



# THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM



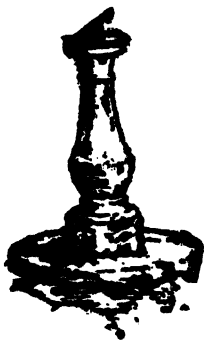
ANNIE BESANT AT FIFTY

THE GRACEFUL FOLDS OF HER WHITE SARI BLENDED WITH  
THE SILVER OF HER HAIR AND SOFTENED THE CONTOURS  
OF HER GRAVE, SWEET FACE.

*J. Russell & Sons, London*

THE  
PASSIONATE PILGRIM.  
*A LIFE OF ANNIE BESANT*

*By*  
GERTRUDE M. WILLIAMS



JOHN HAMILTON, LTD.  
42 GREAT RUSSELL STREET  
LONDON, W.C. 1



## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SEARCHING FOR LOVE . . . .	3
II. BRIDE OF HEAVEN . . . .	17
III. SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS . . . .	24
IV. A HEAVY DOOR CLOSING . . . .	41
V. ADDING AN A TO THEISM . . . .	47
VI. AJAX CRYING FOR LIGHT . . . .	61
VII. THE QUEEN <i>v.</i> BRADLAUGH AND BESANT	77
VIII. A DAUGHTER FOR A CAUSE . . . .	94
IX. A LYRIC INTERLUDE . . . .	107
X. LAWMAKERS AND LAWBREAKERS . . . .	123
XI. BACK TO REALITY . . . .	131
XII. LOVE AMONG THE SOCIALISTS . . . .	138
XIII. SOCIALISTS, POETS AND IDIOTS . . . .	149
XIV. DYNAMITE AND MATCHES . . . .	167
XV. PRIESTESS OF THE OCCULT . . . .	185
XVI. CHELAS AND GURUS . . . .	193
XVII. SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH . . . .	204
XVIII. ISIS VERY MUCH UNVEILED . . . .	224
XIX. SHANTI KUNJA—GROVE OF PEACE . . . .	231
XX. AN ASTRAL SVENGALI . . . .	238
XXI. THE QUEEN CAN DO NO WRONG . . . .	256
XXII. MESSIAHS MADE TO ORDER . . . .	270

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. WAKE UP, INDIA ! . . .	289
XXIV. AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING . . .	303
XXV. THE THRESHOLD OF DIVINITY . . .	320
XXVI. RISHIS, ROMANISM AND REBELLION . . .	328
XXVII. INDIAN SUMMER . . .	345
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	351
INDEX . . . . .	377

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
ANNIE BESANT AT FIFTY, 1897 . . . . .	14
ANNIE WOOD, THE LITTLE GIRL . . . . .	15
THE BRIDE . . . . .	15
MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, 1867 . . . . .	15
THE VICARAGE, MAIN STREET AND SAINT MARGA- RET'S SIBSEY . . . . .	32
ANNIE BESANT AND HER DAUGHTER, 1875 . . . . .	33
REV. FRANK BESANT, M.A., 1895 . . . . .	33
FRONTISPIECE OF REPORT OF FAMILY LIMITATION TRIAL, 1878 . . . . .	90
THE ANNIE BESANT WHO PLAYED DUETS WITH GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, 1885 . . . . .	91
ANNIE BESANT AND HERBERT BURROWS WITH THE MATCH MAKERS UNION, 1888 . . . . .	178
ANNIE BESANT, 1889 . . . . .	179
WILLIAM T. STEAD . . . . .	179
HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY . . . . .	198
THEOSOPHY IN SOCIETY, <i>A Cartoon</i> . . . . .	199
HOW TO BECOME A MAHATMA, <i>A Cartoon</i> . . . . .	224
"WHEN AUGUR MEETS AUGUR," <i>A Cartoon</i> . . . . .	225
SHANTI KUNJA—GROVE OF PEACE . . . . .	232
ANNIE BESANT WITH HER NEW COLLEAGUES IN THEOSOPHY, 1894 . . . . .	233



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
HEADQUARTERS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, INDIA . . . . .	270
CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER . . . . .	271
ANNIE BESANT, 1910 . . . . .	271
ANNIE BESANT IN CO-MASONIC REGALIA, 1925	304
PROMINENT ENGLISH AND AMERICAN THEOSOPHISTS	305
J. I. WEDGWOOD, C. JINARADADASA AND THE LATTER'S ENGLISH WIFE . . . . .	314
GEORGE S. ARUNDALE AND HIS WIFE, RUKMINI ARUNDALE . . . . .	315
CASTLE EERDE, GIVEN TO KRISHNAMURTI BY THE BARON VAN PALLANDT . . . . .	332
ANNIE BESANT AND KRISHNAMURTI, 1929 . . . . .	333
AMERICAN HEADQUARTERS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, WHEATON, ILL. . . . .	333

THE  
PASSIONATE  
PILGRIM



CHAPTER I  
SEARCHING FOR LOVE

1847-1865

QUEEN VICTORIA was writing notes to Disraeli. Night after night until sunrise, her lords and commons debated the Reform Bills. Darwin with his *Origin of Species* touched off another Gunpowder Plot. Charles Bradlaugh, notorious Atheist, stood for Parliament and polled a thousand votes. Karl Marx in exile paced his long rooms on Hampstead Heath, pondering *Das Kapital*. John Stuart Mill meditated upon *The Subjection of Women*.

It was mid-nineteenth century. Annie Wood Besant, soon to be the stormy petrel of sweeping social changes, was lost in the anonymity of childhood. She inherited both courage and determination from her mother. But Mrs. Wood was a Victorian gentlewoman. Happily she could not foresee her little girl's future—the most popular orator of her day, idolized by devoted thousands, international president of the Theosophical Society, elected to the presidency of the National Congress, the highest office in the gift of the Indian people. It would have terrified gentle Mrs. Wood. Mingled with her honours, Annie Wood Besant was to pay the bitter penalties of the pioneer. In her life she had spanned an interval that might have been centuries long from the self-abnegation of her mother's generation to the feminism of to-day.

Annie, only daughter of Emily Morris and William Burton Perse Wood, was born on October 1, 1847, at thirty-nine minutes past five on a Friday afternoon. It

is appropriate that a woman with her lust for life should have been a precocious child. When only five, she used to roll herself in a delightful velvet curtain, English houses being then, as now, the coldest places in the world, and read for hours at a time until her mother drove her out to play.

Two dominating characteristics of her adult life appeared as soon as she could talk : a quivering sensitiveness to praise or blame, and an almost sensuous response to the sound of her own voice. By the time she was eight, she had discovered *Paradise Lost*. She discriminatingly recognized Satan as the hero of the piece and identified herself with him. In a far end of the garden, the swaying bough of a laurel tree was her first rostrum, the nodding heads of primroses and marigold her audience as she sonorously declaimed,

“ *Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, powers.*”

The rolling thunder of Milton's verse made goose flesh on her little girl arms. She ingratiated herself with her teacher by reciting entire Epistles or extemporizing prayers with equal facility. Her Puritanic little conscience sometimes pricked her when she caught herself hoping that God and Auntie would notice how nicely she prayed.

Annie Wood was proud of her Irish blood and to-day, an old lady, frequently reminds her English audiences that although born within sound of Bow Bells, she is three-quarters Irish. A parchment tree over the drawing-room mantelpiece traced her mother's ancestry back to the seven Milesian Kings. Their legendary figures were evoked to curb Annie's tomboy efforts to keep up with her brother Henry, two years her senior. Her only English grand-parent was her father's father. The Woods were

an upper middle-class family with an agreeable sprinkling of titles, a Lord Mayor and a Lord Chancellor.

She has only fleeting memories of her father, who died when she was five ; of running to the gate to meet him, and of romping with him and her two brothers until he was called to dinner and she was carried off to the nursery. Mr. Wood had taken a medical degree in Dublin University and walked the hospitals there. He never practised medicine, but accepted an attractive commercial opportunity in London. He spent his evenings reading philosophy and poetry to his wife while she sewed. In spite of his ardent Catholic mother, Wood was an outspoken sceptic and used to mock at religion until his gentle little Church of England wife ran out of the room to escape his impiety.

Though he did not practise, medicine still fascinated him. One day, assisting in the dissection of a victim of tuberculosis, he scratched his finger. Within a few weeks, he was dying of what they then called galloping consumption. His daughter Annie has a strange, detached memory, like something one has dreamed, of being lifted up beside a bed to say good-bye to dear papa, and of being frightened by his eyes which looked so large, and his voice which sounded so strange as he asked her to promise to be a very good girl to darling mamma because papa was going right away. When the end came, Mrs. Wood collapsed. Annie and her brothers, big-eyed and frightened, huddled in a corner. There was an interval of hysterical confusion. The children were hurried away to Grandpa Morris in Clapham. They came back for the funeral important in new black clothes.

Annie had an early lesson in the disadvantage of being a girl when they took her papa away. Swathed in bands of crêpe, Henry as chief mourner sat importantly in the first

carriage following the hearse. Annie, looking wistfully over her shoulder, was led upstairs to sit through an orgy of female emotion. Her aunts and grandmothers, all in black, sat round the walls. White-faced, prayer book in hand, watching the minute hand move round the clock, her mother followed the progress of her husband's coffin until, with a bloodcurdling cry of "It is all over," she slid from sofa to floor in a dead faint.

Mr. Wood's death meant more than the loss of his jolly homecomings and his strong arms throwing his little "Sunshine" up on his shoulder. His sceptical influence removed, Annie's mother and aunts weltered in the macabre folklore of death and the supernatural. Annie heard how, after her father died, her mother had locked herself into the room all night. In the morning, her grandmother had to knock and call repeatedly before Mrs Wood responded. When she opened the door, her grandmother staggered back with a scream, "Good God, Emily, your hair is white." The story ran that Mrs. Wood's glossy black hair had turned white in a single night. Mrs. Wood used to tell her little daughter of the banshee whose wailing she heard as the hour of her husband's death approached.

There were other stories. When Annie's mother first visited her husband's grave, although she had no knowledge of its location, she walked through the vast uniformity of Kensal Green Cemetery with the trance-like assurance of a sleepwalker, leading her sisters directly to the still unmarked grave. They were standing beside it when the official summoned to direct them arrived. Mrs. Wood explained that she knew where to go because she had followed the coffin in spirit every step of the way. That winter Mrs. Wood dreamed that her husband told her she might have the two elder children, but that he

wanted the youngest boy, Alf ; and Alf, always a delicate child, died a few months later. At the time of his death there were further phenomena.

Three of Mrs. Wood's five sisters were spinsters living with their father in London. In her trouble, they clung to her in clannish devotion. They had an old-fashioned love of repeating incredible marvels with every detail solemnly attested. They were close in spirit to the old Gaelic world known to-day chiefly in Yeats' poems. Annie, still in the most impressionable period of her life, listened avidly to these elders representing all knowledge and authority. She learned to adjust her child-mind to the queer strains and dynamics of old wives' tales.

A very different childish preoccupation helped to keep her balanced. Her natural appetite for admiration was both thwarted and stimulated by her brother Henry's superior position. Her earliest memory is of her fourth birthday and Henry's patronizing suggestion that she be allowed a knife at table. That same year of 1851, she remembers her brother coming home from Prince Albert's Great Exhibition, his pockets stuffed with fascinating mysteries. She had not been allowed to go. Millions of girls and boys have watched their elder sisters and brothers enviously and that has been an end of it. Annie Wood's excessive vitality found an outlet in striving for appreciation and made her peculiarly sensitive to constant eclipse by a male. In spite of her ruffled cambric pantalettes and petticoats, she valiantly held her own with her brother and his friends. She climbed trees and cricketed as well as they. In quick thinking and resourcefulness, she outwitted them, which did not endear her to these arrogant English schoolboys. They used to elude her, throwing her back on books and a fantasy world of day dreams. She carried her scorn of being only a girl into this world



of make-believe, where she always stripped off her skirts and curls and strode forth in shining armour to slay dragons and rescue beautiful princesses.

Mr. Wood had been making a comfortable living, but his widow found herself with only a few hundred pounds. The death of little Alf intensified her determination to send Henry to a university and fit him for a profession. A cousin, Sir William Wood, later Lord Chancellor, offered to assist the boy through an ordinary London school and start him as a clerk in a good house. Her husband's family lost patience when she insisted on nothing short of the training of an English gentleman, public school and university. The cousins' wives and sisters came to see her. They tried sympathetic persuasion and scornful abuse. In the end they flounced off and left Emily to her foolish pride and obstinacy.

Mrs. Wood moved to Harrow where, for lads living in the town, fees were reduced. With no capital and no backing, this determined woman found temporary lodgings over a grocer's shop. Friends put their son, a boy of Henry's age, under her care and shared the expense of a tutor. She found a rambling house, covered with ivy and roses, standing on a hill, with a marvellous view across the green of tree tops to the far towers of Windsor Castle. Preliminaries arranged, she secured the endorsement of the head master, Dr. Vaughan. Impressed, he brought her other boys, and helped and encouraged her for many years. By the time she had put Henry through Cambridge, Mrs. Wood saved enough to buy a small house on the south coast and had a margin to provide a modest income for her old age.

All this would now require scarcely more than pluck and persistence. In 1850 it required inflexible courage. Widowed gentlewomen, like the Hindu women to-day,

accepted the decisions of the nearest male relative. They could scarcely imagine having their own way about anything. It took Mrs. Wood three years to establish herself in Harrow. Even after she had succeeded, her husband's family were so outraged by her unwomanly obstinacy that the break between the two families was never healed.

Mrs. Wood's character and achievement were a powerful example to Annie, who adored her mother and thought everything she did exactly right. She was an emotional child, so exuberant that they called her "Sunshine." Since her father's death, she had centred her affection on her mother with an intensity that was adoration. She loved to follow her about, waiting contentedly while Mamma talked to the servants or snuggling in the ample folds of her dress as she visited a neighbour until one day Mrs. Wood said, "Little one, if you cling to Mamma in this way, I must really get a string and tie you to my apron, and how will you like that?" The child fervently replied, "Oh Mamma darling, do let it be in a knot."

It was soon after moving to Harrow that Annie experienced the first great conscious sorrow of her life. One day playing at a neighbour's, she ran into the drawing-room and saw a lame lady with a beautiful smile. It was Miss Marryat, who, until his recent death, had lived with her favourite brother, Captain Frederick Marryat, the novelist. In her loneliness, she adopted a niece, planning to teach the child herself. Eight-year-old Annie Wood with her brown eyes and tumbling black curls radiated even then something of that enchanting spell with which she has always subjugated her world. She was soon sitting on the strange lady's lap, telling her all about Satan and Gabriel and Abdiel. Miss Marryat was charmed by the mixture of spontaneity and precocity, that inconsistent

combination of outflowing and inward turning qualities, which has made Annie Besant a fascinating puzzle.

The very next day, Miss Marryat, who had never met Mrs. Wood, called and, surprisingly, offered to educate Annie with her niece. It was a cruel dilemma for Mrs. Wood. Her chief preoccupation was her son's education. Dr. Vaughan was showing a kindly interest. Everything depended on creating an ideal atmosphere in her home for the Harrow boys entrusted to her. Dearly as she loved her daughter, she realized that Annie was an aggressive child, jealous and defensive with her brother and his friends. The situation would be infinitely simplified by her removal and increasingly complicated if she stayed. Steeled by her determination to give her son the education of a gentleman, Mrs. Wood consented to the separation.

It was a catastrophic blow to Annie. More menacing than her loneliness was the attack on her self-confidence. Mrs. Wood had already subordinated the family life to Henry's education. She now proposed to sacrifice everything precious to Annie, to turn her out of her home and send her among strangers. Annie's robust will to live guided her instinctively. She never allowed herself to see a flaw in her mother's love. As though to reassure herself, she has always referred to her mother with the extravagant language of a lover. She could not, however, prevent a growing jealousy of her brother, this casual male who took her mother's every sacrifice for granted.

As it turned out, the change was in many ways an excellent one. Miss Marryat was a cultivated woman of ample means. She loved children and was a natural teacher. She had worked out many of the modern pedagogical methods in a day when discipline and military routine were the cornerstones of education. She used few text-books. The children wrote letters and talked their lessons.

Psychologically however, the separation had a profound effect on Annie. At five, she had lost her father. At eight, she had worse than lost her mother. At home for her holidays, she watched with gripping jealousy while her beloved mother expended herself upon the unresponsive young animal that it is the English ideal to make of a public schoolboy. In spite of herself, she would try to restore the old intimacy with her mother, when, like an eclipse, her holidays ended and she was led back to Miss Marryat's. At school she was not actively unhappy. There was a strong affection between her and Auntie, as she called her teacher. Of the several children Miss Marryat took under her care, Annie was the only one who stayed until she had finished. But Miss Marryat divided herself with scrupulous impartiality among her charges. Annie wanted someone exclusively and passionately her own. She changed from the radiant "Sunshine" to a quiet, brooding girl, secretly given to self-pity. Deep down, aching the more because she could not admit it, was the blow to her pride in her mother's giving preference to her brother. She consoled herself with daydreams of which she was the spectacular hero.

During adolescence she was shut away from men almost as completely as a nun. Miss Marryat had a spinster's notions about men. She and her charges lived on her beautiful Dorsetshire estate, seeing little of the male sex except for one small son of a large-familied clergyman. He was such a timid, bookish mite that his trousers scarcely counted.

In the spring following her thirteenth birthday, Miss Marryat took Annie and another girl, Emma Mann, to Germany. They spent three months at Bonn, high up on the cliffs overlooking the Rhine. They climbed the mountains and rowed on the river, looking up with the choking

nostalgia of adolescence at the ruined castles of robber barons, the suave curves of vineyards, the grandeur of the Drachenfels. Two young noblemen, sons of the late Duke of Hamilton, with their tutor were staying at the same hotel. Emma, the elder of the two girls, was fair-haired, pink-cheeked, plump and vivacious, a foil for Annie with her dark hair and eyes, slim grace and moody, pensive ways.

The young men made advances and became aware that Miss Marryat did not approve. The discovery stimulated their efforts. Showing off as the males of most species are wont to do in attracting the attention of the female, they pranced their horses before the girls' windows, followed their chaperoned walks, sat across the aisle and ogled them at church. Lord Charles had a fascinating trick of moving his scalp and wiggling his ears. The girls nearly choked with giggles. Miss Marryat, disappointed in the results of her training, moved her protégées to a girls' school. They were discovered by romantic German students with gashed cheeks who whispered extravagant compliments as they passed.

