampton being the selected constituency. His political programme included compulsory national education, land reform, separation of Church and State, representation of minorities in Parliament, abolition of hereditary peerages, the creation of laws that would place employers and employees on a complete legal equality, etc.

Bradlaugh was not a selected candidate, and the opinion of a local paper was that he stood as much chance of becoming Member for Northampton as of being made Archbishop of Canterbury. But he had many friends in the constituency, and multitudes throughout the country. It is not too much to say that so long as Bradlaugh was fighting to get into Parliament, no other election attracted so wide and so



lively an attention as did the Northampton contests.

For this he had to thank venomous political and Christian bigotry. Hostility such as Bradlaugh excited does one or two things. It either crushes its object into obscurity, or it elevates him in a way, and with a rapidity, that could not otherwise be easily accomplished. It was Bradlaugh the Atheistic Republican that was being attacked; it was the triumphant figure of Bradlaugh the Atheistic Republican that emerged from the fight. But it needed a man of Bradlaugh's physical strength, and mental and moral greatness, to exploit so thoroughly the venomous bigotry of his opponents and make their venom one of the conditions of his own spectacular triumph.

All the forces of reaction and obscurantism were mobilized against his election. No tale was too monstrous to be told, not merely by the guttermongering section of the Christian camp, but by those who were—by accident—in higher places. The *Times* said, just before the election, that if Bradlaugh and Holyoake had their way, "there would be an end to marriage, and Communism and all its abominations would be established in our midst." Sir Hardinge Giffard (Lord Halsbury)—untruthful as ever in this connexion—said that "Bradlaugh was the author of a work so blasphemous that one or two boroughs had refused to have anything to do with him." The "watch story" was revived, with the Market Place of Northampton selected as the place of its performance. Only the imaginative poverty of the average Christian liar prevented the scene being staged in St. Paul's Cathedral.

The election ended in Bradlaugh securing—with six candidates and a total of 9,309—1,085 votes, in the circumstances a very heartening performance. After the election the Mayor and one of the successful candidates publicly thanked Bradlaugh for his conduct during the election, and admitted that it was owing to his influence that the election had passed off so peacefully. Nothing would have suited the religious world better than rowdyism on an extensive scale.

Three more elections were fought, Bradlaugh improving his position on each occasion. At last, in 1880, with a third election, after twelve years fighting he found himself Member for Northampton. The "bellowing blasphemer of Northampton," as the *Sheffield Telegraph* called him, had won his way to Parliament—but to his seat, not yet!

A lengthy, bitter, and, in more senses than one, a deadly fight followed in connexion with the oath. The original magical formula, "So help me God," an invocation to God to punish if truth and honesty were not followed, had been modified in various directions. The first modification was in favour of the Quakers. Then followed another modification in favour of Jews. There had also been a modification in giving evidence in courts of law so far as unbelievers were concerned, although the wording of the Acts gave considerable latitude to magistrates and judges for manifesting impertinence and uttering insults to those who came before them, and also power to decline their evidence altogether unless the oath was taken.

A less conscientious man than Bradlaugh would have taken the oath, as many unbelievers in Parliament had taken it, counting "Paris well worth a Mass." Bradlaugh believed, and the highest legal authorities in England confirmed him in his belief, that he was entitled to take advantage of the state of the law to affirm. The law officers of the Crown had agreed with him on this point.

But Religious and Tory England were in an uproar over the election of this Republican, Atheistic Mal-

thusian to the House of Commons. The impeccable piety and morality of that chaste assembly felt itself affronted, and there ensued six years of fierce fighting which left Bradlaugh a broken man, physically, but the victor of one of the bitterest constitutional fights of the century.

On May 3, 1880, Bradlaugh handed to the clerk of the House a written request to affirm. The request should have been complied with, or the oath should have been proffered in its stead. The Speaker, with a complete lack of courage, asked Bradlaugh to withdraw and sought the opinion of the House. A committee of enquiry was appointed, and on the casting vote of the chairman, it was decided that the Evidence Amendment Acts did not apply to Parliament. Bradlaugh then offered to take the oath, on no occasion did he ever *refuse* to do so—with the explanation that taking it voluntarily would have been an act of hypocrisy, but that he was prepared to repeat the formula of the oath, treating it as though it were an affirmation. "Any form," he said, "that I went through, any oath that I took, I should regard as binding upon my conscience in the fullest degree. I would go through no form, I would take no oath, unless I meant it to be binding."

Many have represented Bradlaugh as refusing to take the oath, with the obvious intention of presenting him as one who weakened in the face of opposition, or who treated a bond as something to be broken as easily as it was made. To the majority of Members of Parliament that attitude of mind is probably nothing out of the way; but it was Bradlaugh's very conscientiousness, the determination that word and bond should be in exact agreement, that led to his acting as he did.

Following his explanation of what taking the oath would mean to him, Bradlaugh went to the House, and amid uproar asked to be sworn. The Speaker, while he admitted that he knew of no precedent for refusing such a request, weakly asked Bradlaugh to withdraw while the House considered the matter. The discussion made it quite plain that Bradlaugh's Republicanism and Atheism were the grounds of the opposition. Not that the man was an Atheist and a Republican, but that he had been honest enough to say so. It was well known that there were members in the House who believed in Republicanism, and who had no belief in a God, but they were less honest in the matter, and Sir Henry Drummond Wolf and Lord Randolph Churchill might well feel that political careers would be endangered if people were encouraged in such manifestations of mental straightforwardness. This was confessed by an ex-Attorney-General for Ireland, who said, while opposing Bradlaugh, that he would have been allowed to take his seat without opposition if he had not chosen to "obtrude" himself (avow his convictions) on the House and on the country. John Bright spoke strongly for Bradlaugh and expressed the utmost confidence in Bradlaugh's honour. Lord Randolph Churchill (worthy representative of a family that has been little in public life but self-seeking since their founder, the notorious Duke of Marlborough, who stuck at nothing that would favour his advancement), read, from the *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick*, the following passage:—

I loathe these small German breast-bested wanderers, whose only merit is their loving hatred of each other. In their own land they vegetate and wither unnoticed; here we pay them highly to marry and perpetuate a pauper-prince race. If they do nothing they are "good." If they do ill, loyalty gilds the vice until it looks like virtue.



Churchill read this absolutely truthful word picture, threw the book on the floor and stamped on it. It was this same Christian gentleman who, later on in the House, described Bradlaugh's followers as "the residuum and scum of society." The Churchill family appears to breed true; there seems a small supply of Mendelian variations there, for in Mr. Winston Churchill's *Life* of his father no apology for Lord Randolph's behaviour is offered, nor, in the recapitulation he gives of the chief Bradlaugh incidents, is the striking fact mentioned that the House of Commons itself apologised for its own action by expunging from its records the resolutions excluding Bradlaugh.