Annie played a passive part. It was Emma who encouraged adventure. Annie was more fascinated by Emma than she was by the boys, who meant nothing more than casual encounters. Daily companionship with Emma offered the possibility of the intimacy she craved. For a time she was deeply enamoured. Emma did not respond adequately. She was more interested in the boys.

The next year was spent in Paris. The Empire was at its glittering heyday. Afternoons driving in the Bois, they passed the exquisite Empress, with her little son beside her in the imperial carriage, surrounded by the theatrical splendour of outriders and bodyguard, brilliant uniforms, jewels and sashes and plumes flashing in the sun. Annie

took only a passing interest in the pageantry of Paris. It was too impersonal, too much outside herself.

All unaware, the glory of Gothic cathedrals, the richness of old stained glass, the sensuous appeal of incense, music and vestments burst upon her like a revelation. Annie was just past fourteen. The only religion she had known for the last six years was Miss Marryat's austere Non-conformist Calvinism. This pensive, moody little girl was peculiarly susceptible to the colour, fragrance and pomp of ritualism. She responded to her own hunger for an intimate relationship in a transport of religious devotion. She haunted church services, attended confirmation classes at the English church, read sermons, meditated on the Christ until he became more real than the people about her. She brought to her confirmation all the pent-up ecstasy of her lonely girlhood. She knelt before the altar rail thrilled at being part of the pageant. The Bishop touched her bowed head and passed on. She burned and shivered as under the touch of a celestial lover.

On the surface life went on as before. Her inner self was immersed in religious fantasy. She spent the following year in London with Miss Marryat, studying French, finishing off her young lady accomplishments. In the winter following her sixteenth birthday, she returned to her home. She spent her mornings at the piano. In the afternoon, she read and studied. She had strong likes and dislikes. She delighted in the Iliad, Dante and Plato. She was annoyed by the insatiable questionings of Socrates. She disliked Wordsworth, Cowper, and most of the English poets. Her mother disapproving of love stories, her novel reading was limited to Scott and Kingsley. It would not have hurt her to read love stories, and it might have helped. The average Victorian *jeune fille* read them surreptitiously. Annie did not care enough to bother. She

had found an outlet in visions of a heavenly lover. Young men were a poor substitute. She had a wide choice of eligible youths. The pick of the Oxford and Cambridge Wranglers and honours men coming to Harrow as junior masters provided abundant beaux for garden parties and balls. She came and went among them as impersonal as a beautiful nun—dark, slim, remote, mysterious. She had the simplicity and appealing innocence of Victorial ideals. She wore her hair parted and brushed down, smooth and prim. She had a clear fine skin and regular, well-modelled features, set in an oval face. She was more than a pretty girl. There was a smouldering something in her eyes that made discerning young men remember and wonder about her. When they tried to draw her out however, they were disappointed. She was deficient in humour and had not much small talk, but she played the piano brilliantly, which kept her in demand for parties. She was good at games and made an acceptable partner for croquet and archery behind the ivy-covered walls of Harrow's social world.

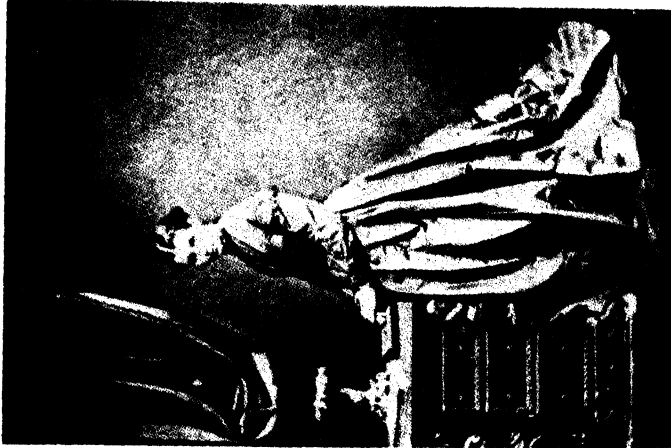
With Henry at Cambridge and his University expenses a heavy strain, Mrs. Wood concealed her worries from Annie. She was an astute woman, quite aware of the hurt her little daughter had suffered in their separation and of the change that had come over her. She was resolved to make up as far as possible in these last years of Annie's girlhood. She petted and waited on her daughter with a devotion that was very pleasant to the girl who had been so lonely. No one but mother might lay out the frock and finery that Annie wore to parties. Mother dressed the masses of curly black hair, laced the slim young body into a stiff bodice, fastened a dozen petticoats, tied bows, pinned on flowers, kissed her and sent her off.

Annie responded gratefully. She gave her mother a



ANNIE WOOD, THE LITTLE GIRL  
THE EARLIEST PHOTOGRAPH OBTAINABLE





THE BRIDE



MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

devotion second only to the secret adoration buried deep in her heart for her mystical lover, the divine bridegroom, Jesus. She had left for the junior masters only an impersonal politeness. When in later years Mrs. Wood told her that some of them had made offers of marriage, it was a shock. Her mother was aware of and deeply concerned over her daughter's indifference. Annie would soon, by the standards of the day, be considered an old maid. But Mrs. Wood put the suitors off, saying that the child was too young.

Throughout her girlhood, Annie had shown herself extremely docile. Her vicarious flirtation at Bonn did not even count. It was her religious metamorphosis which first brought out that aggressive independence which was to be characteristic of her later life. Mrs. Wood's religion was of the simplest low-church type : Dean Stanley and no frills. Non-conformist Miss Marryat sternly disapproved of ritualism as Romish popery, and a first step to perdition. In defiance of both these women who had previously influenced her every action, Annie threw herself into high-church observances with swiftly increasing ardour. She shut herself in her room to spend hours on her knees before a lighted shrine. Among the books in the attic—the house had been a vicarage—she found a pile of old church fathers, Polycarp, Ignatius, the commentaries of Chrysostom, the confessions of Augustine. She imitated the most extreme observances ; denied herself water, food and sleep on fast days, flagellated herself to see if she could bear pain. Her mother gently disapproved of the fasting. She did not know about the flagellation which, indeed, was not severe, and was largely a pose to satisfy Annie's love of the dramatic.

The only effect of her mother's remonstrances was to make Annie more secretive. In an ecstasy that was almost

a trance, she took mass fasting. Her days became mere intervals of waiting for the next celebration. She searched for ardent expressions of the mystical union between the devotee and the bridegroom Christ. Years later, in her *Autobiography*, she quoted these erotic prayers: "Oh that I could embrace Thee with that most burning love of angels. . . . Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Thy love is better than wine. The King hath brought me into His chambers. May the sweet and burning power of Thy love, I beseech Thee, absorb my soul."

With Henry away at Cambridge, she had her mother at last all to herself. But it was too late. Driven by her imperious young ego, she had reached out into the void and clutched an anodyne—intimate, personal connection with divinity, transcending and obliterating the heart-aches of human relationships. She found release in her prayers and visions which so thinly veiled the immanence of human passion.

CHAPTER II  
BRIDE OF HEAVEN

1865-1867

IN unromantic Clapham Annie met romance in the flesh. Her grandfather Morris' house was on Albert Square, in a typical London suburb, a patch of green trees surrounded by a high iron fence, only a block from the thundering trams and buses of Clapham Road. Number Eight was one of a row of dignified, brownstone houses. Within were shiny black walnut and horsehair chairs and sofas ; all very conventional except for Grandfather's workroom. Like Annie, Grandfather could not find contentment in this dull, workaday world. Evenings and holidays he puttered in his workroom, perfecting inventions, happy in his make-believe.

Annie was eighteen in October. She spent the following Christmas with her grandparents. Her mother's youngest sister, her favourite aunt Minnie, only a few years her senior, also had high-church leanings. The Oxford movement was uncovering all the latent ritualism in England. Both girls were delighted to discover that a nearby mission had adopted incense and full canonicals. The mission had not yet built up its following of devoted women who love to wait on the Vicar. The two girls volunteered. They scratched their pink fingers making evergreen ropes and holly wreaths. They played the organ for carol practise. Mr. Hoare, an earnest, hardworking clergyman of the ascetic, high-church type, looked gratefully into their eyes and told them that he could never have managed

without them. They went home suffused with happiness; it was a more than adequate reward.

Annie came back to London for Passion Week. She and Minnie were absorbed in canons and rituals, fasts and penitential prayers, the long hours of Good Friday in a black draped church, the feverish Saturday transformation for the festivity of the Resurrection. Annie made a white cross of camelias and azaleas for the super-altar. Mr. Hoare had a new assistant, Frank Besant, a curate just down from Cambridge. This was his first charge. Annie, intoxicated by the ecclesiastical routine, found a strange fascination in this fledgling curate. Last year he had been an ordinary young man, like the junior masters at Harrow. He was now quite different, one of the Lord's anointed, set apart to assist in the sacred mysteries of the sacraments. She watched him enviously. The young curate, not yet accustomed to the glamour of his priestly office for emotional women, interpreted Miss Wood's interest as personal and found it pleasant.

One evening she retired early to her room. It was clammy with cold, but she would not light the fire in the grate. It was good for her to be uncomfortable. She knelt before the crucified figure on her wall until she passed into half consciousness. Rousing herself, she sat down by her table with Bible, pencil, and paper. She would follow step by step through Christ's last days on earth as recounted by each of the four Apostles. Innocently she drew four long columns on a sheet of foolscap and undertook to parallel the four accounts. To her horror she discovered, as so many others have done before and since, that the four stories do not agree. When she reached the contradictions of the Friday of the crucifixion, she gave up her attempt in an agony of distress.

Her world of religious fantasy reeled about her. But

only for a moment. Remembering the temptations of Augustine and other Saints, she recognized this as crude temptation of the devil, a test of her faith. She flushed that she should have been momentarily shaken, and murmuring Tertullian's "*Credo quia impossibile*" ("I believe because it is impossible") she fell to her knees in an ecstasy of prayer.

Annie had not an original mind, but she had unusual facility in analysis and organization of argument. She had never known a doubt in four years of religious devotion. It is significant that at the moment of meeting Frank Besant, she should agonize over this notorious difficulty of Christian exegesis, the lack of harmony of the four gospels. It was an attempt to escape. But the scales were loaded against her. Her marvellous fantasy world and her celestial bridegroom, personified by Frank Besant, supplemented the curate's deficiencies.

The young priest belonged to a family of ten boys and girls. His eldest brother had carried off high honours at Cambridge as Senior Wrangler. His next brother, also a Cambridge man, was to become the famous novelist, Walter Besant. Originally destined for the Church, Walter had only escaped by the strength of his revolt. After passing his preliminary theological examinations, Walter wrote, "I put myself in communication with the Bishop's secretary, and with great depression of spirit prepared myself for perjury because by this time, I understood that the white tie would choke me. Then I heard rumours . . . I was not sound on the Atonement . . . Christmas came. I was to be ordained in the spring; the Bishop had my name. And then, Oh Happiness! a door of release was thrown open. . . ." He found a last-minute opening to teach in South Africa

and gladly exiled himself for seven years on the veldt rather than enter the Church.

Frank Besant lacked his brother's imagination—and rebellion. He was a matter-of-fact person and had been twenty-eighth Wrangler in Mathematics at Cambridge. He was content to take orders, as offering a safe and easy livelihood. He was not so matter-of-fact, however, as to forget the pleasant impression left by the attractive Miss Wood at Eastertide. She and her mother and Aunt Minnie were spending the summer at St. Leonards, on the South Coast. Frank Besant decided that it was just the place for a week of his summer holiday. As he and Annie were the only two young people in the party, they were thrown much together. They took long walks, chaperones following at a discreet distance, down the sandy beach, exploring the ruins left by William the Conqueror, and trying to reconstruct the Battle of Hastings. Besant got a horse from the livery stable. Annie rode her favourite black mare, Gipsy Queen. With Aunt Minnie, they galloped over the Sussex Downs.

Annie was unable to measure Frank Besant by the standards of an ordinary man. Stripped of his surplice, away from the gloom and fragrance of his chancel, he was only a callow stripling. But for her, he still trailed clouds of glory, the reflected splendour of the Divine Bridegroom. It gave her an exquisite thrill when he held her tiny foot in the stirrup of his hands as she sprang to the back of Gipsy Queen.

It was their last afternoon. He was leaving on the six o'clock train. They walked down the long sea front, dotted with bathchairs and parasols to the quaint town of Hastings, with its salty smells and its checkerboard of weathered sails and fish nets spread to dry on the yellow beach. They talked of trifles, recalled incidents of the

week, wondered when they would meet again. Earlier in the week, Annie had essayed theological discussion. She could not resist making familiar references to Clement of Rome and Polycarp. Her curate was chillingly taciturn. He showed none of the surprised response she met in older clergymen to whom she had taken her girlish problems. She accepted the rebuff and their talk lingered over small things.

On this last day he was oddly distrait. Suddenly she understood. Unconscious of any romantic preliminaries, she realized with consternation that he was assuming an understanding between them. Annie was aghast. She remonstrated. The bungling curate fell back on the rigid conventions of the day. If she were not in love with him, she should not have permitted him to be with her so constantly. She had trifled with his affections. She was caught in a whirlpool of emotion—pleased pride, hurt pride, fascination, annoyance, pleasure, chagrin. She tried to assure him of her innocence in the matter. He acted superciliously and she took refuge in silence. Her suitor had to catch his train. By postponing his declaration until the last minute, he had avoided the embarrassments of courtship. With an easy male arrogance, he bound her to silence. There was no time to see her mother before he left. It would be dishonourable of her to break his confidence. It might prejudice Mrs. Wood against him if she knew that he had spoken to her daughter before asking her permission.

On their way home, at the end of the summer, Mrs. Wood and Annie visited grandfather Morris in Clapham. Annie was miserably unsettled. Another winter in Harrow suddenly seemed intolerable. Mrs. Wood had little sympathy with her daughter's religious intensity. She frankly expressed her dislike of the tinsel of Ritualism.



Annie's ecstasies seemed to her hysterical. The girl chaffed against her mother's quiet disapproval. She rebelled against her sheltered life, with no outlets except books and tiresome visits to the village poor. The romantic glamour of Passion Week, the illusive fascination of the young curate on his holiday had left her fantasy world less satisfying. Yet her curate seen again in the flesh had proved woefully disappointing. She shrank from him and longed for the solitude of her room before her crucifix.

When young Besant spoke to Mrs. Wood, she refused for several months to give her consent. She saw that the two young people were ill-matched. She appreciated Besant's incapacity to understand her daughter and give her the easy rein which alone would make life possible. She was disappointed too in the young man. The Harrow masters offered the pick of the University honours men—position, wealth, charm. Frank Besant had none of these. Her clever, beautiful daughter should make a brilliant match. Sparring for time, she urged that the child was still too young. The hint of opposition drove Annie to a decision.

Her engagement announced, the girl felt compunctions. Did she really want to marry this man? She swung back to a haunting fear of marriage—it was impossible. She determined to free herself. Mrs. Wood was adamant. She had hesitated to give her consent, but, once having made the announcement, there was no going back. Girls who broke their engagements were in a class with women who sought divorces.

"You will have more opportunities of doing good as a minister's wife than as anything else," her mother told her. Her suitor's priestly office was one unfailing consolation. Whatever marriage might or might not mean, there was always her position as the Vicar's wife. It

was as close to being a priest of the church as she, a woman, might hope to come. Her friend of later years, W. T. Stead, summed it up in an epigram : " She could not be the bride of Heaven, and therefore became the bride of Mr. Frank Besant. He was hardly an adequate substitute."

CHAPTER III  
SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS

1867-1873

ANNIE WOOD and the Reverend Frank Besant were married in December, 1867. After a brief honeymoon in Paris, they returned to Cheltenham where he was Master in a boys' school. The little town was nicknamed Asia Minor because so many retired Anglo-Indians came to drink the waters. It was also popular with the hunting set. The average English bride would envy Annie Besant her entrée as the wife of a Church of England curate to this fashionable spa in the Cotswold hills. To the young bride, those first months of married life proved a tragic anti-climax to a girlhood of ecstatic daydreams.

Annie Besant has always remembered her wedding night with horror. She attributes her excessive reaction to her ignorance. She says that she had no more idea of the marriage relation than if she had been four years old instead of twenty. Her deprecation in her *Autobiography* of the perfect ignorance of young girls is the only criticism ever implied of her adored mother.

“ My dreamy life, into which no knowledge of evil had been allowed to penetrate, in which I had been guarded from all pain, shielded from all anxiety, kept innocent on all questions of sex, was no preparation for married existence, and left me defenceless to face a rude awakening. Looking back on it all, I deliberately say that no more fatal blunder can be made than to train a girl to womanhood in ignorance of all life's duties and burdens, and

then to let her face them for the first time away from the mother's breast.

"Many an unhappy marriage dates from its very beginning, from the terrible shock to a young girl's sensitive modesty and pride, her helpless bewilderment and fear. Men, with their public school and college education, or the knowledge that comes by living in the outside world may find it hard to realize the possibility of such infantile ignorance in many girls. . . . No mother should let her daughter, blindfold, slip her neck under the marriage yoke."

While modern thought endorses this point of view, reticence and ignorance were the tradition of her day, and most girls adjusted themselves without ill effects. Annie Besant's romance, however, was shattered on her wedding night. Her fastidious pride was touched by a seeming lack of consideration. Rebelling against adult responsibilities for which she was ill-prepared, she tried to turn back to childhood and brooded over her beloved mother. For a time, she was acutely homesick.

It did not help matters that the young couple made their first home in lodgings. Annie Besant had never shown domestic tendencies, but she might have found a thrill in choosing wall-papers and matching rugs and curtains. Moreover, her schoolmaster husband had no church, depriving her of the parish duties, altar guilds and carrying jellies to the sick which had figured so alluringly in the aircastles of her girlhood.

Annie Besant has never had many women friends. She has preferred both to work and play with men. In Cheltenham she had no choice and she found the women very dull. Twenty-five years later, she described their small talk with vivid irritability: "ladies who talked to me only about babies and servants—troubles [*sic*] of

which I knew nothing, and which bored me unutterably—and who were as uninterested in all that had filled my life in theology, in politics, in science, as I was uninterested in the discussion on the housemaid's young man, and on the cook's extravagance in using 'butter, when dripping would have done perfectly well, my dear'—was it wonderful that I became timid, dull and depressed?"