There is so much to tell that I must summarize the almost epic story. Time after time Bradlaugh presented himself at the table of the House asking for the oath to be administered. Four times he was permitted to address the House from below the Bar, in

needs may demand, will discuss whether an Affirmation Bill shall pass or not. I want to obey the law, and I tell you how I might meet the House, if the House will pardon me for seeming to advise it. Bradlaugh is more proud than you are. Let the Bill pass without applying to elections that have taken place previously, and I will undertake not to claim my seat, and when the Bill has passed I will apply for the Chiltern Hundreds. I have no fear. If I am not fit for my constituents they shall dismiss me, but you never shall. The grave alone shall make me yield.

The fight went on. A way out was suggested by Gladstone, who moved and carried a resolution that Bradlaugh be allowed to affirm on his legal responsibility. But he immediately found himself served with a writ for voting without taking the oath. He administered the oath to himself (I am not following here a strictly chronological order); he was

**THE PRICE OF VICTORY**



From a Photograph.  
1880



From a painting by Mr. Walter Sickert, in the possession of the National Liberal Club.  
1890

speeches that were models of eloquence, argument, and impressive dignity. He warned those who were "about to measure themselves against the rights of the constituencies of England" to think well before they entered on a fight that would end only with his death. He reminded them that his appeal was not to the courts, but to the constituencies, and his first speech concluded with these impressive words—not light ones so far as he was concerned, for he had a greater respect for the House of Commons than it deserved or deserves:—

I beg you, before the step is taken in which we may both lose our dignity—mine is not much, but yours is that of the Commons of England—I beg you, before the gauntlet is fatally thrown; I beg you, not in any sort of menace, not in any sort of boast, but as one against six hundred, to give me the justice which on the other side of this hall the judges would give me were I pleading before them.

And when the struggle had further advanced, in his third speech from the Bar, in reply to the suggestion that it was the man who was objectionable, and not the question of the oath:—

I am ready to stand aside, say for four or five weeks, without coming to that table, if the House within that time, or within such time as its great

ordered to withdraw from the House, and "respectfully" refused. He was "arrested" and taken to the Clocktower, from which he was unconditionally released the day after. When an attempt was made to prevent his entering the House, probably, as Robertson suggested, because of the rough behaviour of the officials, he resisted, and four of the ordinary officials of the House finding themselves incapable of ejecting the one man, ten policemen came to their aid. Overcome by the struggle Bradlaugh fainted, but the struggle was one that no one but a giant could have sustained.

Outside the House a huge crowd of men had assembled from all parts of the country, with Mrs. Besant at their head. When the people saw Bradlaugh struggling with the fourteen men there was a surge forward to his rescue. Had the move not been checked, nothing could have prevented the crowd from entering the House and wreaking vengeance on the hooligans inside who had cried "Kick him out." Only the prompt action of Mrs. Besant throwing herself between the men and the police, and begging them in the name of their leader to remain quiet, prevented a riot. It was a scene that brought the House of Commons to as low a point as it had ever reached.



J. M. Robertson says that Bradlaugh in his magnanimity excused the House of Commons by saying to him that it was swept by a passion of mob feeling. For what it is worth the explanation is good enough. It is too often forgotten that the House of Commons is a mob, with all the essential characteristics of mob psychology. And a mob is a mob, whether it exists in Whitechapel, in a College demonstration, or in the House of Commons. Different mobs may be excited by different things, but its action always corresponds to the laws of mob psychology. If this were better understood, the House of Commons would not take itself so seriously as it does, nor would it be taken so seriously by others.

The fight went on. The Bradlaugh question was the question of the day. Parliament could not break that iron will. Bradlaugh had warned them that the grave might make him yield; the elected bigots never should; and the bigots were beaten in the end. After over five years of struggle the election of 1885 put an end to it. When Bradlaugh presented himself to take the oath, he was sworn without any question, Mr. Peel, the new Speaker, sternly refusing to listen to any question on the subject.

The action was an admission that the House of Commons had all along been in the wrong, and Bradlaugh all along had been in the right. The House of Commons had no legal right to prevent a duly elected member taking the oath. That was Bradlaugh's claim all along. He had done nothing to disqualify himself for membership, and the Commons acted in a thoroughly unconstitutional manner. A few years later, when Bradlaugh lay upon his death-bed, the House did the one decent thing in the whole of its conduct of the struggle. It expunged from its records the resolution expelling Bradlaugh from the House.

Right through the controversy the stream of religious and reactionary blackguardism ran at full spate. The Queen, indignant probably that a man such as Bradlaugh should have so exposed her family, wrote a fussy and impertinent letter to Gladstone hoping that, whatever decision was come to, "care will be taken to prevent its being supposed that the Government sympathises with the opinions of Mr. Bradlaugh." Gladstone, who had formed a very high opinion of Bradlaugh, a little later wrote the Queen that Bradlaugh's speech was that of a "consummate speaker," and that he had challenged the House, "thereby expressing an opinion in which Mr. Gladstone . . . has the misfortune to lean towards . . . Mr. Gladstone fears that it will soon be heard of again, and that, if the constituency of Northampton sees fit to enter into conflict with the House of Commons, the constituency will be the winner."

Prayers were offered up in many Churches and Chapels for the defeat of Bradlaugh, and many petitions sent to Parliament, (in some cases, as Bradlaugh was able to show, they were signed by Sunday School children), praying the Government to refuse to pass an Affirmation Bill. *Moonshine*, a kind of very inferior *Punch*, outdid all others in the viciousness of both its letterpress and its cartoons. It found a source for wit in explaining that the reason why the railway companies would not grant excursion facilities for Bradlaugh's Northampton followers to come to London was connected with "Keating's." In Dissenting chapels people were urged not to entrust any political power to a man who would destroy the sanctity of the Sabbath. This was one of those rare occasions when all sections of the Christian Churches found enough Christian love to work together in slandering an unbeliever and perpetuating an act of injustice.

The *St. Stephen's Review* was consistently bitter and abusive. It talked a lot about the "heart of England being sound," a quite foolish phrase when used of any country and in any connexion, but particularly so when all it meant was that it was "a distinct party mistake, because religion still had a hold over the masses," and doing justice to Bradlaugh might mean losing votes. It asked whether ministers would acquiesce in "Bradlaugh's shameful crusade." Another sample of *Moonshine* humour was, "Mr. Bradlaugh was allowed to take the oath, and the other members were not allowed to complain—not even those who followed and had to kiss the same book as Mr. Bradlaugh."

On the other hand, there were not wanting those in the press and in the world of intellect who were ready to admit the greatness of Bradlaugh and do honour to both his ability and his high character. I do not greatly regret having no space for reprinting them here. They appear in plenty in the new Centenary Volume on Bradlaugh, and those who will read Bradlaugh and study his life will have something better to go upon than testimonials.

But one other thing *must* be borne in mind. Bradlaugh's constitutional fight was won, not merely in the face of the bitterest and most unscrupulous of opposition; it was also accompanied by lengthy and expensive legal battles which his enemies forced upon him for the sheer purpose of breaking him down in financial resources or in health. Some success attended the latter effort, but from the former he was saved—at least to the extent of not being crippled in the fight—by the loyalty of his friends.

## THE WORKER.

Once in the House Bradlaugh settled down to Parliamentary work, his acquaintance with legal forms doubtless absolving him from the usual apprenticeship necessary for most members. He took the oath on January 13, 1885. In the first session he missed attendance only one day out of 83. The greater part of his work was in connexion with Labour questions. On March 3, he moved and got carried a resolution to secure the full and accurate collection and publication of labour statistics. It was this that laid the foundation of the Labour Bureau. The same week he called attention to the abuses of the Truck Act. These abuses were at first disbelieved, but his statements were found to be accurate. He was appointed on a committee to consider the operation of the Employers' Liability Act, which held eighteen sittings of four hours each. He attended all and conducted the examination in chief of witnesses. On February 26 he obtained an order for a return of Market Rights and Tolls, which before the end of the session was on the table of the House. On the first working day of the Session he gave notice of a Bill to render cultivation of land compulsory in all cases where land could be cultivated with profit. On April 14 he moved the Second Reading of the Bill. He asked a whole series of questions on Perpetual Pensions, and by the luck of the ballot set down a motion for a select committee. He gave way to the Bill for the better government of Ireland, but, as he pointed out, no less than 330 perpetual pensions had been commuted, at great cost to the taxpayers, during the time he was excluded from his seat. His interest in this method of plundering the people was well known, and the threatened ones were taking precautions in time, so he obtained a pledge that there should be no further commutations until the question came before Parliament. He persistently advocated economies, voted in favour of the Bill for Parliamentary suffrage for women, but gave



notice of motion in Committee to omit the proviso depriving married women of the vote. He drew the attention of the House to the exclusion of the public from the enclosed parts of Richmond and Greenwich Parks, and in a relevant debate pressed on the Committee the fact that the present Royal Family had at no time given up anything to the country. The so-called Crown lands were not Crown lands. They were purely State property. At no time had they been made over to the Crown. He also called the attention of the House to the utter uselessness of the office of Queen's Remembrancer, which cost the country £3,000 a year. His interest in India was shown in numerous questions and speeches—he was, indeed, known as the Member for India. He pressed for information of the Burma Ruby Mines (a scandalous piece of jobbery) on more than one occasion.

So one might go on for pages with a recital of Bradlaugh's activities in Parliament. No other member was quite so persistent, or quite so troublesome, one would imagine. The official Hansard has a very full index, and if the reader of this hasty sketch will glance down the index pages for the years 1885 onward he will be staggered at the part played by Bradlaugh in an assembly that it had taken him five years of hard fighting to enter, and to occupy the seat he had lawfully won. But in all, his greatest personal triumph was the passing of the Oaths Amendment Act in 1888. The House that had fought him year after year, which had shown the characteristic mob spirit in its behaviour to a man pleading for his legal rights before a body whose chief business it should have been to have seen that these rights were strictly honoured, passed a measure which lifted the question out of the control of every judge in the land, and gave to each man the full legal right to affirm on every occasion, and in every situation where an oath is usually required. And this was the very man whom they had reviled, expelled and slandered.

Above all he had won by sheer weight of personal character the esteem of the worthy among his opponents. Even Churchill, who probably feared the man more than was thought, tried to gain his goodwill. And over and over again Bradlaugh took a legitimate revenge for Churchill's conduct by exhibiting his own superiority to him on the question before the House. The most important of the debates that took place in the House of Commons were child's play to the man who had spent his life as Bradlaugh had spent his.

Again I refrain from citing the many high appreciations of Bradlaugh's parliamentary greatness. Conservatives and Liberals joined in doing him honour. The terrible Atheist, Republican, Malthusian had come into his own, and without abating a jot of his principles. It was a standing proof that given a man of real character there is no need to live in a state of apology for holding the opinions that one does hold, seeking to discover a name that will separate one from those who are out-spoken, and in the end losing the respect of both those with whom we are afraid of being identified and of those whom we are striving to placate.

### VALE!

I have been sketchily and somewhat disjointedly dealing with many aspects of Bradlaugh's life. But a complete estimate can be formed only if it be borne in mind that these different activities were all going on simultaneously. Let us take only the last ten years of his life. During that time he fought four hotly contested elections, paid a lecturing visit to the United States, took part in debates, addressed in one year 186

meetings, exclusive of election meetings conducted an enormous correspondence, gave gratuitous legal advice to a large number of people, carried on his duties as President of the National Secular Society, and, on top of all, he fought lengthy lawsuits in which he had against him the keenest legal brains that England could produce. It is a record of a veritable "super-man," and I know of no other man who could equal him in this capacity for carrying on so much diversified work of so high an order.

It is not to be wondered that even his iron frame gave way in the end. Again, I would advise all to study the portrait taken in 1880 and the picture of him in 1890. They will then realize what those years of struggle really meant. I am not sure but that a fitting epitaph on his monument at Brookwood would be, "Here lies a man sacrificed to the savagery of the 'Gentlemen of England,' and the bigotry of the Christian Churches." I find it difficult, even at this date, as one who never came into personal contact with him, and never even heard him speak, who never even read anything he had written until after commencing my own Freethought work, to read the story of his life, and note his unwavering struggle for truth and justice without feeling a bitterness towards those who so surely harassed him to his death.

On the other side of the account it is only fair to say that there were not wanting some Christians—lay and clerical—who spoke in his behalf and protested against the bigotry and injustice displayed by their co-religionists. During his closing years this feeling became more strongly marked. In the House of Commons he had by his bearing and his labours won universal respect. Gladstone never failed to listen with appreciation to his speeches, and he was usually sure of a good attendance when he spoke. In his last illness prayers for his recovery were said in some of the churches, although the *British Weekly* raised its pious voice by way of protest. This expression of good feeling does not alter one's opinion of the value of the faith professed by those who evinced this better spirit. It serves, and should serve, to rouse one's feeling against a creed that can so distort the minds of those who professed it, and which Bradlaugh attacked in the name of humanity.