The little town with its Anglo-Indians and its sufferers from dyspepsia and obesity bored her. She wasted little time in feeling sorry for herself, however. By the end of the first year, she had made a shuddering adjustment to her marriage, had borne her husband a son, Arthur Digby Besant, and herself found solace in writing two or three short stories for *The Family Herald*. The only fiction she has ever written, they suggest the trend of a new world of make-believe. *Sunshine and Shadows* appeared four months after her marriage :

"The door opened and a young girl bounded eagerly in, but stopped blushing crimson when she saw the young, handsome stranger, so different from her well remembered playfellow." The bounding heroine had long, drooping curls, a rosy mouth and no mother. She and her indulgent father were returning from seven years on the continent. Shortly after her inevitable marriage to the young, handsome stranger, she was thrown from a horse and crippled. Confined to her bed for life, she found consolation in establishing a home for incurables and playing Lady Bountiful to the villagers ; her adoring husband carrying out her every whim.

The plot is slight and offers neither suspense nor character interest. It is a fantasy rather than a story. The title is autobiographical ; Sunshine, the pet name of her childhood—and Shadows. The martyrdom of the heroine suggests a morbid trend. Annie Besant identified herself

with her and found satisfaction in making this broken woman surmount defeat and dominate her environment—her husband through his affections, the village through her benefactions. The crippled heroine symbolized Annie Besant's aching disillusionment in her marriage. Her heroine's triumph over impossible obstacles represented her own hoped for escape from this apparent impasse. Revolt and defiance were even then churning below the surface of her consciousness. For an unknown young woman to establish a market for her stories in that day showed an energy and initiative which was the product of this very churning.

She received thirty shillings for her first story and knew the thrill, which even the emancipated girl of to-day experiences, as she held in her hand the money she had earned, symbol of independence, sole anodyne for her lifelong humiliation of being "only a girl." The thirty shillings gave her new impetus and she undertook a serial-novel. The editor of *The Family Herald* returned it as too political for his pages. If she would write a serial of purely domestic interest and of equal merit, he would accept it. Eagerly as Annie Besant was struggling toward independence, she neglected this opportunity rather than harness her imagination to an uncongenial domestic theme. Instead, she indulged her religious bent by writing a pamphlet on the duty of fasting and a more ambitious book, *The Lives of the Black Saints*. She was unable to find a publisher for either.

Her babies peremptorily interrupted her literary efforts. A year and a half after the birth of her son, she had a second child, a daughter, born prematurely. The following spring of 1871, she was absorbed in nursing both children through the whooping cough. The boy was soon well, but the delicate baby girl developed complications,

bronchitis, pneumonia, and for weeks lay at the point of death. When the child was finally out of danger, Annie Besant collapsed, partly from exhaustion, but largely because of her mounting revolt against the tyranny of Providence.

Bending over the scarcely breathing child through anxious days and nights, a sullen question had forced itself into consciousness: "Is God good?" She was horrified, and the world again seemed to reel about her that she could question the existence of that loving Christ who had been the heart of her girlhood daydreams. She confided her questionings to the sympathetic parish Vicar, and together they struggled to save her faith. She thought it was all resentment against a God who would torture a helpless, innocent baby, born prematurely and handicapped by long illness at the outset of life. But even the most devoted mother love does not produce such lasting and extreme revolt as Annie Besant was to know.

Relations with her husband slid from bad to worse. Describing herself at this period, she was, she says, "accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, very hot tempered and proud as Lucifer." The emergence of these qualities in such courageous women as Annie Besant has contributed largely to the recent revolution in the position of women. Sixty years ago, however, they disqualified a woman to adjust herself to the demands of the mid-Victorian male. An editorial on "The Modern Young Gentlewoman" which appeared in *The Family Herald* in the same month as "Sunshine and Shadows" brings back something of the musty complacency of the stronger sex.

The article presented a "true and unsmirched picture of our sweet, modern English girl." She lives quietly at home, "is very often alone, but always in company with

pure thoughts ; and if she loves now and then to hear the village news and discourse of her fellows, she shuts her ears to scandal and seasons the sorrows of others with pity and their sins and sorrows with charity. She has always some poorer boy or girl or some awkward servant dependent upon her whether she lives in a castle or a cottage. . . .” The one gleam of humour was quite unconscious : “ She is a clever and amusing companion, for she listens with freshness and a will.” That is one secret which women, in spite of many changes, have not forgotten.

The editor views with alarm the younger generation and—it has a familiar ring—he discovered that their deterioration was largely due to American influence. The result of the American war—it was the Civil War then—“ has brought with it an inconsiderate worship of success and of everything which is American.” At the end he neatly summarized the 1868 young English gentlewoman : “ Next to God, the being she most reverences is a noble, brave, true-hearted man. Next to the Devil, that which she detests is what she has heard of and yet doubts—a wicked woman.”

Romance for Annie Besant did not get off to a fair start. Frustration of her childish affection for her parents proved an abnormally severe blow to her egotism. Instinctively, she protected herself against further rebuffs by centring her emotional interest in herself and her world of make-believe. It was his symbolic relationship to the hero of this make-believe world which enabled Frank Besant to break through the hedge surrounding his sleeping beauty. Masked in priestly glamour, he carried off his bride and there his success abruptly ended. Every further step was ominous. Their wedding night remained in her memory a lifelong horror. She was cramped and restless in their new home. She was bored by her neighbours. Her effort



to escape to her world of fantasy by writing stories was checked by the burdens of motherhood and the critical illness of her baby. She tried conscientiously to fulfil her new duties but the persistent infringement of her individuality was intolerable. With a nervous collapse she went to bed to smoulder and brood.

It was a day which denied all right of independent self-expression to woman. She must find her satisfaction vicariously in husband and children. Revolt against a husband, however tyrannical, was impious. "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as unto the Lord." Annie Besant, shrinking from the issue, rationalized her rebellion and ascribed her conflict to religious scruples. She had had no difficulty in dismissing her first theological doubts before her marriage with a Latin counsel of perfection, "*Credo quia impossibile.*" Now it was less simple. Her religious and personal life were involved in inextricable confusion. She began by questioning the divinity of Christ, whose surrogate she had married. She was rebelling not only against her loveless marriage, but against the crippling of her independence, the lack of opportunity to express her eager, ambitious personality, growing every year more restive against the conventional woman's rôle.

To a man of Frank Besant's unimaginative precision, his wife's passionate concern over religious dogma was incomprehensible. It was her business to think of his comfort and that of his children. Living up to the traditions of his class, he tried at first to be patient and persuasive. Unluckily, he had matched himself against a vastly superior force, though he never all his life long suspected the fact. Little as there may be to admire, it would be unfair to belittle the difficulties of his situation. A two-fold weight of authority and tradition stood behind

him : the sacredness of the Established Church and the duty of woman to subordinate herself to her husband. His baffled puzzlement as to how to handle his obstreperous young wife comes down to us across the years, pathetic, even tragic. In the decades since, thousands of women have defied convention and thousands of men have known the bewildered fury of this young Vicar. There may indeed be men reading these pages who have experienced a similar rage. They are paying the inevitable price for a change in the social *mores* and from their own experience, will doubtless have a fellow feeling for young Frank Besant.

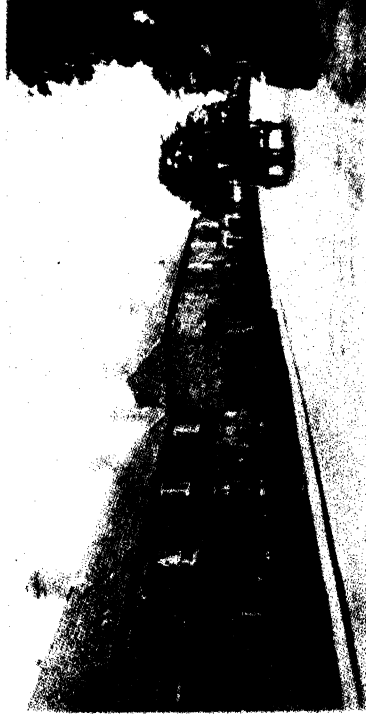
As the months passed and Annie persisted in making herself unhappy over pedantic sophistries, Besant decided that, women being totally irrational, it was useless to try to reason with her and that he must break in this turbulent creature. It became for both a trial of strength and endurance. Annie Besant has been reticent about her life with her husband and about the degree of violence in their quarrels. Some years after leaving him, she sued for divorce, specifying acts of cruelty. Besant denied these charges. She never afterwards publicly referred to the matter. Certainty of the exact situation eludes us. It is probable that both lost their self-control and that the quarrels involved loss of dignity if not actual violence. Whatever the degree, to the proud and sensitive girl who had been Annie Wood, unaccustomed to so much as contradiction, the indignity of these scenes was intolerable. Her sense of frustration reached a climax in the summer following her children's illness.

After a humiliating quarrel, Frank Besant had stormed out of the house. She leaned against the drawing-room window in impotent rage against the romantic falsity of her girlhood dreams of God and man. The grey twilight

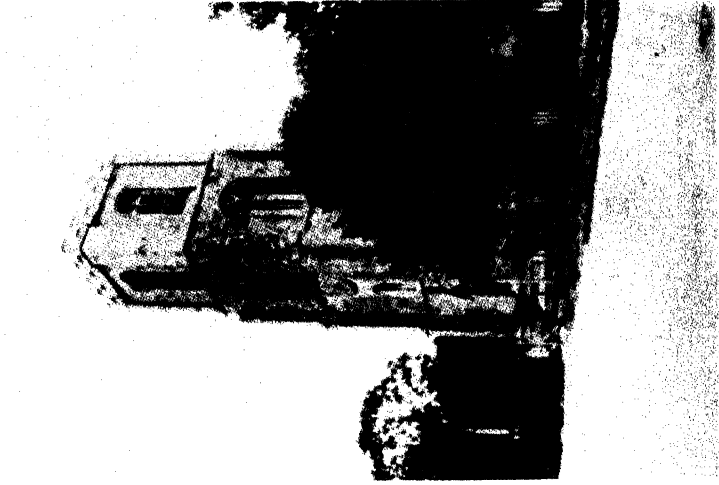
sky reflected the chill hopelessness of her mood. The blackness of another night was settling about her. She could endure it no longer. Casting about for a means of escape, she remembered a bottle of chloroform, used in her baby's illness. She ran upstairs and brought the bottle back to the window under the grey evening sky. As she stood pulling the stopper out of the bottle, it was not the thought of her children, but her own will to live that asserted itself, and she heard a voice within her whispering, "Oh coward, coward, who used to dream of martyrdom and cannot bear a few short years of pain." She threw the bottle far out into the shrubbery and fell fainting to the floor.

Still cherishing visions of the opportunities of a Vicar's wife, Annie Besant appealed to her father's cousin, Lord Hatherly. He secured for her husband the Crown living of Sibsey, a village of 800 inhabitants in Lincolnshire. Here, once more, she tried to adjust herself to the woman's rôle. Eagerly exploring her new home, she found a sleepy village of farm labourers living in ivy-covered cottages. At the crossroads, a seat ran round a spreading elm. Here the village lads gathered. They were the only sign of life, except for the clopety-clop of a horse drawing a bright yellow farm cart down the dusty road.

Her husband's church pleased Annie Besant. Its Early Norman windows and square tower went back to the eleventh century. The high, rounded Norman arches gave it the stateliness of a miniature cathedral. Beside the church, through the graveyard, under an arched gateway, she followed a worn path to the Vicarage, a rectangular plaster house, severely plain with long French windows. They opened on terraces sloping down to a garden and rose arbour, enclosed by trees and hedges and a high stone



*Top, SIBSEY VICARAGE. Bottom, SIBSEY MAIN STREET*



*SAINT MARGARET'S, SIBSEY*



ANNIE BESANT AND HER DAUGHTER.



REV. FRANK BESANT, M.A.

wall. To one side lay an orchard, kitchen garden and barns. For the average English woman, loving country life and domesticity, it was an ideal home. The high walls glowered at Annie Besant like a prison.

Her husband's flock of farm labourers in smocks and high boots tugged respectfully at their forelocks. Their little girls bobbed and curtsied. Mrs. Besant did not find the anticipated pleasure in ministering to them. For society, there were only the clergy of the neighbouring villages, Tory and prim. She had nothing to divert her from brooding over religious scruples. Again she agonized over the tortures of hell and the doctrine of the atonement. She read more sermons, Maurice, Robertson, Mansell's Bampton lectures. She exchanged voluminous letters with her Cheltenham Vicar, full of Greek and Hebrew phrases and erudite definitions of goodness, love, inspiration.

Mr. Besant was well content with Sibsey. He diverted himself with mathematical problems. Ordering a tree cut down, he would calculate its height, pace it off and stand on the spot. If the top branch so much as brushed his nose he would frown and mutter "Slight miscalculation." He was superlatively methodical and soon found his opportunity. In the parish chest in the vestry he discovered a loose mass of yellow parchments and registers. They went back to 1568. The older Latin entries were difficult to decipher. He was to spend most of his life poring over these old records, translating and transferring, indexing and docketing them. He became an expert in paleography, copying and editing the deeds and charters of Reevesby Abbey and similar documents for publication. But this was after Annie Besant had left him to his own devices. During those earlier years, the attention of both was mainly centred on the mortal conflict raging between them.

By 1872, the year after moving to Sibsey, the emotional strain had undermined Annie Besant's health and she had an attack of congestion of the lungs, known to-day as bronchitis. She experienced a mental agony only possible to an intense and egocentric nature. An ordinary woman would have been crushed into spiritless subservience. A less high-spirited girl might have found escape in lifelong invalidism or neuroticism. Annie Besant was to mould this impasse into a stepping-stone to her career. Convalescent from the bronchitis, she spent the autumn in London with her mother and it was in this rebellious frame of mind that she went to hear the Rev. Charles Voysey.

For three years he had been the topic of scandalized gossip in prim clerical circles. An Oxford man, Mr. Voysey was Vicar of a neighbouring Yorkshire village. Replying to a smug pronouncement from York Cathedral, he had defiantly stated that he would rather be a righteous atheist than a man chiefly concerned about his orthodoxy. This sounds mild enough, but sixty years ago the very word atheist was taboo. Hovering around the fireplace after clerical dinner parties, Annie Besant watched the beads and bugles flutter on the black silk bosoms of her sister Vicaresses. They shook their heads and made clucking noises about the depravity of Mr. Voysey. Offences accumulating, he was tried for heresy. Clerical garden parties forgot the Franco-Prussian War in their excitement. Found guilty by an ecclesiastical court, Voysey appealed to the Privy Council, a civil body. From her Vicarage garden, Annie Besant eagerly followed the struggle which lasted for two years. In the end, Voysey was unfrocked and lost his living, which had amounted to about £110 a year, plus Vicarage. On this he had maintained a wife, eight children, and an aged mother. He

went to London and soon attracted a following outside the Church.

Annie Besant, aglow with the pleasure-pain of her rebellion, eagerly went to hear him. She was fascinated to find another rebel against the Established Church. There hovered about him, like the fragrance of autumn, the glamour of holy orders. The insurgency of this ordained priest furnished a precedent for her own revolt. She introduced herself and they found that they had much in common. He was charmed by this young and beautiful woman who quoted the church fathers, ancient and modern, as fluently as a theological student primed for examinations. She submitted to him some essays, the product of her suffering. Mr. Voysey, of the susceptible, emotional type suggested by his career, was deeply impressed. Wasting this lovely flower in the swampy fens of Lincolnshire must be prevented.

He introduced her to Thomas Scott, the wealthiest and most influential member of his circle. After years of travel and hunting all over the world, Scott had settled down and made his home a centre for liberal propaganda, editing and distributing a monthly series of heretical pamphlets and establishing a salon of polite revolt. Here Annie Besant met people of her own sort, cultured, thoughtful men and women who shared her questionings; there was another Church of England rebel, Bishop Colenso of Natal, and E. Vansittart Neale and Sarah Hennell, names already forgotten but notorious in their day for daring to question the status quo.

They were profoundly reassuring to Annie Besant. She was charmed by Mr. Scott's distinguished bearing, reminiscent of his boyhood as a page in the Catholic court of Charles X. With a captivating mixture of shyness and assurance, she looked up at the leonine white head and



into the keen eyes under shaggy white eyebrows. Voysey showed him her essay on "Inspiration" and suggested that she write some pamphlets for his current series questioning the divinity of Christ. Mr. Scott enthusiastically endorsed the idea. In her work, Mrs. Besant has amply justified the confidence which she inspires. But her beauty has always helped.

This autumn in London ended the racking chaos of Annie Besant's conflict. For another year and a half complications and painful decisions continued. But the reassurance derived from Mr. Voysey and Mr. Scott resolved the first and most intense phase of her struggle. Her active correspondence with the Cheltenham Vicar suddenly languished. His place in her life had been filled by a more congenial adviser. Under Mr. Voysey's sympathetic encouragement, one by one she surrendered her dogmas, eternal torture, vicarious atonement, even the divinity of Christ. She recalled with sudden pleasure her father's scepticism and secretly agreed with his patronizing tolerance of her mother's piety as fit only for women. The autumn slipped away, a succession of discoveries and adventures. Haunting memories of Sibsey Vicarage, the irascible husband and helpless children awaiting her return subtly shadowed her pleasure.

Despite the thrill of these new friendships, she doggedly determined to give the Established Church one more chance, but she loaded the dice in her choice of an arbiter. Instead of consulting one of the famous Liberals, such as her mother's favourite, Dean Stanley, she journeyed down to Oxford to see the celebrated Dean Pusey. She found a short, stout gentleman in a cassock, looking like a comfortable monk. He did not respond sympathetically to her distress, but treated her like a penitent schoolgirl, cross-questioning her and, when she explained

her doubts, reproved her sharply for blasphemy. He refused to recommend more books.

"No, no," he said with a shudder, "you have read too much already. You must pray, you must pray." He countered her skilful dialectical questions with admonitions that it was not her duty to ascertain the truth.

"It is your duty to accept and believe the truth as laid down by the Church. . . . Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." He rebuked her for intellectual pride.

Piqued by his stolid dogmatism, she rose and while expressing thanks for his courtesy, neatly tossed him her defiance. Quietly she told him that she must follow her conscience, publicly leave the Church and take the consequences. At last he appreciated the mettle of his questioner. She looked a slender, clinging female, but she was brazenly threatening him. He flushed with anger.

"I forbid you to speak of your disbelief," he cried, "I forbid you to lead into your own lost state the souls for whom Christ died." Later, when Mrs. Besant's eloquence was leading thousands into atheism, did the Dean have the humility to wish that he had tried less high-handed methods? Probably not. Annie Besant says that she came away "slowly and sadly, knowing that her last chance of escape had failed her." She could not admit it, but the pulse in the secret recess of her heart quickened its beat over the chance of work which was gradually taking shape. She had been at work on it half unconsciously long, long in advance, like a prisoner tunnelling his way to freedom.