As a result of the physical violence in expelling him from Parliament, he was compelled to go away for a brief period, but he was soon back at work, until in 1889 he was taken seriously ill with an attack of Bright's disease. He recovered sufficiently to undertake a voyage to India, which effected some slight improvement, but the end was near. In 1890 he was compelled to resign his Presidency of the N.S.S., and one of his last lectures in the Hall of Science was delivered for the benefit of Robert Forder, an old fellow-worker, and for many years Secretary of the National Secular Society. Forder, like so many workers for Freethought found himself without provision for his old age, and Bradlaugh was not one to forgo an opportunity of helping in such a case. He continued his work with the shadow of death resting upon him. He died on January 30, 1891, aged fifty-seven years and four months.

The event that would have given him the greatest satisfaction he was never to learn. While he lay unconscious, news came to his daughter that the House of Commons had resolved, with some slight protests, but otherwise without dissent, to expunge from its records the resolutions excluding him from the House. It admitted its unjust treatment of one of the best of its members.

His funeral, by his own request, was without ceremony of any kind. He was buried at Brookwood Cemetery in the presence of thousands of men and



women who had travelled from all parts of Britain to pay the silent tribute of their respect to their beloved leader. The monument that stands over his grave is a silently eloquent testimony to his greatness. No one can stand in the presence of that effigy without feeling that he is looking at no ordinary man. The sculptor has wiped from the face the marks of strain, and it looks down upon the visitor with an air of calm strength and inflexible power that one would expect from the record of his life. If it were possible to trace the influence he exerted upon the lives of multitudes of his contemporaries, and the unconscious influence he has had on myriads who came after him, we should be able to form some idea of what the world owes to one who in sunshine or storm, but mostly in storm, set the example of steadfastness in the pursuit of truth and the establishment of justice.

### England's Infidel.

GREAT BRADLAUGH takes his rest; not in that  
Hell  
To which his Christian foes would him consign,  
Nor in that Heaven in which the "Righteous"  
shine,  
But in the kindly earth he loved so well.  
Some few among us knew the magic spell  
His voice could weave, his tomb is yet their  
shrine;  
The younger can his mighty work divine  
From his proud title, "England's Infidel."

He rests, but we must work, for we are left;  
Man's thought is still by superstition bound;  
The multitude of freedom is bereft;  
The poor and ignorant are all around.  
His watch-word, "Thorough," let us keep in  
mind  
Till Reason's voice is heard by all mankind.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

### SOME CRITICISMS.

In attempting a final estimate of Bradlaugh's work and worth I must deal, however briefly, with the common statement that his attacks on religion were coarse and abusive. I have already pointed out that this charge was no more than an attempt to "rationalize" the brutal treatment measured out to him. This treatment was not a consequence of "coarse" language, for the coarseness was never there; it was in the nature of an afterthought devised to excuse the blackguardism of a great many of his opponents. It was the old story of the wolf and the lamb.

The charge served with two classes. With a very common type of Christian it was used to give a moral covering to a species of ruffianism which few had the moral strength openly to avow. It also helped the timid unbeliever to "rationalize" his lack of courage or principle. Incidentally it also warned the general public to have nothing to do with Bradlaugh. In my own case, before I knew anything of Bradlaugh or the National Secular Society and its work, the judgment of those around me had painted him as an able but coarse and uneducated man, while another whose name had for long been a by-word amongst Freethinkers for his anxiety to stand well with Christians, was the "only gentleman" the Freethought movement possessed. It was the latter that the Christians admired most—naturally.

As a matter of fact Bradlaugh's language was careful almost to austerity in both form and expression. There are his published works for all to read, and there are his contributions to the *National Reformer* extending over a period of thirty years. It is not in these that the searcher for vulgarity will get any reward for his hunting. There are his published debates; and in debate, where feelings are likely to run high, and where the cut and thrust of controversy will be certain to disclose a man at his worst, and not always in his suavest and most courteous manner, there are no passages I can recall in which Bradlaugh failed in his usual course of careful and perfectly polite speech. Offensive language can only be found here by those who regard any criticism of religion as offensive. There are also his parliamentary speeches, some of them, as in the case of those delivered at the Bar of the House, where the injustice under which he was suffering and the abuse to which he was treated might well have excused any outburst, but again there is the same austerity of language.

I ask my readers to consider the following, written by Bradlaugh, at a time when he was experiencing the vilest of abuse, the rowdiest of opposition, and, above all, the intolerance of judges, who, when forced to decide, or accept a verdict in his favour, were careful to accompany it with "contemptuous" damages, or to indulge in insulting comments.

When at Bolton I sued for damages occasioned by the breach of contract for the hire of the hall in which the lectures were to be delivered, I was nonsuited by the County Court Judge on the ground that the lectures to be delivered were illegal (although there was, of course, no possible evidence of what I should have said.) When I was illegally arrested at Devonport, confined in a damp cell for one night, twice brought before the magistrate, an Exeter jury, although they in point of fact decided entirely in my favour, gave me one farthing damages; and Lord Chief Justice Erle, on appeal to the court sitting *in banco*, laid down the doctrine that the imprisonment which prevented a man like myself from making known his views (although the imprisonment had been by the verdict of the jury utterly unjustifiable) was rather a benefit to the individual than a wrong for which damages could be sought. When, at Wigan, the evidence of myself and a gentleman and his wife were all refused by the County Court Judge on the ground of our being all well-known Secularists, I was legally robbed of nearly thirty pounds. When concerned about three years ago in another litigation, the statement of my opponent that I was "Iconoclast the Atheist," sufficed to defeat me. . . . Now I am grossly libelled, the libel is not justified; the only cross-examination is on my opinions and the counsel for the defendant, who actually admits that the libel never ought to have appeared, asked the jury to give me the smallest possible damages because I am an Atheist. The jury respond to his appeal to their religious prejudices, and I am given one farthing damages. What am I to do? If when I am libelled I take no notice, the world believes the libel. If I sue, I have to pay about one hundred pounds costs for the privilege, and gain the smallest coin the country knows as a recompense. Duelling is forbidden alike by my code of morals, and the law of the country. If I horsewhip the libeller, I am punishable for assault. Am I outlaw or citizen—which? Answer me, you who boast your superiority; you whose religion makes you better than myself. What mockery to tell me that I live in a free country, when it is thus justice is dealt out to such as I am!

Can anyone readily think of a similar instance in which an injured and ill-treated man exhibited so great a restraint on an occasion when the most violent language would have been excusable?



Finally, Bradlaugh did not, I think, certainly not in his published speeches, possess a lively sense of humour; and that, as shown in some of our greatest writers is very liable to bubble over in a certain colloquial ease of expression that may easily be mistaken for coarseness, and from which those will shrink who are destitute of humour themselves, and who are burdened with a painful puritanism that should keep them inside a conventicle for life. But men like George Meredith did not find Bradlaugh coarse, neither did Gladstone, neither did Conway, neither did Morley nor many others I might name. It would be an insult to Bradlaugh further to labour the point. A more plausible, but not more defensible, statement is that Bradlaugh was attacking an out-of-date theology. In one sense this is true, and it would be no compliment to Bradlaugh if it were not. The man who first laid down a paved road put the dirt track out of date. The man who invented the steam engine put out of date the horse as a method of long distance transport. Naturally many of the things against which Bradlaugh fought are by way of being out of date. What is the use of a teacher who does not enable his pupils to go farther than he did? Bradlaugh did his work so well that for multitudes he definitely put out of date many of the ideas against which he fought.

What was the state of the religious world when Bradlaugh came definitely before the people of this country as a Freethought advocate? The doctrine of evolution, with its shattering influence on general religious ideas, was not yet definitely formulated. Special creation still held the field. Miracles were accepted in theory, even though not believed in practice. The Bible was still the word of God, Dean Burgon, Spurgeon, and others, had said it was inspired in every word, and even in every syllable. The most advanced believers had not got beyond the position that the Bible contained the whole truth, if one interpreted it properly. The stream of denunciation that met the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* is well known to all, and on the whole, while the Christian Church was showing marks of the batterings it had received, it still apparently held the field.

The state of Christian teaching was shown, even in its higher flights, by the publication of the famous *Essays and Reviews*, and Colenso's *Examination of the Pentateuch*. The substance of both these works had formed for nearly half a century the staple of popular Freethought literature, but the works named were greeted by a flood of denunciation hardly less fierce than that which greeted Bradlaugh himself. There were heresy trials within the Church, and men who were counted advanced Christians at this date, such as Frederick Denison Maurice, were bitterly hostile to Colenso. Even so late as the "eighties," Gladstone was defending against Huxley the scientific accuracy of the Bible, and the latter was using, substantially in the name of recent science, arguments which Bradlaugh had used years before, but without Bradlaugh's uncompromising application of them to fundamental religious beliefs. A few years later than the date of which we are writing, Dean Farrer's *Eternal Hope* roused another storm in Christian circles because of its questioning the doctrine of eternal torment. If anyone will turn to a standard work of the period, such as *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, he will see what were the real beliefs of educated Christians in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Can anyone really believe that the intense malignity manifested against Bradlaugh was due to his attacking a theology which the Christian Church no longer held? The fact is that Bradlaugh was attacking a

theology that was very much alive. His real crime was one that Freethinkers had been committing for at least half a century. This was to take the latest information available in religion and biblical scholarship, the latest knowledge in science and comparative mythology, and put them into simple language, at a low price, before the people.

But this is measuring Bradlaugh by his contemporaries. Does the statement that Bradlaugh is out of date hold good when we measure what he taught with the state of things to-day? I think not. A danger to all reforming bodies of people arises from their segregation. Isolated as they are in "spirit" from the mass of the people, they are apt to ignore the fact of the existence of the larger body outside themselves, and to convert themselves into a kind of mutual admiration society. But there are millions of Christians in this country to-day who are pretty well where their grandfathers were. Hell-fire and a belief in the literal inspiration of the Bible are terribly common, particularly in the more isolated parts of the country. It really will not do to take the heresies of a Dean Inge or a Bishop Barnes as proof that Christianity is dead. They represent but a very small section of their brother clergy and of Christians in general. The mere fact that their mild heresies arouse so much attention is proof of this. The Christianity that Bradlaugh attacked is very much with us.

The attack on Christianity was only part of Bradlaugh's work. He attacked the fundamentals of religion. Is it really true that *religion* is dead? It is to me; it may be to millions of others in Great Britain, but there are still a greater number of millions left when the unbelieving ones are deducted from the total population.

We need not stop our enquiry here. Bradlaugh attacked Christianity, he attacked religion, but he attacked also the dominance of religion in social and political life. Is this so weakened that we can honestly count Bradlaugh out of date? I think not. Ought we to forget that within recent years the House of Commons was thrown into a state of unintelligent hysteria over a debate on the Prayer-Book, a debate that ought to have been laughed out of existence; or that the most powerful Government of recent years was afraid to grant reasonable facilities for Sunday entertainments, and in the end would only grant them under conditions that were copied from the racketeering policy of the Chicago gangsters? Ought we not to bear in mind that forty years after Bradlaugh the Blasphemy Laws still disgrace the statute book; that Freethought literature is still subject to the boycott, that religion is still being taught in the schools? In municipal and in parliamentary elections candidates are still afraid to avow Freethinking opinions, men are still afraid to take advantage of the Affirmation Law that Bradlaugh got passed for their advantage. There are Freethinkers in the Labour Party, in the Liberal Party, and in the Conservative Party, but the fear of religion keeps their mouths shut. And I have not so poor an opinion of human nature as to believe that these men prefer to act a lie rather than to speak the truth. They act as they do because they know that religion is powerful enough to harass and even to ruin them if they dare to avow their disbelief in it.

Bradlaugh and his fellow workers did much to broaden men's minds, and to make it possible for a larger number to speak the truth. But a great deal remains to be done; and an important part of the Freethought campaign has been to enable the "weaker brethren" to live a freer life than they could ever have done in the absence of the work of the fighting Freethinkers. Disperse the militant Freethought



movement in this country, and how long would it be before the liberal movement in the religious world were extinguished?

In the work to which I have already referred, Mr. A. W. Benn speaks of these liberalizing Christians as pioneers of an advancing army. They are nothing of the kind. They were what their successors are to-day, the rearguard of an army in full retreat calling upon those they are guarding to throw away some of their baggage in order to save the remainder. The religious world concedes only as much as it is forced to give up. It has been the fighters, from Paine to Bradlaugh and onward, who by broadcasting the truth about religion have so changed the atmosphere that public men may say what the majority of them otherwise would never have dared to utter. As John M. Robertson says, it was "the fighters who won freedom for the scholars." The pity is that the scholars have not evidenced a greater degree of gratitude to the fighters.