Compromises and fresh quarrels dragged out the painful process of breaking away from home for nearly a year. Returning to the Vicarage, Annie Besant confronted her

husband with new authority. Frank Besant found himself agreeing to incredible compromises. Denying the divinity of Christ, she used this abstruse dogma as the fulcrum of a lever to move her entire world. With a relentless glitter in her beautiful eyes, she insisted that she could not compromise with the Truth, she would not "live a lie," she could no longer receive the Holy Communion. Besant, to her surprise as well as his own, agreed that if she would attend church as usual, she might withdraw from the communion service.

It was not a practicable programme. The village gossips talked of nothing but the scandal of the Vicar's wife not attending the communion service. When Besant realized the comment his wife was exciting, the blood in his veins froze in horror. His brother, Walter Besant, goaded him to assert his authority and stop his wife's nonsense. Walter, himself a sceptic, had escaped holy orders with prayers of thanksgiving. He had no tolerance however for non-conformity which might incriminate the family name. What, he raged, would the county families think ?

From the seclusion of her Vicarage, Annie Besant wrote two pamphlets which Mr. Scott promptly published. As she pulled off their wrappers, they brought her a tantalizing sense of the freedom beyond her reach. She felt more than ever a prisoner. The short prefaces by Mr. Voysey gave her a glow of pleasure. In their quaint and stilted formality still lingers the aroma of masculine admiration : "The following pages were put into my hands by a lady, the wife of a beneficed clergyman. Not wishing to compromise her husband, she has withheld her name from publication and deserves all honour for the concession."

Although anonymous, the pamphlets proved a

penultimate straw. "Supposing," stormed Walter, "she should be identified as 'the wife of a beneficed clergyman'!" Under oath in court six years later, Annie Besant and her husband told flatly contradictory stories of the writing of these pamphlets. She said that she showed them to him in manuscript and that he agreed to their appearance on condition that they should be anonymous. He denied ever seeing them, said he forbade her to write them and supposed that had settled the matter until, to his horror, he saw them in print. Like the charges of cruelty against Besant, there is no further evidence on the matter. These contradictions and discrepancies recur from time to time all through Annie Besant's life.

Out of the meagre resources of her Lincolnshire village, Annie Besant deftly created the next determining event. One afternoon she had locked herself into the old stone church to practise on the organ. She was restless and distraught. A spring breeze came blowing over the quiet graves across the musty aisles. Only she and that breath of spring were alive in all the sleepy village. Her hands fell from the organ in tempestuous discontent. On an impulse she sprang up the steps of the worm-eaten wooden pulpit and looked out over the empty pews. The eternity of Sundays that she must endure her husband's prosings suffocated her. Ah, if she were only a man, what sermons she would preach!

She declaimed a text and was fascinated by the sound of her voice. With the instinctive rhythm of the orator, her pent-up passion broke into balanced sentences. An intoxication of pleasant childhood associations swept over her; the rolling thunder of Milton's verse; her facility in extemporizing at morning and evening prayer; a recurrent daydream of standing a lone, heroic figure

- before vast crowds, sweeping away their doubts in the flood of her eloquence and becoming a great religious leader. This spring afternoon, the wakening passion of womanhood gave new force to her girlish fantasy. Her voice, rolling down the aisles echoed back under the stone arches, filling her with the awe of an Annunciation. At that moment she knew that the gift of speech was hers and that it offered her the means of achieving recognition, a living, power, fame.

For eight centuries those soaring Norman arches had resounded to the measured discourses of a man's world. To-day they echoed to the more delicate accents of a woman's voice. Instead of the humdrum firstlies and secondlies of a country parson, there beat against those lofty pillars the passionate defiance of a restless and unhappy woman. Demure English wives and maidens still sit beneath the square stone tower in respectful silence, their heads covered as St. Paul commanded, listening week by week to the dull booming of the village Vicar. For a moment on that spring afternoon sixty years ago, the old church came out of its mediaeval isolation and witnessed a tableau so modern that it reaches on into the future. Spellbound by the sense of her power, Annie Besant leaned over the side of the crumbling pulpit and her rich voice swelled through the bays in passionate peroration. Half dazed, she came down the narrow stairs and, unlocking the doors, left the old church to musty silence and the night.

CHAPTER IV  
A HEAVY DOOR CLOSING

1873-1874

THE suspense of despair is painful. The suspense of hope is delirious. The next few months of dawning hope were agonizing for Annie Besant. Momentarily, she shrank before the power of tradition and took refuge in a feminine pretext. After another nervous collapse, she escaped to her mother who was living with her brother Henry. A London specialist pronounced her case nervous exhaustion and a disturbance of the heart.

On the pretext of her health, she announced that she was not going back to Sibsey. She was through. Her mother, whose courage she inherited, had displayed her independence along conventional lines. It was in her passion for the hall marks of her social world that Mrs. Wood had dared assert herself. She realized how harshly an 1870 England would judge her beautiful, impulsive daughter, separated from a Vicar husband. In an agony, the white-haired woman fell to her knees and, clasping her daughter about the waist, implored her to relent. Her docile little girl was gone for ever. In her place stood a woman, hardened by suffering, but even more by an imperious necessity for freedom.

Frank Besant pursued his wife to London. They had a final stormy scene. She clung to her moral issue with the intensity of desperation. Continuing to receive Communion would be hypocrisy. Truth was the dearest thing in her life. She would not live a lie—it is a recurring

phrase. She has always maintained this rationalization, never admitting even to herself that hers was a revolt against a life intolerable to a woman of her temperament. Although she had not guessed how cruel men and women could be, how venomous their tongues, she insists that she would go through it all again rather than live under the burden of an acted lie.

The issue seemed obstinate fanaticism to Frank Besant. Losing his temper, he stamped about the room and used violent language. Her family could not help overhearing the uproar. They had held off as long as they had hopes of Annie's relenting. Now they surrendered and consulted a barrister. Annie told of her husband's repeated outbursts of violence. As conventional opinion sided entirely with the Vicar, it seems probable that she established her charges of cruelty, for she secured a deed of separation with an allowance of £110 a year from her husband's income of £400. The deed gave the boy to the father and Mabel to the mother, with holiday visits to the other parent. Annie Besant seemed curiously resigned to giving up her son, and in accounts of this period scarcely mentioned him again. The parting between wife and husband was bitter. Mr. Besant refused to share their furniture or to let her take anything more than her own and her baby's clothing.

In Italy in the summer of 1879, Ibsen wrote the final lines of his play *The Doll's House*—"from below is heard the reverberation of a heavy door closing." Annie Besant, pioneer, closed her Vicarage door six years before Norah's creator sent her forth on her career of closing doors in all the theatres of the world.

Henry Wood, revolving in those conservative grooves which brought him an early peerage, shrank with horror from family notoriety. He offered his sister Annie a home

if she would give up her heretical friends and keep quiet. She coolly refused his offer. She had not gone through all this turmoil to exchange one Victorian master for another, her brother least of all. Mrs. Wood, who, if she had had her own home would gladly have sheltered her daughter, was as unable to help her now as she had been in Annie's childhood. Mrs. Wood was passing through deep waters. After years of cheerful drudgery for her son, Mrs. Wood had looked forward to rest and a modest independence in her old age. At the moment when she was relieved of the financial burden of her children, she was left penniless. The lawyer in charge of her affairs misappropriated her lifetime savings. She went to live with Henry, but in her humiliation she practised the most painful economies. She sat all day without a fire in her room and often went out at noon in order to avoid sharing the midday meal. Annie Besant bitterly resented her brother's failure to show their mother more consideration. She chafed against the fate that made him the man and her the woman. She resolved to care for her mother herself.

Facing the world with a sickly baby girl, no practical training and total resources of £9, payable monthly, she dismissed the idea of a furnished room or boarding house and determined to take a small house so that she might have not only her child but also her mother with her. She had shown indifference, if not revulsion, to the two homes of her married life. This house where hers would be the dominant personality inspired her with unflagging interest. Less than a year after leaving her husband, she triumphantly bore her mother off from her brother's home to her own. She had shown great courage and resourcefulness in achieving that first goal.

Rather than accept her brother's hospitality, she with her little girl spent their first few weeks in London visiting



the Moncure Conways whom she had met at the Scotts. Virginian by birth, Harvard man and Unitarian minister, Mr. Conway had been summoned to London to build up the South Place Society, a quasi-Unitarian group. He was the first American Annie Besant had known and she was surprised to find that he was already on friendly terms with most of the literary and artistic celebrities of London. She let him persuade her to prolong her visit in order to translate German legends for his book on daemonology. In the meantime, she was looking about, answering advertisements of work for ladies in reduced circumstances. It is a humiliating experience and has caused the surrender of countless women in her position. She tried fancy work and found that after days of stitching, she had earned four shillings and five pence which little more than covered the cost of materials.

The first winter, in exchange for board and lodging for Mabel and herself, she took a position as governess in a country Vicarage. This enabled her to save her monthly allowance for the new home. She had even selected the house before leaving London and arranged to take possession the following Easter. It was out in Norwood, near her good friends the Scotts. She soon had her hands full at the Vicarage. The cook and waitress left and the children fell ill. Annie Besant hurried her own child off to her grandmother and remained to nurse the Vicar's children through diphtheria and scarlet fever. This ordeal was scarcely over when she was summoned to London by Mrs. Wood's dangerous illness. All through the spring she nursed her mother.

A curious episode ensued, chiefly significant because of the interpretation given to it by Annie Besant. Mrs. Wood, who knew that she was dying, longed to receive Communion once more, but insisted that Annie join her.

Annie gently told her mother that it was impossible ; that no clergyman would administer to her, knowing that she was a heretic ; and that she could not “ soil her honesty ” by concealing her attitude from some strange clergyman. Mrs. Wood insisted that she could not die happy unless they received Communion together. To humour her mother, Annie vainly applied to several clergymen. Finally she went to see Dean Stanley. This most liberal of Churchmen promptly acceded for the sake, he said, of the dying mother. After eighteen months of abstention, and for the last time, Annie Besant partook of Holy Communion. One afternoon many years later, strolling along the Embankment, W. T. Stead, the famous journalist and one of Annie Besant’s most devoted friends, told this story to Canon Liddon. Stead said afterwards that the Canon shuddered with horror at the sacrilege to which he conceived that the Dean had been a guilty party.

The incident is curiously out of keeping with Annie Besant’s picture of her mother. Mrs. Wood stands out as an intelligent, capable woman, shrewdly understanding her children, supremely unselfish in her devotion to them. She had understood, as her daughter never could, the perils of Annie’s religious ecstasies. One day, as she lay dying, grief-stricken that she must leave her daughter at this critical juncture, she said softly,

“ My little one, you have never made me sad or sorry except for your own sake ; you have always been too religious.” Warily turning her head on the pillow, she repeated,

“ Yes, it has been darling Annie’s only fault ; she has always been too religious.”

It is improbable that Mrs. Wood, dying, keenly aware of the complexities of the situation, would have allowed herself to indulge an eccentric whim. It is more likely

that Annie Besant took an unconscious but very human delight in pulling off this spectacular *coup*. She had broken up her home and marriage over this very issue. Now that she was free, she could admit, by implication, that receiving Communion was not really a matter of vital importance.

In spite of the demands of her mother's illness, Annie Besant arranged through the Scotts to buy furniture from a manufacturer on the instalment plan. She furnished a bed and sitting-room for her mother, and planned to sleep on the floor. Going out to make final arrangements, she found that Mrs. Scott had furnished a room for her as a delightful surprise.

Irked to remain under her brother's roof, even in this emergency, the moment that she could secure the doctor's permission, she drove her mother to the new house. It was early May. A spell of enchanted beauty lay over the quiet streets, streaked with sunshine, and the blossoming trees and hedges. But the gallant woman who had braved the world to give her son the education of a gentleman could do nothing more for her daughter, not even remain beside her to give her the protection of a mother's presence. The day after moving to Norwood, she was suddenly taken worse. Again and again as she lay dying, she moaned, "I am leaving you alone." Two days later the end came and the silence of death filled the new house, leaving Annie Besant alone and desolate.

CHAPTER V  
ADDING AN A TO THEISM

1874

ANNIE BESANT was stunned with grief over her mother's death. But she was young and she had her baby girl. Most important, she had her freedom. She might think, speak, do as she liked. After five years of bondage, this sudden liberty gave her a dizziness as though she were looking down at the world from one of the stars. Her friends stood by her devotedly. Mr. Scott plied her with work. He wanted more pamphlets—on eternal torture and the atonement. She spent long days in his library and in the British Museum and wrote six pamphlets during the next few weeks.

On her way home from the Museum one late afternoon in July, she again encountered Romance strolling along, as he usually does, in commonplace disguise. She stopped at a stationer's, Edward Trulove's on High Holborn, and happened to buy a copy of Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*. It was a sixteen page weekly. Looking at it in the yellowing files, it is indistinguishable from scores of other propaganda publications. To Annie Besant, poring over its pages in the bus that summer evening, it proved a magic carpet, bringing her the most important friendship of her life and providing an immediate stepping-stone to her career. She noticed an item about the National Secular Society. With the promptness of youth in search of the unknown, she at once wrote a letter of inquiry. Bradlaugh's answer appeared in the next issue. She need not

profess Atheism to join the Society. It welcomed open-minded inquirers. Annie Besant joined by return mail. On the following Sunday evening she left the London she knew and found her way across unfamiliar Hoxton to the Hall of Science where she heard Charles Bradlaugh for the first time.

Annie Besant's later life was to be devoted to India. It is appropriate that the first speech she heard by Charles Bradlaugh should have dealt with the many resemblances between the New Testament story of the Lord Jesus Christ and the older Hindu story of the Lord Krishna. Bradlaugh was an exceptionally able speaker. Well over six feet, with a voice as powerful as his physique, he had an arresting personality. Annie Besant had never before heard a real orator. Inspired by the same passionate revolt against the world that had impelled her to shake off every protection, here was the magical eloquence towards which she had been reaching when she made her first impulsive speech in her husband's empty church.

After nearly a quarter of a century, when Bradlaugh lay dead and she had long since abandoned his propaganda, Annie Besant set down her memories of that first meeting. Across the years his presence came back to her vividly : " I remember well my sensation as I looked at Charles Bradlaugh for the first time . . . the grave, quiet, stern, strong face, the massive head, the keen eyes, the magnificent breadth and height of forehead ; was this the man I had heard described as a blatant agitator, an ignorant demagogue ? Eloquence, fire, sarcasm, pathos, passion all in turn were bent against the Christian superstition till the great audience carried away by the torrent of the orator's force hung silent, breathing soft as he went on, till the silence that followed a magnificent

peroration broke the spell and a hurricane of cheers relieved the tension."

She lingered near the door as he came down the hall with some certificates of membership. Several others were waiting, but he walked straight up to her as though she were alone, and with a low "Mrs. Besant" put her certificate in her hand. Later, as a Theosophist, she explained this electric thrill of mutual recognition as the result of close friendships in previous incarnations, "and on that August day, we took up again an ancient tie, we did not begin a new one." That he should have recognized her seems natural. In those days, beautiful young women without an escort did not attend radical meetings in obscure corners of London. Against the background of that dingy crowd, she stood out like a lily against a patch of weeds. Whether or not they had known each other in previous lives, both realized that they had much to say in this one and that they wanted to shake off the gaping spectators. The next day, at his invitation, she made her way through the slums of Whitechapel to consult with him. She was startled by the drab poverty of his lodgings.

Bradlaugh was a self-made man, coming of more simple people than she had ever known. His mother was a nursemaid, his father a two-pound-a-week clerk. Bradlaugh had married an artisan's daughter who proved to be a dipsomaniac. After fifteen years of marriage, he gave up an unequal struggle. Popular prejudice against Atheism had boycotted him out of one business venture after another. He sent his wife to a nursing home, put his two daughters in boarding school, sold his comfortable home and everything in it except his books to meet his debts. Reducing his expenditures to a minimum, he gave himself up to the passion of his life, Freethought propaganda.

He was president of the National Secularist Society and editor of *The National Reformer*.

Annie Besant found him living in two tiny rooms for which he paid three shillings and sixpence a week. He had furnished them with nursery furniture, salvaged from his home, the only things small enough to fit the space ; little Hypatia's narrow bed for his big frame, a nursery washstand and bureau. A kitchen table served as desk in the study, books crowded the walls and overflowed on the chairs. He had to pile them on the floor before she could sit down. A painting done by a friend filled one of the cramped walls, a hurdy-gurdy boy asleep in a doorway while a wistful monkey in cap and bells kept watch.

Annie Besant had brought with her the neatly rolled manuscript of a pamphlet on "The Nature and Existence of God." She plied him with questions. She had been reading up on Comte. What did the Atheists think of Positivism and Comte's Religion of Humanity ? To her pleasant surprise she learned that Atheists questioned but did not dogmatically deny the existence of God. The idea that they blatantly asserted that there was no God was a vulgar error, Bradlaugh told her. Under the magic spell of mutual interests, they found little difference in their theological views. She read him parts of her essay in a clear, agreeable voice. Bradlaugh smilingly assured her, "You have thought yourself into Atheism without knowing it."

Before she left, she invited him to call. In spite of the magnetic pull toward her, perhaps because of it, fearing it, he warned her against himself. He was anathema. His friends must share his ostracism as though he were a source of contagion. Not even her pleasant heretics would tolerate her friendship with an infidel. In Annie Besant's

mood, this warning only cast an added glamour. She had made every sacrifice rather than submit to the dictation of her husband. She did not propose to trim her sails to another set of conventions. When she went home, she was haunted by the memory of his steady eyes, his firm lips and powerful physique. She had so many other questions to ask him. Within a day or two she wrote an urgent note, renewing her invitation to call. This time, he came at once and before he left she had accepted a position on the staff of his paper. He could offer her only a guinea a week. It sounds grotesquely small to-day, but it added fifty per cent. to her income and enabled her to move into a larger house.

She has frequently referred to her extreme poverty in those early months ; how she was obliged to pawn her jewels and clothes and do with insufficient food in order to provide everything needful for her child. In proportion to her budget, she had undertaken an ambitious fixed expense of house and servant. But after all, the allowance from her husband came to a trifle more than the living on which Mr. Voysey had supported his mother, wife and eight children. She had beside what she made from her writing.

It was not economic insecurity nor any superficial cause but rather a deep, emotional urge which kept her restlessly on the alert. Only two months after she had installed herself in Norwood, she was eagerly following up a chance clue to a society of Atheists, the outer fringe of social outcasts. The most adventurous young woman might have found herself engrossed a trifle longer in the responsibilities of her new home and the demands of her unfamiliar literary work.