Bradlaugh lived long enough to see many of the Christian beliefs against which he fought rejected by a very considerable number of the better-educated Christians. He lived long enough to see his Atheism endorsed by the new science of anthropology, which reduced the world's gods and the world's religions to a study of so many illusions. But above all, he lived long enough to witness the changed mental atmosphere which permitted the free discussion of subjects which in his own case had roused the most violent opposition. This fight was not alone to the benefit of Freethinkers inasmuch as it made their work easier; it was of value even to Christians, for it introduced a humanizing element into their lives from which they could not fail to benefit.

### THE POLITICAL ISSUE.

From another quarter, with no better justification, comes the criticism that Bradlaugh is out of date—this time with reference to his political principles. The criticism reflects little credit on the capacity for scientific thinking of those who make it. It has weight chiefly with such as carry the religious spirit into their political life, and it comes mainly from those who regard opposition to the Socialism of Bradlaugh's time as the political analogue of the sin against the Holy Ghost. To those with better balanced judgments other considerations will have their weight.

Historically Bradlaugh belongs to the school of political Radicalism. In this respect he stood well in the front rank of that school, which in Bradlaugh's time was looked upon with hardly more favourable judgment than is Communism in our own. As a matter of fact, advocating Communism was one of the charges that was—quite wrongly—brought against him. And against him was ranged the strongest of the vested interests of the country—a consideration that might well give pause to those who dismiss his political ideas as old-fashioned and out-of-date. Moreover to measure a man's opinions—expressed fifty years ago with the opinion of to-day, or even to assume that Bradlaugh's opinions would have remained unchanged had he been alive to-day, is to imagine him standing still while the age advanced beyond him. It is also to lose sight of what we of to-day owe to those of yesterday, and how much of our assumedly advanced thought is based upon the work done by our predecessors. It is of little use losing our intolerance in reference to religion, if we are to re-establish it in reference to our political and social thinking.

Bradlaugh was critical of Socialistic theories, as he was critical of all political propositions put forward. He did not, as a rule, indulge in much philosophising

on either the ultimate basis of social life, or the final form of political organizations. Discourses at large in either direction will often serve to give to those who indulge in them an air of profound wisdom, while relieving them from the necessity of clearly visualizing or explaining exactly what they mean or how they are going to achieve their declared ends. Nothing is easier than to create an ideal social environment in which ideal citizens shall joyfully and unanimously realize an ideal end.

But to use a word much beloved by some of his Socialistic critics, Bradlaugh was essentially a "realist." Without losing sight of an end, he had to deal with things as they were, and whereas politicians and numerous others were, and are, ready to compromise in their opinions—a sphere in which compromise is never justifiable—Bradlaugh saw in political action a field where compromise is inevitable. The philosophy of this is well put by him thus:—

All progressive legislation in this country is necessarily compromise. It is not possible to legislate on hard and fast lines of principle alone. A state of things has grown up through generations which can only be gradually changed. The expedient has to be considered in all law making . . . Temporary concessions have to be made on the one side, to win consent from the other, to a sure step in advance; but no compromise is final.

I do not know anyone who has put this point more clearly; and it must be borne in mind that he was writing with specific reference to a country in which, as he had said, there existed no written constitution, and, therefore, it was within the power of Parliament to alter existing laws in any direction whatsoever. His action with regard to Spain, Italy, France, and elsewhere, showed that he had a pretty clear opinion as to what was allowable where the opportunities for constitutional reform did not exist.

There is one other passage which may be cited in order to get the fundamentals of Bradlaugh's political thinking:—

Poverty, so long as it exists, is in fact the impassable barrier between man and civil and religious liberty. You can never have true liberty so long as men are steeped in poverty . . . Are the people poor? For the poor there are no museums, no pictures, no elevating spheres of life, no grand music, no ennobling poetry. All these phases are closed to them; and why? Because their life is a constant struggle to live . . . What is the use of your phrases to them when their education compels them not to comprehend the words you say . . . Liberty, equality, fraternity, are words used very often about the Republican institutions of the world, but you can never have liberty, equality, and fraternity, as long as there is poverty dividing one class from another.

Many other passages might be cited to prove that Bradlaugh was as critical of the general formulas attaching to his avowed political theories as he was of those to which he manifested opposition.

We cannot now cross-examine Bradlaugh as to his ultimate political beliefs, but it is simply ridiculous to assume, as some have *interestedly* done, that he was a hard and fast "Individualist," strongly opposed to the action of the State in facilitating an equality of relations and opportunities between individuals. I say "*interestedly* done," because I believe that in many cases it is the fear of an identification with Bradlaugh's Atheism which has led many to dissociate themselves from him by way of emphasizing his alleged political shortcomings. And if Bradlaugh were alive to-day he might see in this a justification of his considered warning expressed well over forty years ago, that



there is the very grave danger that the Church of Rome . . . may use Socialism with the democracy as a means to endeavour to win back through the people the temporal power which, even with the aid of monarchs, it has been unable to retain.

Could he have lived to note the manner in which the Labour Party of to-day truckles to the religious crowd, and the readiness of some of its leaders to bargain with the Roman Church for the sake of its mass vote, he would have been justified in saying, "I told you so!"

How far the State might go in its operations was to Bradlaugh a question of expediency. In the case of the land, a matter in which he was always keenly interested, he affirmed his agreement with John Stuart Mill that "Property in land is only valid, in so far as the proprietor of the land is its improver"; and "When private property in land is not expedient, it is unjust . . . In fact, individual proprietorship of soil is only defensible so long as the possessor can show improvement and cultivation of the land he holds." The principle of the nationalization of land could hardly be better indicated. He also confessed regretfully that few workmen shared his belief in co-operative production, and that the wage system would "just now" remain a necessity.

Add to these considerations his actual work in the direction of guarding the working class from different forms of exploitation. There was the "Truck Act," a measure which did incalculable good to the mining world in particular. He was responsible for the creation of the Labour Bureau, an institution which if not essentially Socialistic was at least necessary to legislation in the direction of Socialism; he worked hard for Land Reform, Employers' Liability, and a dozen other measures that had a direct bearing on the welfare of the working classes.

What must also be noted is his constant fight against privilege in every form, from the crown down to the ordinary civil servant, his fight against the scandal of perpetual pensions, granted with a lavish hand, often for questionable services, and by means of which men without utility or serviceable ability lived on a capitalization of the prostitution or the venality of some remote ancestress or ancestor; his insistence on the rights of the people against the encroachments of crown, parliament or vested interests; his rejection of the common theory that it was the mere duty of Government to "keep the ring," while the contest was decided between men on the one side armed with every weapon that position, education, and influence could furnish, and, on the other side, by those who were hampered by every possible circumstance of education, position, and outlook. And this was no late attitude in his life. He changed no principle to win political appointment; there was no turning round on stated convictions in order to gain advancement in a party. With Bradlaugh these had been his characteristics from his teens.