It is significant that Annie Besant took all the initiative in making this new contact and that she had joined the



National Secularist Society before she met Bradlaugh. It was primarily an expression of sympathetic interest in any form of rebellion against the status quo. Her first revolt against the smug gentry of her girlhood and married life had landed her among heretics, but people of her own class, public school and University men and gentlewomen. Theirs was an idealistic protest, taking an urbane, often dilettante, form. Bradlaugh's National Secularist Society represented another world. Most of his working-class followers were thinking men who had been thwarted by the system. Personal grievances made them strident. Temperamentally and by tradition, Annie Besant had far more in common with the circles of polite revolt than with the more "tough-minded" Atheists with whom she was soon to identify herself.

She was young, high-tempered, resentful of interference or suggestion. Her family had been scandalized by her heretical friends. In her defiant mood, she found them a rather pale pink, as much limited by their own set of conventions as the respectables from whom she had escaped. It would be another ten years before economic and social questions focused attention. Atheism still represented the reddest and most aggressive challenge to the authority of the established system. This fascinated her. Although the motives of the two groups were similar and they took pains to show each other respect and courtesy, she realized that socially she must choose between them.

From the moment of meeting Bradlaugh, she was subject to another and overpowering influence. In abandoning religion, she had given up more than her dogmas. Ever since that glamorous springtime in Paris, she had found emotional release in fantasies of a celestial lover. Disillusionment by her earthly bridegroom had robbed her of her heavenly bridegroom as well. As a result of the

frustration from childhood of her natural affections, Annie Besant as always had an unusual power of sublimating her emotional life. It has resulted in her Gargantuan appetite for work, her insatiable intellectual curiosity. It was to be her safeguard in the stress of the years before her. It could not however insulate her against all emotional cravings. The spellbound response of her vast audiences gives evidence of the power of her pent-up fire and passion. She had a fervent nature and was by no means ready to give up an unconscious search for some force bigger and stronger than herself. It happened that none of the men among the polite heretics was qualified to interest her emotionally. Mr. Voysey was not enough of a person and his eight children loomed in the background. Mr. Scott was thirty years her senior and had recently married a young wife. Mr. Conway was absorbed in his young family and promising career.

An instant accord between Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh transcended all other consideration. Bradlaugh had the confidence of a man so sure of himself that he was unconcerned about accidents of birth, even in Victorian England. Annie Besant, in revolt against all the values of her class, responded with a primitive intensity to this fighting man, so gentle to her, so aggressive to the world at large.

Within a month of their first meeting, *The National Reformer* was printing Annie Besant's contributions. As Bradlaugh had foreseen, Scott objected to her publicly identifying herself with Atheism while writing for him. For more than a year, until she finished her series of pamphlets for Scott, she was obliged to use a nom-de-plume in the *Reformer*. She took the pen name "Ajax" from the statue of "Ajax Crying for Light" in the Crystal Palace :

“ *If our fate be death,  
Give light and let us die.*”

It seems a curious choice. Annie Besant was familiar with the classical story of Ajax, gigantic in size and of great courage, but dull of intellect. In response to his prayer, the gods rolled back the clouds and gave light while he rescued the body of his friend from the Trojans. In the end, after an heroic life, Ajax killed himself when the gods, in giving preferment to Ulysses, placed wisdom before valour. Following out the Prometheus theme of the light-bringer, she called her department “Daybreak.”

Her first article was vivacious and adroit ; gossipy, unrelated paragraphs applauding the progress of liberalism, lampooning reaction and orthodoxy. She had a light style with a touch of satire. She pounced upon the Bishop of Lincoln, her husband’s Bishop, as the scapegoat of stupidity rampant. It was an easy way to embarrass her husband and she pursued the Bishop through the years with patronizing accounts of his pompous bigotry. “The Bishop of Lincoln is an invaluable man,” she jeered, “few help forward as he does the cause of Freethought.” And again, “Of course where there is a chance of putting his foot into it, in that ‘it,’ Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, promptly sets his episcopal gaiters. This time . . .” etc.

These were flushed and feverish days. A few weeks earlier she had been dining with the Scotts constantly, in and out of their house every day. Now she did not see them for a week at a time. The night *The National Reformer* went to press with her first article, she made her maiden speech under Bradlaugh’s auspices. He introduced her to his editorial office, shared with the printer Charles Watts, who published most of the Freethought books and pamphlets. It seemed an enchanted spot that

August afternoon ; through the bustle of Fleet Street, under an archway, up a winding alley to 17 Johnson's Court, a crumbling building as quaint as the house opposite where Dr. Johnson used to labour over his dictionary. She met Bradlaugh's associates, the lights of the Free-thought movement. She had little notion of what important parts Charles Watts and the others were to play in the rolled-up script of her next few years.

Life took on for Annie Besant that magical ease which an overpowering infatuation gives to the monotonous succession of days and nights. In her weekly "Daybreak" she appealed to readers to forward suitable cuttings from the provincial papers to :

AJAX, National Reformer Office, 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street. She re-read the notice on the printed page. It was almost like having a business card. It gave her a sense of belonging. She made an exhaustive digest of Professor Tyndall's speech as President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science for the next number.

From the first, the relationship between Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh was based on a foundation of their work together. Both had an exceptional appetite for long hours of intensive effort. Their intervals of relaxation gained by contrast. Neither had ever known real companionship. Each was captivated by the other's point of view, quick intelligence and similar experiences. Growing up in different worlds, both showed in adolescence an abnormal preoccupation with religion. It had been a similar arrogance of anointed Vicars of the Established Church which drove them to revolt. Annie Besant was stirred as never before when Bradlaugh told her the story of his precocious progress from Church of England Sunday school teacher at fourteen to the presidency of the Atheists at twenty-five.

Charles Bradlaugh's father had worked in the same

office at two pounds a week for twenty-two years. In lieu of raise of pay, he was rewarded, after his death, by a notice in *The Times*, commending his faithful service. Eldest of five children, twelve-year-old Charles was taken out of school and put to work in his father's office. He stayed only two years. By the time he was fourteen, he had found himself a more promising job and had been promoted to teaching a class in Sunday school. A thoughtful, conscientious lad, when the Vicar pressed him to be confirmed, he made the same startling discovery that Annie Besant was to make a few years later. Puzzled by discrepancies in the four Gospels and Thirty-nine Articles, he wrote a letter of inquiry to his Vicar. The Vicar denounced the boy to his parents for Atheistical tendencies and suspended him from Sunday school for three months.

His Sundays now free, young Bradlaugh strolled over to Bonner's Fields, a suburban centre for soap-box oratory. Here he learned about Atheism, a word he had first heard from the Vicar. Before long he was taking part in the debates. Again the Vicar complained. Bradlaugh senior, with the servility of an old-fashioned clerk, threatened his son with the loss of his new job unless he gave up Bonner's Fields. Young Charles was defiant. His father complained to the boy's employers who gave him three days to recant or lose his position. Sixteen-year-old Charles did not wait for the axe to fall. He abruptly left home and from that time made his own way, marrying at twenty-two and establishing a comfortable home. He was a versatile man and able, but the supreme passion of his life was always his propaganda for Free-thought and Secularism.

Temperamentally a fighter, he would not submit to the libels, boycotts and discriminations in which Atheism involved him. He brought his first suit for damages when

he was twenty-two and for the rest of his life was constantly involved in lawsuits. He became a famous lay lawyer and worsted some of England's most distinguished barristers. He was also plunged hopelessly into debt by adverse judgments. Oblivious of the contempt of Victorian society, at forty-one, when Annie Besant met him, Bradlaugh was a powerful and important figure in his own world. When only twenty-five, he had displaced G. J. Holyoake, the veteran Atheist, as president of the Secularists. Taking off his coat and working beside his devoted artisan followers, they built, under his leadership, the Hall of Science, an auditorium seating 1,200. He travelled constantly and his income from lectures was about £1,000 a year, most of which he poured into the bottomless pit of his debts.

Against the contrasting backgrounds of the lives of Bradlaugh and Annie Besant stands out a dramatic parallel in their escape to Atheism. Both had the more than normal egotism and need for approbation of the artist type, the orator, actor, singer. Both had been thwarted in their natural childish affections. Bradlaugh senior's acquiescence in his Vicar's tyranny galvanized his adolescent boy into a defiance which never weakened all his life long. Charles Bradlaugh's struggle for free speech, free press, free thought was fought with the intensity of an embittered idealist striving desperately to salvage his ideals.

When Annie Besant met Bradlaugh he was standing for Parliament for the third time, and in the early autumn he made a month's campaign in his constituency of Northampton. Immediately after the election, he must sail for a lecture tour in the United States. Bradlaugh never permitted personal pleasure to interfere with his work. After only a few weeks of enchanting companionship, he was obliged to leave London for six months. It was tantalizing.

In *The National Reformer*, Annie Besant reported his lecture delivered on the eve of departure. He spoke on Giordano Bruno who, after months of torture, refused to recant his heretical opinions and was burned at the stake. Annie Besant was deeply moved. She felt that this Secularist group were the lineal descendants of Bruno and the long line of martyrs to Freethought, and that in joining them she fulfilled her highest instincts. For her there was always a certain macabre fascination in the thought of martyrdom:

*“ If our fate be death,  
Give light and let us die.”*

She joined Bradlaugh in Northampton to report the last fortnight of the campaign and to lend a hand. There was plenty to do. Bradlaugh had no wealthy backers. His two daughters who adored their father had come to help him and one or two Secularist friends. For the rest, he must depend on local volunteers.

It was a bitter three-cornered fight, with volleys of mud-slinging by the eminent banker who stood as Whig candidate. He alleged that Bradlaugh's daughters were illegitimate, that he had deserted his so-called wife and that she and his mother were both in the poorhouse ; all equally false charges. In the end, the Tory candidate was elected. Bradlaugh had bettered his position over the previous campaigns and almost tied with his libellous Whig opponent. After the announcement of the poll, Bradlaugh's supporters were ominously restive. They resented the libels on "our Charlie." During the early evening, he held them in check, but he had to leave at nine to catch his steamer for the United States. After his departure, bedlam broke loose and the windows of the Whig headquarters and newspaper office crashed until the soldiery were called out. The Riot Act was read and the crowd

finally dispersed with broken heads, black eyes and a residue bound over for trial. It was life in the raw, a tantalizing opportunity for a cub reporter. Most journalists begin with months of drudgery, what they call leg-work, tedious trips to the outskirts and finally, a story which the desk boils down to about two inches.

Inexperienced Annie Besant was turned loose with unlimited space to report this melodramatic campaign in which the central figure fascinated her more than anyone she had ever known. The result was pathetic and, sad to admit, justifies the city editor's cold-blooded technique in putting novices through the mill. Annie Besant buried her story under an avalanche of words ; October 4,—7,000 words ; October 11,—nine solid pages the story ran, 15,000 words ! It was a *tour de force* of pen pushing, but a weariness to read.

The campaign had been the most thrilling experience of Annie Besant's life ; the stimulating glare of the spotlight, the pressure of a thousand things to do, the hectic climax of that last night of wrenching farewell, followed by rioting and feverish anxiety. Returning alone to London was anti-climax. The big city seemed desolate and empty. She went down to Mr. Watts' office with her arm-full of copy. Lacking the magnetic pull of Bradlaugh's presence, it was a depressing place. It forced upon her a situation which she had avoided facing, but which the last fortnight had intensified. As long as she could be with Bradlaugh, she was content. But for the future, she must face the fact that alliance with the Secularists meant not only Bradlaugh but all the rank and file. Their intellectual and moral worth was beside the point. Their bearing, their mannerisms, their accents and dropped h's were "lower class," associated with servants and tradesmen. In recent decades, under such influences as the Labour Party, the



English class system has broken down amazingly. Americans in England still stumble over its bulky remnants like prehistoric fossils. In the 'seventies, its prestige was apparently unshaken. At the height of her rebellion, even Annie Besant paused before it. She realized that the distinction worked both ways. Friendly and democratic as she might be, she must always remind her new associates of her difference in class by her accent, her assurance, her walk and bearing. She looked down the long five months before Bradlaugh's return, five months alone with these rough diamonds, cut off from her pleasant drawing-rooms of polite revolt.

There was besides her little girl to consider. Dared she risk excluding the child from the world of conventional culture? She might ostracize herself, but had she a right to banish her child? The pros and cons pulled her this way and that, and in the end, were too much for her. For more than half a century of public life, she has been an amazing worker. In trials of endurance, her iron constitution leaves the strongest of her men colleagues outdistanced. On the rare occasions when her health has failed, the illness may usually be identified with some intimate emotional conflict. In this case, the struggle for a decision, following on the physical strain of the Northampton campaign and the emotional strain of her engrossing interest in the man himself, wore out her resistance.

By the time she recovered from a severe attack of bronchitis, she had settled her problem. Her first act when she was about again was symbolic. She gave up the house in Norwood which she had taken to be near the Scotts. She rented a larger house in Bayswater, near Hyde Park. This put her in easy reach by bus or tube of Fleet Street and the offices of *The National Reformer*. She had burned her bridges and joined the extreme left wing.

CHAPTER VI  
AJAX CRYING FOR LIGHT

1875-1877

A STATUE of Ajax crying for light so fascinated Annie Besant that she adopted his name. Ajax, a blunt-witted giant, was not an inspiring figure. It was the power of Ajax's voice which allured her. When he cried for light, the gods heard and yielded.

That magical afternoon when Annie Besant first cried out in Sibsey church lay far back in another life, but she treasured its memory like a lover's token and never lost sight of her main purpose, her tingling ambition to become an orator. Annie Besant's genius has been her gift of speech. She has written voluminously, but she has been too impulsive for the patient labour that polishes and refines. Her speeches demanded no dull plodding. They were an inspiration which lifted her out of the crowd and put her at the head of whatever movement she joined. For half a century she swayed thousands with the magic of her voice, intoxicated them with the frenzy of her emotional appeal.

In the few hurried weeks before Bradlaugh left London, she saw to it that he secured an opportunity for her to speak. Her choice of subject was significant. She was to identify herself primarily with anti-religious propaganda for the next decade. Nominally, it was a revolt against religion which had driven her from home. Atheism was the intellectual bond between herself and Bradlaugh. Yet on the night of her maiden speech, she selected

as her subject, "The Political Status of Women." This being her first appearance in a public hall, she told her audience, in loyalty to her sex, she had determined that her first speech should be dedicated to the assertion of women's rights. She acquitted herself well. Bradlaugh, who was not the man to indulge in mere gallantry wrote in *The National Reformer*, "It was probably the best speech by a woman to which we have ever listened . . . it was marvellously successful."

The night before leaving London for the Northampton campaign, she spoke again, this time under the auspices of her friend Moncure Conway. Her speech on "The True Basis of Morality" made an excellent impression and later, in pamphlet form, sold 7,000 copies. Conway was eager to assist Annie Besant. He still hoped that she might be diverted from her rebellious impulse toward Atheism to a milder form of propaganda. But a more powerful magnet was pulling her onward.

The months passed. Her sprightly "Ajax" articles brought in many appreciative letters and inquiries. It piqued her that she was not asked to speak to her "Ajax" audience. Bradlaugh was still away. In his absences, Watts who had charge of the Hall of Science, frequently gave the Sunday night lectures. Mrs. Watts was the daughter of a well-known Lancashire Freethinker; for they had already begun to build up old families in the movement. She was a pretty woman who later, as an actress, toured the United States in a company of Forbes Robertson's. Until the arrival of Annie Besant, she had dominated the spasmodic efforts to build up a social life around the nucleus of the Secularist meeting place, the Hall of Science. When Bradlaugh's first letter arrived from across the Atlantic, it was Mrs. Watts who read it aloud before her husband's lecture to the Sunday night audience. It

was Mrs. Watts who instigated the amateur theatricals in December. She and her husband played Othello and Desdemona. Annie Besant did not take part. When Bradlaugh returned, it would be different, but Annie Besant could not wait. She had other strings to her bow.

That God helps those who help themselves is as true for an Atheist as for a devout believer. Alone on New Year's eve, Annie Besant sat late over her fire to welcome a new year of breathless possibilities. It was less than six months since she had joined the staff of *The National Reformer*. It was all very well to be a journalist. Her ambition leaped vastly higher. She determined that from now on she would lecture regularly. She would begin with another London appearance, to be followed by a tour of the provinces. On January 19, she again addressed Mr. Conway's South Place Chapel audience. The evening was a triumph. Her earlier lectures had shown promise. This night she stirred her audience to a fervour of emotion which left no question of her career. She was interrupted by frequent applause and at the end, as Mr. Watts admitted in the *Reformer*, she received a tumultuous ovation. He even added that she was a great acquisition to the Freethought platform.

Did she remember in the flush of her triumph that it was just six months since she had chanced into the stationer's shop and bought a copy of *The National Reformer* for July 19? Hers is one of the rare cases where life comes up to the high standards of romantic fiction. Annie Besant's meteoric career in these six months is one more variant of the most popular story in the world, that cast-iron plot which bobs up from three to ten times in every proper fiction magazine, the Cinderella legend. No petty jealousy of older sisters in the movement could longer stand in Cinderella's way. By the end of the month

she announced her first lecture tour, booked solidly for six weeks ahead, swinging round the circuit Bradlaugh had travelled for many years ; the textile towns of Lancashire, the mining towns of Northumberland and Durham, across Scotland and back again. Watts had gallantly hazarded that she was a great acquisition to the Free Thought platform. In spite of her spectacular success in the provinces, she did not reach the Hall of Science until Bradlaugh was on his way back to England.

Annie Besant eagerly followed Bradlaugh's long diary-letters from the States which were published weekly in the *Reformer*. It irked her that they were received and opened by the Wattses when they were really written to her. She glowed with pride as she read of his dignified reception across the water. The American press interviewed him as a celebrity. The *New York Herald* headline ran, "Charles Bradlaugh, the future President of England, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel." At a Lotos Club dinner in his honour, Whitelaw Reid was toastmaster. He spoke at Harvard, Dartmouth and on other representative platforms. Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, William Lloyd Garrison served as chairmen of his Boston meetings. The conservative *Boston Transcript* printed a letter from Wendell Phillips : . . . "While Bradlaugh was speaking, Sumner looked to me and said, 'This is very fine.' At the close of the lecture he remarked, 'This is, I think, the most eloquent speech I have heard for some years.' " . . . The Vice-President of the United States invited him to visit the White House. Sitting beside Emerson in a chair of honour at a reception given by Mrs. Sargent on Chestnut Street, he met the Boston Brahmins. After deducting his expenses and commission to Cooper Union, which managed the tour, the trip netted him £1,000.

Bradlaugh was gratified by Annie Besant's progress in

his absence. It helped to justify his desire to advance her rapidly, over everybody's heads to a position beside himself at the head of the Secularist movement. She was persistently featured. The *Reformer* advertised her photos, *carte de visite* and cabinet sizes, on sale at the *Reformer* office, the Hall of Science, and, appropriately enough, at Truslove's, the stationer's where she had bought her first copy of the *Reformer*. Her speeches were reported in glowing terms. In Bradlaugh's column of personal chat, "Rough Notes," he urged his readers to give her rousing audiences. He could be severe too : "and we cannot help expressing in extremely strong terms our displeasure that steps had not been taken at this her first lecture in the district to rally friends enough to give her warm and worthy greeting. Those who undertake to set right the organization of the whole party should be at least capable of organizing one lecture in their own locality." Such sharpness was not like Bradlaugh and suggests, as events soon showed, friction behind the scenes.

In addition to "Rough Notes," Bradlaugh had a second personal column, "To Correspondents," paragraphs in which he briefly disposed of his weekly mail. His lecture schedule appeared conspicuously in a box at the head of this column. Notices of the dozen other Freethought lecturers, most of them earnest but uninspired veterans, appeared in a column of fine print advertising on a back page. They were printed free as part of the propaganda, but they were not given display type. From now on, Annie Besant's advance engagements were printed in a box immediately under Bradlaugh's. She was soon booked ahead for six months and gave notice that she could accept no more engagements for the present.

The rôle of orator was deeply satisfying to Annie

Besant. Before her lectures, she suffered all her life from intense nervousness and even nausea. She never experienced stage fright. From the instant she began to speak, she was at her best. She enjoyed her isolation on the platform, the exhilaration of that mosaic of watchful human eyes, her power to play on the emotions of the crowd. In return, she has put into her oratory a sturdy perseverance which commands the highest admiration. Public speaking, still a strenuous occupation, was in those days vastly more so. That first winter before her lecture income enabled her to dispense with minor economies, she travelled third class. Third-class carriages of sixty years ago, in the peculiarly penetrating cold of an English winter, offered most of the hardships of a trip to the North Pole. For hours she sat on hard wooden benches, chilled to the bone in spite of her rugs, the tiny windows so high that she could not even look out at the frozen hills and valleys. In snow and wind and rain, she broke her journeys in the middle of the night, and in dark junctions waited for local trains. She was driven in butchers' and bakers' carts to remote hamlets.

She slept in miners' cottages and shared their simple food. About the open fire in the evening, she joined their shrewd discussions of theology, and sometimes politics and economics—questions which were to crowd religion out of the spotlight a few years later. She showed great physical endurance and easy adaptability. It is difficult to realize, only fifty years later, the intensity of passion against which the Freethinkers had made their way. She was too young to witness more than the final flickers of a violence due to orthodox panic. The high tide of passionate revolt which had caught her up, was sweeping over England and old-fashioned, bigoted Christians were making a last stand. Within a decade the situation

changed. On her first tour in 1875, a village inappropriately named Darwen met her with stones and catcalls. Ten years later, in the same hall, she addressed a large and enthusiastic audience.

She was cool in the face of danger. At Swansea, where there had been threats of violence, none of the local group cared to take the chair. Alone, Annie Besant walked up on the platform, introduced herself and proceeded with her lecture. The violence was usually prearranged. At Hoyland three Primitive Methodist missionaries had exhorted their followers to sweep the Secularists out. The excited villagers heckled her throughout the lecture, standing in their chairs, yelling and shaking their fists. She persisted and won a short hearing. There was a riotous scene as the meeting broke up, and she was kicked in the dark confusion of leaving the hall. As she reached her cab, the crowd swarmed round her and attempted to overturn it. The driver whipped his horse to a gallop and she escaped. She weathered other stormy scenes when stones were thrown, windows smashed and bullies attempted to break up the meetings.

She was now twenty-seven years old. She was a beautiful woman with something of the regularity of feature of Lily Langtry. She had wistful brown eyes and a fine brow. The drooping corners of her lips gave her a look of sadness. Her dark hair worn in a heavy plait around her head, formed a glistening frame for her face. Standing alone on the platform in a day when women speakers were unusual, she made an appealing figure ; not very tall, her slim waist set off by the billowing fullness of her dark, rustling silk dress. Her tightly fitted, high-busted silk bodices, were cut down at the neck in a deep V, edged with white ruching. She wore a black velvet ribbon and locket about her firm young throat.



Her hands were delicate and graceful, but she made few gestures. She held herself if anything, too much repressed, depending on the rich cadences of her voice, the dramatic quality of her own personality. It was more than enough. Malcolm Quin in his *Memoirs of a Positivist* recalls vividly the appeal she made to him as a young man. Looking back—"she still seems incomparably young and attractive, her face alive with emotion and expression, her voice full and sonorous, but musical and not unfeminine. She was perhaps too uniformly earnest and indignant in her denunciation of bigotry and obscurantism, rarely indulging in wit. She was, or we thought she was, a martyr ; she had won freedom from domestic and clerical oppression at the cost of social proscription. She faced a hostile world on behalf of liberty and truth. We young men, who had the passion of these things in our souls, responded readily to the passion with which she pleaded for them. We were carried away. Mrs. Besant's portrait was for sale at the close of the lecture, and I still have the copy which I bought at the time. Its colours are now faded, but the image of this young prophetess of religious and political progress as she appeared on her first lecturing tour is still fresh in my mind."

Legacies of £13,000 from two loyal Freethinkers enabled Bradlaugh to pay off his debts and relax the severity of his economies. With his daughters, he took part of a house occupied by a music dealer. He had a dark basement for a dining-room and on the top floor some small bedrooms and one large room for his study. In their quiet way his daughters were ecstatic. Both adored their father and their one ambition was to help him in his work. Their enthusiasm was dampened when they realized that he was only to sleep at home, while he lived in Annie Besant's house a dozen blocks distant.

With the sudden rise in income from her lectures, Annie Besant had moved to a still more ambitious house, and engaged a resident governess for her daughter. The new home, Oatlands, was the social centre of the Secularist movement. Visitors and distinguished contributors to the *Reformer* were invited to dine at Oatlands. It was a real establishment with grounds and gardens. Sixty birds sang and flew about among the palms and ferns of her conservatory. She kept several dogs, among them a St. Bernard given her by Bradlaugh. She has described how Bradlaugh would leave his house every morning, books and papers under his arm, to join her in her sunny study. There they worked together, writing hour after hour, sometimes scarcely exchanging a word. He gave up smoking these years because she did not like the odour of tobacco. If he went home for dinner, he returned to spend the evening. Inevitably Alice and Hypatia Bradlaugh, shy, self-conscious girls of seventeen and nineteen, were jealous. They had been the most important women in their hero's life. The situation was difficult. Inheriting their father's pluck, the girls swallowed their disappointment and maintained an apparently harmonious relationship with Annie Besant who, in spite of her impulsive kindness and generosity, showed surprising blind spots of tactlessness.

Well within her first year on the *Reformer*, Annie Besant's name and personality pervaded the paper to a degree second only to that of Bradlaugh. The "To Correspondents" column indicated increasing interest in the new-comer :

- E. W. ; Mrs. Besant is too busy to undertake the work suggested.
- X. ; Mrs. Besant requests us to state that she destroys all anonymous communications unread,

F. : Accent on first syllable—rhymes with pleasant,  
(Evidently in reply to query as to pronunciation of  
her name.)

A Well Wisher : Mrs. Besant declines to accede to any  
request made in anonymous letters and considers  
advice from a stranger as a piece of impertinence.

She did not permit lecture tours to interfere with her journalism. The weekly "Daybreak," book reviews and general articles came in from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester. The paper was in the main heavy reading. Bradlaugh showed as little humour about saving mankind from religion as his opponents in exhorting them to salvation. Annie Besant's satiric vein provided the sole gleam of humour. Anything to discredit the clergy served her as propaganda. She told the story of a seventeen-year-old maid servant, charged with unlawfully leaving her master in July, although her contract ran until November. The girl explained that her bed had been removed to her master's room ; " I felt shame to undress before him." The Reverend Chairman of the Magistrates asked if her master could see her undress, " Yes, he told the servant lad that he would take a fancy to me, I wore such short chemises." The Reverend Chairman asked the master what loss he sustained on account of trouble and expense through the girl's leaving him at this time of year. For punishment the girl forfeited eight months' wages of three pounds ten. The Reverend Chairman admonished her severely. "We may say that we should have made her pay more if we had not thought that Mr. Patterson had not given proper and decent accommodation for the girl." Annie Besant jeeringly commented: "Worthy minister of the gospel, sentencing a girl to lose three pounds ten of hard-earned wages because she would not undress and

sleep in her master's bedroom. If he had a daughter, a governess, we wonder if he would think she ought to forfeit her salary for refusing to sleep in her master's bedroom."

She wrote numerous books and pamphlets which appeared serially in the *Reformer*, a life of Auguste Comte ; a history of the French Revolution ; an economic-political series on Landlords, Tenants and Farmers ; the story of Afghanistan ; of the Corn Law Struggles and many more. Year after year, in sheer amount of work turned out, she showed endurance and determination worthy of Ajax himself. Inevitably, her style lost its early promise. She had chosen quantity rather than quality ; although, considering the enormous volume of her output, the quality was surprisingly good. She showed great versatility. Like her father, she was a clever linguist and discussed French, German and Italian books with equal ease. At international gatherings, she served as interpreter. She was soon doing almost all the book reviewing for the *Reformer*. She had facile judgments on every subject under the sun.

Annie Besant attended her first annual Conference of the Secularist Society over the Whitsun weekend. Nominated by Bradlaugh, she was elected a Vice-President of the organization. It was just nine months since she had become a member. Cinderella had reached the top of the Freethought ladder in less than a year. She passed on the way many earnest men and women who had given years of devoted service to this cause for which they felt the emotional intensity of a religion. Bradlaugh's pushing Annie Besant forward so rapidly was not entirely a surrender to her charms. He had a fanatical loyalty to the cause. He satisfied his conscience with the rationalization that he was acting primarily in its interest. With the optimism of a crusader, he interpreted this notable conversion

as indicating the broadening appeal of Freethought doctrines. Enlisting her extraordinary gifts, he could imagine making an end of superstition and rousing all classes throughout the country, to a magnificent, clear-eyed rationalism.

Annie Besant has deserved her successes. She has taken to whatever cause she espoused a combination of personal charm, oratorical genius and appetite for hard work, all in superlative degree. She did not demand audiences and admiration. Tirelessly she worked far into the night on an article for the *Reformer*, or a new pamphlet. She gave herself to drudgery as gracefully as she stood a smiling figure on the platform, receiving applause and bouquets. There was no question of her ability as Vice-President. It was a matter of diplomacy. For these simple, homespun zealots, a dazzling halo surrounded the group of executives who with Bradlaugh carried the responsibility of their Society. Some of the workers who had stood closest to Bradlaugh looked back resentfully on decades of unpaid trudging through winter sleet and summer sun to spread the message. For years they had shouted down hissing, cursing crowds and faced the stones and mud of mobs ; years when this bright, new star was a little girl perched in a laurel tree, reciting :

“ *Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers.*”

Annie Besant and Bradlaugh, with their heads in the clouds, did not even hear the mutterings of discontent. There was Mrs. Harriet Law, a stout, loud-voiced person, a daughter of thunder. For thirty years she had travelled up and down the land, crude, earnest, the only woman Atheist speaker, one of the very few women speakers in England. Until 1875 she frequently spoke at the Hall of Science. Suddenly, she was relegated to the

provinces. There was Mrs. Watts. Her husband, as printer and publisher, held a close and confidential relationship to the chief. Mrs. Watts, under the spell of Bradlaugh's charm, considered herself unofficial hostess and social leader of the Society.

There was James Thompson the poet, whose famous "City of Dreadful Night" was first printed by Bradlaugh in *The National Reformer*. For years Bradlaugh was the only editor in the city of London to recognize Thompson's genius, and for its sake, put up with his vagaries. Between drinking bouts, Thompson had worked with Bradlaugh as a capable and devoted assistant editor for fifteen years. Within six months of Annie Besant's arrival, Thompson felt himself crowded out of the office. He quarrelled and left and the long friendship between the two men was permanently ruptured. There were a dozen others who, from devotion to Bradlaugh or to the cause had given years of cheerful service. All these lesser stars were blotted out by the glow of Mrs. Besant's radiance. Serenely confident in her talent, with a half masculine, half childish naïveté, she accepted the adulation.

For all her charms, she lacked the very quality which might have eased the situation. She has always been at her best on the platform or tête-à-tête with one person, preferably a man. Formal society bored her, she had no small talk. The years have softened her, but they have not given her tact. It is an intuitive quality with most women, an involuntary awareness, an adaptation to environment, handed down through centuries of female ancestors whose chief obligation was to be instantly aware of the moods of their lord and master. It was part of Annie Besant's rebellion against the essentially feminine that she should take on this bluff, boyish insensitivity. In those early days when she was finding the incense of

adulation a bit heady, she could be and often was ruthlessly outspoken. The world accepts this from men. Bradlaugh did not bother about tact. He was an autocratic president and, in the main, his followers loved him for it. It is a different matter with a woman, as Annie Besant was to discover.

All this was no handicap with the rank and file. Her distinction, her unconscious breeding only endeared her to that humble mass of followers eternally craving an idol to adore. In spite of pinching poverty, they received her with banquets and ovations. They presented her with books bound in vellum, with a gold-mounted writing set, with a Brussels carpet and an address printed on white satin, massively framed. They named their little girls after her. They accepted her, not as second in command, but as queen consort. When Annie Besant and Bradlaugh toured the mining villages, it was a triumphal progress. Brass bands led processions of every cart and trap and wagon for miles around. Miners lined the roadway, and fell in line behind them, calling affectionately to "Our Charlie." At night, after the meeting, hundreds of workers escorted them to the inn and stood cheering in the village street until "A. B. and C. B." appeared in bay window or balcony to bestow a final benison.

"A. B. and C. B.," as they were familiarly known, made many joint trips, alternately speaking and taking the chair. They lectured three times on Sunday and twice on many week-days. The long hours of companionship mitigated even the terrors of third class, which as their finances improved, they soon abandoned. D. N. Bennett, the New York Freethinker, visiting England, wrote back to his paper *The Truthseeker*, "Bradlaugh travels like a prince, he had a first-class coach reserved." During her absences from home, Annie Besant left her daughter

Mabel in charge of the resident governess. She and Bradlaugh were extremely circumspect. On trips involving absence overnight, they usually took one or both of Bradlaugh's daughters with them.

Both Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh were such prodigious workers that they had little time for recreation. He was a famous fisherman, and they made all day excursions up the Lea to Broxbourne where he knew every eddy and tried to share with her the angler's mysterious contentment. She never had much luck with fishing. It interested her only so long as she was fascinated by anything that Bradlaugh might do. For supper he took her into the Crown Hotel at Broxbourne Bridge. The proprietor proudly showed her, mounted in a glass case over the mantelpiece, the largest carp ever taken in England with rod and line, fourteen and three-quarter pounds. It was one of Bradlaugh's trophies.

A. B. and C. B. took long walks up the Thames in the springtime to the gorgeous flower beds of Richmond ; to Kew Gardens for water-cress sandwiches and tea beside the river ; to the terraces and ruins of Hampton Court. In the files of the *Reformer*, between the lines of Annie Besant's studies of cabbages and kings, there lingers the glow of their friendship as they wandered hand in hand through the glamour of their first springtime. It was in April, a fortnight after Bradlaugh's return from the United States that Annie Besant began a biography of Auguste Comte, the French Positivist. Like Bradlaugh, the French philosopher was unhappily married and, like Bradlaugh, he comforted himself with an intimate friendship with another woman, Madame de Vaux. Annie Besant grew lyrical in describing the beauty and purity of their relationship :

“ Those who are too base to believe in a true and noble



friendship between a man and woman will alone try to cast any slur on the frank and loyal love which bound these two great souls. All and more than all that Beatrice was to Dante, that Laura was to Petrarch, was Clotilde de Vaux to Auguste Comte. He loved her passionately, and yet most purely with a deep, reverent, faithful love.

“ To Auguste Comte, this woman’s friendship came as a revelation from heaven. It woke up all the music in his heart, silenced so long by care and toil and friendlessness ; it unsealed the springs of tenderness, fast-closed by coldness and neglect ; it revealed to him the beauty and grandeur of the human spirit ; it crowned the cold white brow of Humanity with the rosy diadem of love. The philosopher who had defined pure intellect now became the High Priest of the Heart.”

## CHAPTER VII

### THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT

1877-1878

ANNIE BESANT's first radical adventure, entirely on her own, led her plunging past all the Danger and No Thoroughfare signs of the Victorian world. She had shown high courage in leaving the protection of her home, but it was an act of rebellion against conditions imposed upon her. In her work for the Theists and Atheists she had joined going concerns. Their issues were defined and organized. By a curious chain of circumstance, early in the year 1877 she charged full tilt into her first crusade dictated entirely by her own free will. It was the defence of a pamphlet on family limitation, giving methods for preventing conception. We have scrapped a good many stupid traditions in recent years. Yet birth control remains a controversial subject. Half a century ago it was not even controversial. It was nothing but asterisks.

Mrs. Watts happened to serve as the immediate provocation. Far deeper than any outside influence, however, lay an inner compulsion. Every phase of the unequal status between women and men, political, legal, economic, stirred Annie Besant profoundly. She had chosen "The Political Status of Women" as the subject of her maiden speech. She would have made a world famous leader for the Woman Suffrage movement if they could have reached her in time. In the fury of her revolt, she had identified herself with Atheism, putting herself beyond the pale. She had come to realize her disfranchisement from their

ranks and secretly to regret that she was not asked to sign memorials to Parliament with such representative women as Florence Nightingale and Harriet Martineau. Thirty-eight years later, her maiden speech was republished by the Women's Rights Library of London as a notable contribution by a famous woman. By that time, Annie Besant's position was secure.

There may have been an element of resentment against ostracism, but it was chiefly a passionate loyalty to her own sex which impelled her to become a pioneer of birth control. It was a Quixotic adventure. Too impulsive to analyse the situation in advance, she rushed ahead in an emotional cyclone.