Against some present-day depreciation of Bradlaugh, chiefly from certain individuals in the Labour movement, I may fittingly cite from the miners of Durham and Northumberland (1874), one of many of a similar kind, and signed by the then President, Treasurer, and Secretary of the Federation:—

The assistance you have given to all movements of a popular character—the long and invaluable services you have rendered to the cause of the poor, the neglected and the oppressed—the ability and power you have at all times displayed in advocating the interests of the masses of the people . . . the genuine courage and enthusiasm for Right and Progress that have marked your whole public career—all these services and qualifications entitle you to this humble

recognition of your talents and your worth.

Your labours in behalf of advanced political ideas have not, we are aware, always been confined to your own country. Nor have they, indeed been limited to a single hemisphere. France and Spain and Italy are alike indebted to you for good work done in the interests of the people. For the help you have given to Italy you have been thanked by Garibaldi; for that you extended to Spain you have been honoured by Castelar and the Republicans of Madrid; for that you rendered to France you received the acknowledgment of the Government of National Defence . . . Only those who have watched your course from the time when you first entered public life can form any estimate of the sacrifices you have made for the popular cause or the advantages you have contributed to its success. The right of free speech and of public demonstration is especially indebted to your exertions for the firm establishment of that inestimable blessing in this country.

What Bradlaugh really dreaded, what I think we still have cause to dread, was the growth of a bureaucratic State, which means the strangling of individual initiative and of individual freedom. To work for the State is good, but only so far as State action eventuates in individual freedom and happiness. The individual exists for the State only because in the absence of collective life the individual suffers. But the test of State action is in its application to the individual, and its effect upon him. The State has no other justification for its existence. It was in this sense that Bradlaugh was fundamentally individualistic, and critical—not antagonistic on principle—of all schemes that threatened an extension of State activities. His main concern here was to secure, first, the freedom of electoral power; second, freedom of thought, speech, and publication; third, to guard the judicature from the absolute control of Parliament.

Can it reasonably be said on the grounds just named that Bradlaugh is out of date? I think not. The principles indicated in what has been stated are to-day the more important and need the more carefully guarding, just because the power of the State has increased so largely of late years. We have seen it in more than one country, the State elevated to the rank of a super-normal—almost a super-human—power, overriding the wishes of the people, suppressing freedom of thought and publication, and repressing all criticism with the moralizing savagery of an ancient Inquisitor burning a heretic. The need for freedom of speech and publication is greater than ever. The necessity to check the power of the State at the point when it threatens the real freedom of the individual is greater than ever. When we see the manner in which mass opinion is created and directed to-day by an irresponsible press, by political parties which use every endeavour to crush those who stand up against their decrees; when we watch the development of government by administrative order—one of the most dangerous of our recent political developments; when we note the move in the direction of making the judicature directly subordinate to the Executive; it would appear that present-day reformers who desire to think more of principle than of party, more of guarding the freedom of men and women than creating a machine against which nothing may stand, may still find much that is helpful in Bradlaugh's example and teaching. It looks as though the present choice does actually lie between Hitler, Mussolini and the Soviet on the one hand, and the fundamental principles of Bradlaugh on the other. At least it is certain that so long as human society continues to be the theatre of divergent interests and conflicting ideas, the ideals of Charles Bradlaugh can never be out of date, nor can they be ignored save at our peril.



# CHARLES BRADLAUGH

*Champion of Liberty*

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## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Reggiori's Restaurant, 1-3 Euston Road opposite King's Cross Station) : 6.30, Reunion non-members welcomed. 7.30, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe—"Secularism—To-day's Necessity." Freethought literature on sale.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, Prof. H. Levy, D.Sc.—"Changing the World."

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand) : 3.15, Sunday, September 24, Mr. R. H. Rosetti. "Salmon and Ball," Cambridge Road, E. 2, 8.0, Thursday, September 28, A Lecture.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (The Grove, Hammersmith) : 7.30, Sunday, September 24. The Grove, Hammersmith, 7.30, Tuesday, September 26. Freethinker on sale.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead) : 11.30, Sunday, September 24, Mr. L. Ebury. Highbury Corner, 8.0, Sunday, September 24, Mr. F. R. Corrigan. South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, Monday, September 25, Mr. C. Tuson. Highbury Corner, 8.0, Thursday, September 28, Mr. C. Tuson.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park) : 3.30 Sunday, September 24, A Lecture. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Wednesday, September 27, Mr. H. C. Smith. Chestnut Grove, Balham Station, 8.0, Thursday, September 28, Mr. L. Ebury. Aliwell Road, Clapham Junction, 8.0, Friday, September 29, A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical College, Romford Road, Stratford, E.) : 7.0, Mr. Rosetti.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 12.0, B. A. Le Maine. 3.30, Platform 1, Messrs. Tuson and Wood. Platform 2, B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Platform 1, Messrs. Bryant and Wood. Platform 2, Messrs. Hyatt and Saphin. Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Campbell-Everden and Wood. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Tuson and Saphin. Friday, 7.30, Messrs. Bryant and Le Maine.

WOOLWICH (Beresford Square) : 8.0, Sunday, September 24, F. W. Smith and S. Burke—"Charles Bradlaugh." "The Ship," Plumstead Common, 8.0, Wednesday, September 27, S. Burke. "The Ship," Plumstead Common, 8.0, Friday, September 29, F. W. Smith and S. Burke.

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley) : 2.30. First meeting of the Winter Session. Business : To arrange Syllabus of Lectures for the Winter. Will members and friends try their best to attend.

OXFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (22 St. John Street) : 7.0, Sunday, September 24, A Lecture.

#### OUTDOOR.

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Level opposite the Market) : 3.30, Mr. J. Cecil Keast—"Truth the Church Hides."

DERBY BRANCH N.S.S. (Nottingham, Council House Square) : 7.30, Tuesday, September 26, Mr. H. V. Blackman, B.Sc. Derby, Market Square, 8.0, Sunday, September 24, and Thursday, September 28, Mr. H. V. Blackman, B.Sc.

GATESHEAD (Co-op. Hall) : 7.0, Sunday, September 24, Mr. J. T. Brighton, A. Flanders, etc.—"Bradlaugh."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Platt Fields, Platt Lane, Rusholme) : 3.0 and 6.30, Sunday, September 24, Mr. G. Whitehead. Devonshire Street and Lower Ormond Street, 7.30, Mr. G. Whitehead will lecture at these places for the remainder of the week.