One day, coming down to the office, Annie Besant found the staff in an uproar of discussion over a pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy, or the private companion of young married people*. They told her its history. Half a century earlier, Charles Knowlton, a Massachusetts physician, had written and published it anonymously. It was dignified in tone and described the methods of preventing conception practised in various parts of Europe. Dr. Knowlton, identified as the author, was prosecuted in Taunton and fined £10 and costs. He was also prosecuted in Cambridge and served three months in prison. The authorities then let the matter drop and the book ran into nine editions within seven years.

It was brought out in England by James Watson, a Freethought publisher. On Watson's death, Charles Watts bought up his stock of radical books, this pamphlet among them. For forty-two years, *Fruits of Philosophy* had been quietly selling in England about 800 copies a year. Recently a Bristol bookseller had interleaved some copies with obscene pictures. The police had arrested the bookseller, and also Watts as the publisher, and the

## THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 79

prosecution now seemed to have shifted from the obscene pictures to the pamphlet itself. The excited discussion in the office that morning centred round whether Watts should undertake to defend the pamphlet by pleading Guilty. He could probably evade the issue by a plea of Not Guilty, taking the ground that the pamphlet had come to him with a publisher's stock, that he had never read it, and that he would withdraw it from sale.

Watts' colleagues were unanimous in advising him to plead Not Guilty and take his chance of getting off. G. J. Holyoake, the veteran of the Secularists, who had served a term in jail for blasphemy, was emphatically opposed to mixing up Atheism and family limitation. G. W. Foote, next to Bradlaugh the most capable fighter in the movement, also vetoed it. Bradlaugh was reluctant to shoulder the broad implications of the case. He had been a Malthusian for years, but had never made the subject of family limitation a major issue. It was not included in the Freethought platform and would involve them in a propaganda more unpopular, if possible, than their attacks on religion. It would handicap all their regular activities by inviting a new line of attack as free lovers and dealers in obscenity. The pamphlet was over forty years old, its physiology antiquated, its style archaic. Annie Besant and Bradlaugh agreed that if it had been submitted to them in the first instance, they would not have published it, as it was not a treatise of high merit.

However, its prosecution as obscene because it advised the limitation of the family infringed upon the freedom of the press. It was on this issue, and the fact that the Secularists had been openly selling it for forty years that they could be involved. None of the men in the office was willing to fight for the pamphlet. Annie Besant alone reserved decision. That night she took it home with her

and the next morning telegraphed to Watts : " Book defensible as medical work."

Annie Besant was familiar with the Malthusian theory. Several years later, she testified in her suit for divorce that her efforts to impress upon her husband their duty to limit their family within their means had been a source of friction between them. She had supported her position by reminding him that it was another Church of England clergyman, the Rev. T. R. Malthus, who, in an economic treatise, published in 1798, advanced the theory which gave Malthusianism its name. Mr. Malthus had argued that there is a tendency in all animate creatures to increase faster than the means of subsistence. A population unhindered by war, plague or other checks doubles itself every twenty-five years. Annie Besant had followed the discussions by economists which condemned Mr. Malthus' remedy of postponing marriage as tending to increase prostitution. James Mill had summed up the situation in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* : " The grand practical problem therefore, is to find the means of limiting the number of births." Annie Besant accepted the Knowlton pamphlet as a practical and dignified answer to the questions raised by Mr. Malthus and Mr. Mill.

Watts afterwards charged that Bradlaugh and he had agreed that the Knowlton pamphlet was indefensible, and that Bradlaugh was converted to a different opinion by pressure from Annie Besant. Mr. and Mrs. Watts were invited to Oatlands for a conference. Mrs. Besant took the offensive. It was a moral issue. To back down on a pamphlet sold by Freethinkers for forty years would be cowardice. In fact, she had already drafted an appeal for funds for the defence. She read it aloud.

The two Watts were more concerned about personal than about abstract issues. Mrs. Watts was a second wife,

much younger than Watts, pretty, frivolous, with no aspirations to martyrdom for herself or her husband. Mr. Watts had all the reluctance of an elderly, amorous husband to cross his young wife's wishes ; beside her horror of the possible prison sentence, Mrs. Watts instinctively opposed Mrs. Besant, and resented her lack of concern about their personal danger. Bradlaugh was reluctant to assume the issue but he was a born fighter, and when he saw how grimly Annie had set her heart in the matter, he allowed himself to be persuaded. It was a harassing evening. In spite of his wife's opposition, Watts succumbed and assented to Annie Besant's insistence that he plead Not Guilty and make his trial a test for the right of publication of the book.

That night at home, Mrs. Watts had her turn. By morning, Watts, at bay between two determined women, decided that it would be preferable to disagree with the absent one. Fortunately for him, Mrs. Besant was taking an early train to Plymouth where she would speak on Sunday. Watts wired her that he had changed his plan and would plead Guilty. Monday afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Watts were summoned to Oatlands for another conference. He was sullen, his wife angry. Watts was not an aggressive man. He dreaded the necessity to hold his own against Annie Besant. Bracing himself with a last look at his wife, he plunged into an outline of his defence. He had determined to plead Guilty. He would then throw himself on the mercy of the court, promising to withdraw the book from circulation, as he did not consider that it had any legitimate place in Freethought propaganda.

"Oh, you coward," said Bradlaugh, "you had better make up our accounts on Tuesday morning and let us separate."

Watts : " You do not know all that influences me, but on my honour, I am not a coward."

Bradlaugh : " If that be so, Charley, I am sorry I used the word, but I can only judge on what I know ; tell me what there is."

Watts : " I cannot tell you now ; time will reveal it."

There is pathos in Watts' innuendoes. He realized that Bradlaugh had been overpersuaded by Annie Besant and that it would do him no good to say more. Mrs. Besant was indignant over his attempted change of plan. She professed not to have understood his telegram, and triumphantly produced eight pounds which she had collected for his defence. He was now publicly committed to pleading guilty, and could not, she told him, back out. The Watts stood their ground. Mrs. Besant thereupon refused to give them the eight pounds. She should return it to Plymouth, as it had been raised under false pretences. The Watts, who had no such financial resources as Annie Besant, were faced with heavy legal expenses. It did not help matters to snatch this eight pounds from them.

Bradlaugh and Watts both stated their cases in the next issue of the *Reformer*. By the following week, personal relations had ended. Bradlaugh dismissed Watts as sub-editor, and gave him notice that at the end of two months he would take his printing away from him. This was a serious matter for Watts, as it formed a major portion of his business. On the same day, though they did not announce it at the time, Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh entered into partnership and organized their Freethought Publishing Company.

Watts was tried at the Old Bailey early in February. He withdrew his plea of Not Guilty and pleaded Guilty. The Court, on condition that the plates and stock of the

## THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 83

book were destroyed, discharged Watts on his own recognizance in £500. A few weeks later, he and Foote took over Holyoake's Freethought weekly, *The Secular Review*. In subject matter and make-up it was patterned closely on *The National Reformer*, even to such minor points as featuring Mrs. Watts, who now made a brief appearance on the lecture platform. They advertised her photographs at ninepence, and one-and-six. The notices about her in the "To Correspondents" column were exact imitations of Bradlaugh's notices of Annie Besant.

Both sides being provided with sixteen pages of news-print per week, a battle of printer's ink ensued. "No doubt," wrote Watts, "had I been content like a poor mean cur to lick the hand that struck me, and humble myself at the feet of this copy of Rome's pope, I should have been deemed still worthy of his gracious favour. Oh Insolence, thou art indeed unblushing!"

Handicapped by the restraints of an old-fashioned chivalry, the Watts were unable to say what was really on their minds. Watts raged about the oracular utterances of this Sultan of Turkey and Czar of Russia. His wife used her woman's privilege to strike nearer home in a pamphlet, *Mrs. Watts' Reply to Mr. Bradlaugh's Misrepresentations*. After an aggressive account of her grievances, she wrote of Mrs. Besant: "She may congratulate herself upon being the means of causing the break between two old and tried friends who had worked together harmoniously for years. Mrs. Besant with an officiousness that ill becomes her, presumes that she has a right to act with and for Mr. Bradlaugh, as if she had a greater claim upon him than any other person in the party, forgetting that those who have worked for the cause for more years than she has months are content to remain neutral."

In the weeks that followed, both sides stooped to petty



and ignoble bickering. The O'Byrne incident was typical. Widely advertised as a convert from Roman Catholicism, in the beginning O'Byrne was an assistant to Watts. He was one of a dozen men to sign a circular reciting Watts' grievances against Bradlaugh. Bradlaugh notified O'Byrne that the circular was libellous. O'Byrne who had a wife and five children to support had no intention of becoming involved in a lawsuit with Bradlaugh, and promptly repudiated the circular. Watts discharged him. Bradlaugh employed him. A few months later, O'Byrne melodramatically recanted his Atheism, and returned to the clerical fold, where he was loudly welcomed. A year or two later, he tried to return to the Atheists, but they had had enough of him. Each side in turn used O'Byrne's tortuous course to prove the lack of judgment, of humanity and of common sense of their opponents.

Their charges and counter charges were innumerable. They seemed to have no appreciation of the undignified effect of such personal squabbling in print. They wrangled like school children. The opposition brought Mrs. Besant into the picture whenever possible, but this was dangerous ground. Although she had entered public life, both she and Bradlaugh hotly resented any attack on her—the cowardice of attacking a woman. It gave her an embarrassing immunity.

Having broken with the Watts, the two partners had their hands full. They had no capital, yet with impulsive bravado, they determined to become their own publishers, and to print *The National Reformer* within two months. They established their first office in a tumble-down building at 28 Stonecutter Street. It was a hundred yards up Shoe Lane from Fleet Street, past Wine Office Court and Gunpowder Alley. The narrow lanes hummed with the

## THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 85

clank of presses and the air was heavy with the sweetish smell of paper and printer's ink.

Annie Besant borrowed a few hundred pounds from friends and they engaged a manager. At the end of a strenuous month, they advertised their partnership as publishers of Freethought literature, and defiantly included *Fruits of Philosophy* in their list. Both had much to lose by this action. Bradlaugh felt that it meant the almost certain destruction of twenty years' work to establish himself as a Parliamentary candidate in Northampton. Annie Besant, separated from her husband, and intimately associated with Bradlaugh, was subject to the coarsest slanders. Connection with such a case invited the extremes of ribaldry. Most serious for Annie Besant was the danger of her husband's persuading the Court to take Mabel away from her. She had been forewarned by a previous effort that he was watching for such an opportunity.

Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh published the pamphlet and notified the Guildhall magistrates. They sold 500 copies in twenty minutes. A tone of exultant excitement runs through Annie Besant's account of their arrest and the trip up Ludgate Hill to the Guildhall: "The rule of the place of course divided the sexes, the gaoler however did the best he could for us by allowing me to remain in a section of the passage which separated the men's from the women's cells, and putting Mr. Bradlaugh into the first of the men's. Then, by opening a little window in the thick wall, a grating was discovered through which we could dimly see each other. Mr. Bradlaugh's face as seen from my side, scored all over with the little oblong holes in the grating, reflected by the dull glimmer of gas in the passage, was curious rather than handsome; mine was probably not more attractive. In this charming place, we passed two hours and a half, and it was very

dull and very cold. We solaced ourselves at first by reading *The Secular Review* (Mr. Watts' paper), Mr. Bradlaugh tearing it into pages and passing them one by one through the grating. By pushing on his side and pulling on mine, we managed to get them through the narrow holes. Mr. Bradlaugh paced up and down his limited kingdom, and after I had finished correcting a *National Reformer*, I sometimes walked and sometimes sat, and we chatted over future proceedings and growled at our long detention, and listened to names of prisoners being called, until we were at last summoned to 'go up higher,' and we joyfully obeyed." They were released on bail.

Bradlaugh did not find much spice in the adventure. His daughters had disapproved of the financial responsibility of his new publishing venture. They felt that Annie Besant was pushing him into it. The quarrel with the Watts had split the Secularist Society in two. Most of his old associates, nursing grievances against Mrs. Besant, had sided with Watts, and were secretly organizing a rival British Secular Union. They had his mailing list, and could reach the entire membership with denunciations and appeals. There was friction even among those who had not seceded. In April, Bradlaugh's Executive Board held a stormy session over a letter from Mr. Bull making offensive references to Mrs. Besant. He was asked to withdraw the letter and apologize to Mrs. Besant. He refused. It was moved to expel him from the Executive, and on Bradlaugh's insistence, a special request was sent Mrs. Besant that she ignore the incident and remain on the Board.

It was springtime again ; hedges bursting into bloom, fruit trees a cloud of pink and white buds, meadows streaked with daffodils and violets. The Secularists gathered in Nottingham for their annual Conference. The

## THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 87

exultant gaiety of that first Conference when Annie Besant was elected Vice-President seemed vastly more than two years distant. And yet, there was an exultation about this year too, an aggressive exultation. Insurrection had broken loose. Almost single-handed, Annie Besant and Bradlaugh had to face the entire group. Freethinkers were not ready to endorse Malthusianism. They resented being burdened with this new opening for attack. From the first Holyoake and Foote had sided with Watts, emphasizing the importance of keeping Freethought literature free from any suspicion of immorality. Some joined the revolt as an expression of discontent with an administration which had not consulted the membership before committing them to so radical a policy. Others took revenge for personal grievances ; the slighting of Mrs. Law, the break with James Thompson and with the Watts. Ghosts of vanished leaders haunted the Conference Platform.

Foote led a movement to abolish the office of President as inappropriate for a democratic organization. The discussion ended in an uproar. It was scarcely possible to take the vote. Abolishing the presidency on the eve of Bradlaugh's trial amounted to a vote of censure, and might well prejudice his case in court. In spite of their vastly superior force of personality and eloquence, Annie Besant and Bradlaugh barely saved the day. They had a majority of seven in a vote of 117 to 110. It was a victory which gave little moral support for facing their trial, the cynical comments of the press, the vulgar satire of the Solicitor-General and the outraged virtue of the world at large.

Bradlaugh was proud of Annie Besant's courage in determining to assume equal responsibility for the pamphlet and plead her own case in court. But it was also embarrassing. Now that he was in for it, he would have

preferred to run the gauntlet alone. The dual defence added to his responsibilities. It doubled the work of preparing papers and briefs. It meant coaching Annie Besant, inexperienced in court procedure, not only in what to say, but in what not to say. Bradlaugh and all her friends implored her not to associate herself with the case, but she was adamant. As Bradlaugh had foreseen, his opponents were quick to criticize him for sheltering himself behind a woman in a disagreeable case.

With the trial drawing near, Annie Besant and Bradlaugh found themselves stripped of supporters. They realized that they must arrange for the management of the paper and their new publishing venture in the event of prison sentences. They were forced to turn over everything to Bradlaugh's inexperienced and bewildered daughters. In her biography of her father, his daughter Mrs. Bonner writes : " There was no one but his daughters, girls with no experience and in many ways young for their years. But we might be ignorant, we might be stupid ; still we loved him so well that we could not help being absolutely faithful to any trust that he might confide to us."

Nineteen-year-old Hypatia, who later became Mrs. Bonner, was two years younger than her sister Alice. She was the more capable, and Bradlaugh selected her as editor of the *Reformer*. During the last days before the trial, she sat beside him, pale and frightened, notebook in hand. With something of her father's determination, she doggedly took notes while he explained confusing details and contingencies. On the last day, he took her to the bank, introduced her to the manager and had her signature recorded, for she must also act as their sole financial agent. In the heat of conflict, it is doubtful if the two defendants suffered as much as these two girls. During the long hours of the four-day trial, they used to walk

## THE QUEEN *v.* BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 89

up and down the great hall, watching for anyone to come out with news of how the case was going. It was thought better for them not to stay in the courtroom because of the nature of the case. They were melancholy figures, nearly always alone, their faces white and drawn against the deep black of their mourning, for their mother had died suddenly in the midst of it all. Bravely they tried to keep up appearances and meet their father cheerfully, but they could not control the burning reproach in their eyes when they looked at Annie Besant.

The case was heard before the Lord Chief Justice of England and a special jury. One of the first books from the press of the new publishing company was a verbatim account of the proceedings, *The Queen vs. Bradlaugh and Besant*. Signed photographs of the two defendants were pasted in as a frontispiece (see p. 90). The book comes to 357 pages and is an interesting document. It shows Annie Besant at her ease, displaying an instinctive knowledge of men and deft assurance in handling them. The atmosphere of everyone in the Court, attendants, jury, Judge, had been formidable. Mrs. Besant, simply and becomingly dressed in modest black, soon had both Judge and jury fascinated. It will perhaps be more interesting to quote some brief examples of her technique than to attempt to do justice to her long and brilliant speech.

“My Lord,” she remarked parenthetically, “I don’t know whether I am going out of my case, but I think that if the light could be prevented from falling on the jury box, it would be an improvement. It is a great point to me to keep the jury in a good temper, my Lord.”

“The Lord Chief Justice,” reads the report, “directed that this inconvenience be stopped and added, ‘I must do you the justice to say that up to this time, you have said nothing that could produce any other result.’” When, at

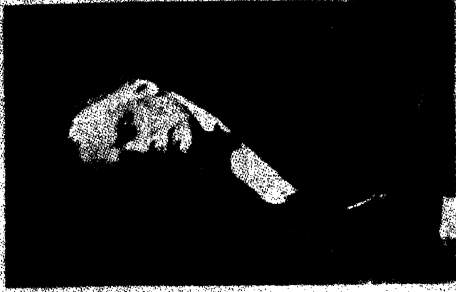
the end of two days, after delivering a defence of 40,000 words, Annie Besant rested, His Lordship was moved to say, "You have gone through this long, and I must say very able address, up to the present without saying anything that could be regarded as painful or offensive to anyone."

On the contrary, though His Lordship did not refer to them, she had said some very pleasant and agreeable things, as in her reference to another publisher who, "was not fortunate enough to be tried as we are, before a fair and upright judge, one who administers the law with the equity and impartiality seen in this court."

In addition to her profound understanding of male psychology, Annie Besant's capacity for sustained, intensive work was put to the test. Bradlaugh gave grateful recognition to the "weeks of unrecognized but most wearying and continued drudgery in analysing a mass of scientific works, searching out authorities and generally preparing the huge body of material required for use on the trial . . . as well as . . . the brilliant eloquence, patient endurance and sustained effort manifested for so many hours in the Court."

According to the next morning's papers, the Lord Chief Justice summed up strongly for an acquittal. He dismissed the Solicitor-General's abusive invective with the comment that a more ill-advised and injudicious proceeding in the way of prosecution was probably never brought into a court of justice. He referred to the two defendants as two enthusiasts actuated by the desire to do good in a particular department of society. He cautioned the jury to be careful not to abridge the full and free right of public discussion.