MORPETH (Market Place) : 7.0, Saturday, September 23, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

NORTH SHIELDS (Harbour View) 7.0, Tuesday, September 26, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SOUTH SHIELDS, 7.0, Wednesday, September 27, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Southwick, opposite War Memorial) : 7.30, Friday, September 22, Mr. A. Flanders. Sunday—No Meeting.



# NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

The National Secular Society was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh. He remained its President until shortly before his death, and the N.S.S. has never ceased to live up to the tradition of "Thorough" which Bradlaugh by his life so brilliantly exemplified.

The N.S.S. is the only organization of militant Freethinkers in this country. It aims to bring into one body all those who believe the religions of the world to be based on error, and to be a source of injury to the best interests of Society. It claims that all political laws and moral rules should be based upon purely secular considerations. It is without sectarian aims or party affiliations.

If you appreciate the work that Bradlaugh did, if you admire the ideals for which he lived and fought, it is not enough merely to admire. The need for action and combined effort is as great to-day as ever. You can best help by filling up the attached form and joining the Society founded by Bradlaugh.

### PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

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Address .....

Occupation .....

Dated this.....day of.....19...

This declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription.

P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year, every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S OFFICES, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

# A SCEPTICAL POET

## MINERVA'S OWL AND OTHER POEMS

BY

BAYARD SIMMONS

A Poet of Ours . . . sceptical poets of whom Mr. Simmons is, among modern, by no means least. He has sense of form, grace of word, and vitality of spirit . . . a light, and sometimes, sprightly wit.—A.H., in the *Freethinker*.

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*New Age*.

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*Everyman's Encyclopaedia*.

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Notes and News.

We have devoted the whole of this issue to Charles Bradlaugh, and we fancy, conceited though it may sound, that readers will not regret it. But there still remains a great deal that not only might be said about Bradlaugh, but ought to be said; so further important matter will now be inserted week by week. Among other things we shall reprint next week the very fine and important lyrical poem by Gerald Massey, "We do not bury the Hatchet So!" read at the Hall of Science the night before Bradlaugh's funeral, and which, we believe, has never been published, save in the National Reformer. It is very little known. We should also like to publish some more, and some little known, cartoons, but that is a question of expense, and we have already done more than we ought to have done in that line.

Next week the Freethinker will resume its usual appearance, with articles on varied subjects, paragraphs, etc. We advise those who make their first acquaintance with the Freethinker this week to continue it for at least two or three weeks, in order to get a taste of its quality. It is the only paper of its kind in Britain, and the oldest Freethought paper in Europe. That and the National Reformer, which ceased publication in 1893, are indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand Freethought in this country for the past three-quarters of a century. We also request the patience of all who have written us on various subjects. We have a very busy time before us, but will wipe out arrears as quickly as we can.

To-day (September 24) Mr. Cohen will speak in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, at 6.40, on "Charles Bradlaugh." Admission will be free. On Sunday next (October 1) he will speak on the same subject in the Piccadilly Theatre, Manchester, at 6.30. We hope that Manchester Freethinkers will do their best to see that this large building is well-filled.

There is just time to call attention to one matter in connexion with the Bradlaugh Dinner. There are likely to be a number of people who would prefer a vegetarian menu, and it would help the arrangements if they were to make their wishes known as early as possible. Also, we trust that all those who have not yet obtained their dinner-tickets will do so without delay. The dinner will be at the Trocadero Restaurant, on Tuesday, September 26. The price of the ticket is 10s. 6d.

Some time back the Bradlaugh Centenary Committee requested the B.B.C. to arrange for a broadcast by one of its representatives on or near September 26. It was too much even for so Christian an institution to refuse on the ground that Charles Bradlaugh was not a figure of sufficient importance. So, after a little delay, the reply came that the B.B.C. had "arranged" for a broadcast to be given on September 26 following the "News." It transpires that it had stipulated five minutes; not much harm—or good—could be done in that time. Under pressure it doubled the time. So a ten-minutes talk will be given, after the talk has been, we presume, censored by the B.B.C. Time and date of talk, September 26, at 9.50 p.m.

One of our cartoons in this number is the striking one, "Bradlaugh Triumphant." This broadcast can hardly be reckoned a triumph for Bradlaugh. For one who did so much for freedom of speech to be made the subject of a censored speech is little short of a humiliation. We are hoping that one day our public men will develop sufficient self-respect to decline to submit to the censorship exercised by the B.B.C. Bradlaugh, we are sure, could have done well without a broadcast in such circumstances.

This seems a rather appropriate issue of the Freethinker for a note on the population question. Germany demands colonies as an outlet for its surplus population. France with a stationary population has no need for more colonies to relieve home congestion. England, whose birth rate and death rate are approaching an equilibrium, has enough colonies to relieve whatever overcrowding exists. But Germany is ordering and bribing its people to have as many babies as possible, France is offering a bounty to increase the number of babies born, and our own papers dolefully announce a decrease in the number of births, and cry for more children. Why? Well, the only reason given is to provide more children for war purposes. The more children, the more soldiers. The more births, the greater the opportunities for larger mass murders. This is the state of things to which nearly two thousand years of Christian influence have brought us. Would it, could it, have been any worse had Christianity never been heard of?

We cordially commend to all our readers of this issue the Centenary Bradlaugh Volume, which is advertised on another page. We shall be publishing a review of the work in a later issue. All we need say now is that no cheaper volume has ever been issued from any press. It is not sold, since that would imply an ordinary trade sale. It is being given to every one who contributes half-a-crown towards the cost of the volume. It is profusely illustrated, and gives to those who read it a bird's-eye view of the life and career of one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century. We suggest that a copy of the volume, with a copy of this issue of the Freethinker, presented to a friend, would be a good stroke of work for the Cause that Bradlaugh loved. The book will be sixpence extra if sent by post.

Our usual standing orders are omitted this week. We need only remind readers that orders for literature should be addressed, The Manager, Freethinker Office, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. All other communications should be sent to the Editor.

The first of Mr. Cohen's meetings in connexion with the Centenary, was held in the Birmingham Town Hall, on Sunday last. The middle of a fine September is not the best of times to choose for an indoor meeting, but there was a very large audience to listen to the address. The attention of those present was most marked, and at the end of an address, that lasted an hour and a half, the audience appeared to be quite as interested as at the commencement. Our old friend, Mr. Willis, J.P., who we were sorry to find was not in his usual health, occupied the chair with his customary ability.

Obituary.

MRS. J. A. SHORTER.

WE regret to announce the death of Mrs. J. A. Shorter, of Teddington. Mrs. Shorter was a very ardent Freethinker, and a great admirer of this journal. We tender our sincere condolence to the family.

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