In spite of all this, the jury brought in a straddling verdict. "We are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the



*Charles Stewart*



*Charles Stewart*

1878

FRONTISPIECE OF REPORT OF FAMILY LIMITATION TRIAL





THE ANNIE BESANT WHO PLAYED DUETS WITH GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

## THE QUEEN v. BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 91

same time, we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motives in publishing it." It was the stupid blundering typical of twelve men in a state of emotional conflict ; wounded in their sentimental susceptibilities by what they must obstinately regard as obscenity, and at the same time, stirred to chivalrous yearnings by the charm and power of this amazing woman. The Judge, obviously annoyed by their bungling, announced that on this verdict he would have to find the defendants guilty. Bradlaugh filed an appeal, the defendants were released on bail, and in the following June the indictment was quashed.

The prudishness of the period, and the rabid intolerance displayed even to-day, in regard to birth control, combine to render this an amazing achievement. Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh took the subject of family limitation, buried in the pages of economic treatises, and made it a living issue, news that the mass of people read about and discussed. After a meagre sale of less than a thousand copies a year over a period of forty years, they sold in the three years following the trial 185,000 copies of *Fruits of Philosophy*. They both admitted their qualified approval of the pamphlet. They had been defending the right to circulate such information. Having won this point Annie Besant at once wrote a book, *The Law of Population*, more dignified in tone, more modern in physiology, and telling the best methods then known for preventing conception. In the next fifteen years, nearly half a million copies of the two pamphlets were sold. Mrs. Besant received a deluge of letters from grateful women all over the world. Other women had rebelled against the wastefulness and cruelty which condemned many women to lives of continuous childbearing in a world that permitted nearly half of the babies to die. None of them had tried to do anything about it. Mrs. Besant was the first woman

publicly to endorse the use of contraceptive devices and she did it in a day when there were few men brave enough to take such a stand.

The motive power generated by this trial is still functioning; innumerable birth control organizations in every country on the globe owe their original impetus to the courage of these two pioneers. Before the trial was over, while they were still waiting for the formality of sentence, Annie Besant organized a committee of ten to draw up a prospectus for a Malthusian League which should take advantage of the interest and publicity resulting from the trial. The following year, in Holland, Dr. Aletta Jacobs opened the first birth control clinic in the world.

The brutally inefficient custom of enduring the agony of childbirth for twice as many babies as will survive their infancy is slowly yielding to influences springing from this trial. It is more than a coincidence that the English birth rate reached its peak in the years 1875-80 at 36.3 per thousand. In the half century since, it has steadily declined until in 1927 it was 16.7, less than half. Sir William Beveridge, the famous economist, has said that "the years about 1880 (*i.e.*, the years in which the English birthrate began to decline) are an epoch in human history as important as those which witnessed the introduction of gunpowder or the printing press."

A falling birthrate is invariably accompanied by a drop in the death rate. In spite of halving her birth rate, England is maintaining a natural increase in population, at the rate to-day of about 10 per cent. It is true that her population was increasing more rapidly in 1880, at the rate of 14 per cent. Watching England's baffled efforts to meet her unemployment problem year after year, a problem so acute that it may well founder more than one Government—one wonders if she would have devised any better plan

## THE QUEEN *v.* BRADLAUGH AND BESANT 93

for handling her excess millions if this drop had not occurred.

Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh paid the penalty of added derision and insult from provincial editors and barnstorming revivalists for many years. But it was a revolutionary victory that these two outcasts won for the society which spurned them. Perhaps in establishing the right to circulate birth control information, Annie Besant came nearer to the secret for which she has searched all her life than she has ever come since. In terms of such imponderables as hours of futile agony and needless deaths of young mothers prevented, this was the greatest achievement of all Annie Besant's many years of life.

CHAPTER VIII  
A DAUGHTER FOR A CAUSE

1878

ANNIE BESANT risked more than going to jail when she championed the cause of family limitation. She staked her mother's right to the girlhood of her only daughter—and she lost. It is difficult to appraise how much her little girl really meant to her. As far as she was consciously aware, the child was the most precious object in her life. And yet, in the face of unanimous warnings that she would lose her child, her insistence on making an issue of the Knowlton pamphlet can lead to only one conclusion. Her compulsion to defend this pamphlet was stronger than her necessity to keep her daughter.

Annie Besant was not in the least domestic. This was a shocking admission in the 'seventies, but she was realistic enough to recognize it, as in her reference to women's conversation "about babies and servants—troubles of which I knew nothing and which bored me unutterably." To go further was heresy, even for this archheretic. She could not admit what modern realism accepts as a common-place, that the physical process of childbearing does not necessarily transform a woman into a wise mother, not even into a devoted one.

In her attitude towards her children's father, Annie Besant was torn between well-bred reserve and a shrewd sense that exploitation of her wrongs at the hands of this priest of the church made excellent anti-religious propaganda and effective personal publicity. She had an example

of reserve in her friend Bradlaugh. Although his enemies for years made the most of his separation from his wife and used it as the basis for fantastic accusations against him, Bradlaugh never hinted at the real situation. In justice to his memory after his death, his daughter Mrs. Bonner, reluctantly explained in his biography that Mrs. Bradlaugh had been a hopeless drunkard, and that he had done everything that a tender and patient affection could suggest before breaking up their home.

Annie Besant was unable to preserve such consistent silence. As long as the Besants left her alone, she ignored them. When her husband and his brother made unfriendly gestures, she and Bradlaugh gestured back. The silent intervals between, created suspense and made these occasional flare-ups the more dramatic. Under the separation agreement, Mabel spent a month with her father every summer. The first year, when Annie Besant came for her, Mr. Besant had hidden the child. Bradlaugh appealed to the Court, and the Vicar received an urgent message from his solicitor to give the child up at once. The incident was fully described in the *Reformer*, with a thinly-veiled threat that it was not necessary *at present* to say anything about the earlier portions of Annie Besant's married life.

“ . . . We do not intend, if it can be avoided, to enter into a purely personal discussion ; but if the advocates of the Sibsey Vicar are well advised, they will not presume too far on the generous silence of the lady to whom he owes the very bread he eats.”

Following a speech by Annie Besant, Bradlaugh, who had occupied the chair, stirred the audience by denunciations of pious intolerance. Just as religious hypocrisy had deprived Shelley of his children half a century before, so it was seeking to-day to tear her little girl from Mrs. Besant's arms. He turned the attack into atheistic propa-

ganda by his fiery invective against religious bigotry in this and all ages. He concluded amid general applause with the assurance that unlike her prototype, Shelley, Mrs. Besant had friends who would not rest until they had seen justice done, and that they were prepared if necessary to carry the case to the House of Lords.

The oddest thing about both statements is that Annie Besant should have wished them sponsored by Bradlaugh. It gives a curious impression that, in such an intimate matter, he was speaking as her protector and that he was the person with whom even her husband must reckon. In spite of their observance of the proprieties under the chaperonage of Bradlaugh's daughters, it was inevitable that tongues should clatter and clack. Both were vivid, forceful, magnetic. She had great charm, attracting men as naturally as she breathed. She not only fascinated them, but stimulated them to a high, intellectual camaraderie. Gossip does not bother about fine distinctions. Here were two people of the opposite sex, both of them married and separated from their partners. They were attractive, were constantly together, and were identified with the two most unpopular causes of the period. It was more than was necessary.

Fighting libels was part of their daily routine. Scandalized by their defiance of popular opinion, all classes resorted to the filthiest abuse. A Brighton Town Councillor hoped that "such an animal as Mrs. Besant would not be allowed to use the Town Hall." Another called her a foul woman. *The Essex Standard* called Bradlaugh a skunk and referred to "that bestial man and woman who go about earning a livelihood by corrupting the young of England." *The Cheshire News* quoted an advocate's statement that there was nothing on the statute books which made the procuring of a miscarriage an offence, otherwise, where

would such people be as Mr. Bradlaugh and others? Sensational pamphlets, *Wife or Mistress?* purporting to be from Annie Besant's pen sold like hot cakes. Even the aristocracy stooped to mudthrowing. Admiral Sir John Hay, Bart., Conservative candidate for Parliament, in a campaign speech, described Bradlaugh as an Atheist who had published a book showing how to break the seventh commandment without adding to the population. Mr. Bradlaugh travelled about with a lady and had published this book (*Fruits of Philosophy*) which he supposed was the fruit of their experimental philosophy.

English men and women old enough to recall the earlier phases of Annie Besant's career offer conflicting opinions as to the degree of intimacy between Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh. In the absence of any definite evidence these opinions vary according to the individual temperament. The trusting type believe in a consistently Platonic relationship. The sceptical do not. Types in between are not sure what they think. Annie Besant was involved in years of litigation, was recklessly libelled, was perpetually subject to whispering campaigns. She was shadowed by detectives who interviewed her landlords and inn-keepers and investigated her associates. Not only her husband but all orthodoxy would have been glad to discredit Annie Besant and Bradlaugh and their propaganda by involving them in a scandal. It is an impressive fact that although her husband and his advisers gave her no quarter, they never once attempted to attack her character in court. Since Mr. Besant showed his wife no consideration otherwise, this must be credited not to his chivalry, but to her discretion.

The relationship between Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh was on both sides one of tender affection. His two biographers who knew Bradlaugh most intimately, his daughter, Mrs. Bonner, and the Hon. J. M. Robertson,



M.P., both state without qualification that he would have married Annie Besant had it not been for legal hindrances. Mrs. Bonner writes : " Having enrolled herself a member of the National Secularist Society, Mrs. Besant sought Mr. Bradlaugh's acquaintance. They were mutually attracted and a friendship sprang up between them of so close a nature that, had both been free, it would undoubtedly have ended in marriage."

Through the forty crowded years since Bradlaugh's death, his memory has remained unique for Annie Besant. As an energetic old lady in her eighties, she still refers in nearly every speech to some wise saying or some principle of her dear old friend, Charles Bradlaugh. She sometimes quotes him three and four times in a single evening. He stands out as the ablest man with whom she was ever associated. His was the great love of her life. This is the important fact about their relationship and not their precise degree of intimacy.

From his quiet Lincolnshire Vicarage, the Rev. Frank Besant had watched his wife's career with incredulous consternation. It was revolting to have her name—his name—associated with Atheism and the notorious Bradlaugh. But that a lady should defile herself in the mire of controversy on unmentionable sexual matters—it was too much. His only consolation was that by this last breach, she had practically insured her loss of the custody of their daughter. Mabel's summer holidays with her father added fresh fuel to his wrath. He watched suspiciously for the contaminating effects of that godless woman and her intolerable Bradlaugh. Miss Everitt, the spinster head mistress of a school for girls in Boston, lived at the Vicarage and had charge of Mabel during her holiday visits.

The first summer, when Mr. Besant went up to kiss his little girl good-night, she said her prayers just as he had

taught them to her. The second summer, he was horrified to find that she had forgotten them. Mabel had all of a precocious child's awareness of a complicated grown-up situation. When he scolded, she told him that her mother said that was no God for her to say prayers to and there wasn't any use in saying them. Struggling to control himself, her father explained the immanence of God to his complete satisfaction. Mabel listened dutifully. He prompted her through "Now I lay me," and when she came to the "God blesses," he magnanimously included mamma. Tucking her into bed he said, "Good-night and God bless you." Mischievous Mabel had not had enough. Innocently she asked him why he said that ; her mamma had told the servant not to say it because there wasn't any God, and it was silly.

Miss Everitt, who regarded the Vicar with that delicately balanced ascetic-sentimental attitude of the spinster for her priest, heard the story with soothing sympathy. Mabel, with a child's instinct to bask in the glow of the spotlight, made further elaborations. Shyly she confided to Miss Everitt that she had felt very badly when her mamma would not let her say her prayers ; after her mamma had kissed her good-night and left her, she used to get out of bed, all by herself, and say them anyway. Did Miss Everitt think God would forgive her for not saying her prayers some nights when it was her mamma who would not let her? Sitting in the garden in the evening after Mabel and her brother had been put to bed, Miss Everitt and her Vicar counselled together as to how to protect this precious little soul from the perils of such a life. Impressively the Vicar gave Mabel a Bible and hymn book, and she solemnly promised that she would read them every day and never forget her prayers. The next summer, she did not have the books. She explained that

her mamma would not let her keep them, that her mamma said that the Bible was not a proper book for little girls to read.

Mr. Besant waited until it was evident that his wife was not going to jail. He had grimly hoped that she would. It would be simpler to get the child. He met with substantial sympathy in his own community. A committee of Lincolnshire gentry sent out a circular letter appealing for funds to aid the Vicar in rescuing his daughter. They raised more than £200. The Bishop of Lincoln was happy to head the list of contributors with ten pounds. It was a soothing antidote to Mrs. Besant's jeers at Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln. Besant sued to deprive his wife of custody of Mabel on the grounds of her Atheism and her association with Bradlaugh in publishing an indecent and obscene pamphlet called *Fruits of Philosophy*.

The case was heard before Sir George Jessel, Master of the Rolls. It went against Annie Besant from the beginning. In spite of the fact that the higher court had dismissed the charges against *Fruits of Philosophy*, Sir George had the temerity to volunteer his own opinion that it was an obscene pamphlet and to base his judgment against Mrs. Besant partially on that opinion. He ignored her offer to provide £100 a year for Mabel's care and education if she could be placed with some third person. He admitted that the mother had taken admirable care of Mabel, and that there was no charge against her personal conduct. It was Annie Besant's ideas which were intolerable, and in giving his opinion, he was gratuitously insulting: "I know and must know as a man of the world that . . . her course of conduct must cut her off practically, not merely from the sympathy of, but from social intercourse with the majority of her sex. . . . You cannot expect modest women to associate with her." In short, a person

holding her views was not a proper guardian for a young girl.

Annie Besant does not cherish grievances. From beginning to end of her *Autobiography*, this emotional woman referred dispassionately to her former opponents or else ignored them. Even for her husband, she had no recriminations. There was only one exception, one person who broke through her reserves. This was the Judge who deprived her of her child. After his death, she reprinted her attack on him, written at this time, saying that she was glad to put it on record in permanent form, now that only his memory remained for her to hate. He was, she said, rude, overbearing, and coarse ; he had the sneer of a *Mephistopheles*, mingled with a curious monkeyish pleasure in inflicting pain. Defiantly she argued that the change was all against Mabel's material interests, taking her away from cultured and thoughtful society to place her among half-educated farmers. The girl's matrimonial chances would suffer. She blandly called attention to the five unmarried daughters of a deceased clergyman in Sibsey, and a clergyman's family of six unmarried daughters, immolated in a neighbouring village. She denounced the humiliating discriminations of English law against married women. An unmarried mother retained control of her children but, at that time, the married woman surrendered all rights over her offspring to their father. In relation to her children, the advantages were all with the mother of illegitimate offspring.

Press comments were remarkably sympathetic with Annie Besant. Many journals granted her good faith and criticized the courts for robbing her of her daughter. They underscored the irony of a Jewish Judge deciding against her because she did not believe in a Christian God. Even the American paper, the conservative *Springfield*

*Republican* was outraged and commented on "the terribly unfair judgment which virtually charged Annie Besant with advocating promiscuous sexual intercourse. . . . There is no trace of such a vile meaning in its pages. In this day (1878!) when such things have perforce become matters of common discussion, we may speak plainly . . . whether the class that recruits pauperism shall continue to breed as unconcernedly as flies or fish is a question of serious imminence. Somewhere there must be a pause."

Annie Besant had only begun to fight. Bradlaugh's familiarity with legal devices kept the case in court for another year. Mr. Besant's friends sent out a second appeal for funds, estimating further expenses at £500. The respectable gentry had engaged against a sinister combination—two aggressive fighters, embittered and implacable, supported by uncommon legal adroitness and an inexhaustible fund of money. With their eloquence and skilful human appeal, Annie Besant and Bradlaugh raised from the working classes who made up their audience the amazing sum of £2,000. In the pages of the *Reformer* they accounted for legal expenses of this amount of the Knowlton pamphlet trial and the subsequent litigation. This was in spite of eliminating most of the counsel fees by pleading their cases and drawing their own papers.

Mr. Besant now had both children. Relying on the Court's lenience, he stopped payments to his wife and refused to allow her to see the children. His counsel had by this time a wholesome respect for Bradlaugh's legal resourcefulness, and forearmed the Vicar with an order from the Master of the Rolls, the same Sir George Jessel, restraining Mrs. Besant from bringing any suit against her husband. She filed a counter claim for divorce. When she left her husband, she had not looked further than a separation agreement. Since then, she had met Bradlaugh.

His wife was now dead. The shattered troth which bound her to Frank Besant was all that stood between her and the man she loved.

Up to this time, she had never publicly accused her husband of violence. She had been a bit mysterious and Bradlaugh had hinted that there was something to conceal. Now, with her back to the wall, Annie Besant played her final trump. She had been saving it, but in the England of the 'seventies, it was not high enough. She alleged that her husband had repeatedly struck and threatened her. She specified six occasions. The first was early in 1870. She had been married two years, and it was during the early months of her second pregnancy. Mr. Besant struck her a blow on the shoulder and told her to go back home. The following year, he seized her by the arm, dragged her along by force and nearly threw her over a stile in the field. At about the same date, he pushed her violently out of bed, so that she fell on the floor and was much bruised. Again, he clenched his fist, shook it in her face and threatened that if she ever mentioned she had obtained the living at Sibsey for him, he would kill her. Finally, he shook her by the shoulders and struck her with his knee violently several times, causing her to leave him and return to her mother. During the last two years, he kept a loaded gun in his study and several times threatened to shoot her. In answer, Mr. Besant denied every one of the charges and said they were purely imaginary; the violence . . . "if any—was done in the heat of the moment."

Annie Besant and Bradlaugh had a curious custom of printing in the *Reformer* full length reports of the legal trials in which they were almost continuously involved. They published these charges of violence in a verbatim report of the trial in April, 1879. Neither then nor later did they ever refer to them specifically. The charges are

the only evidence available. It is difficult to imagine an English clergyman with Besant's background beating his wife like a navvy. It is also difficult to imagine an honest woman's inventing such charges. Besant fumbled his denial rather suspiciously. Certainly there must have been cruelty. Whether or not in her conflict, Annie Besant embroidered the facts is a delicate question. The Court paid no attention to her claims and refused to hear her witnesses including the doctor who had attended her while she was living with her husband. This is no reflection on the validity of her case. Annie Besant knew before she began that she had little to hope from Sir George Jessel. He held that the deed of separation when she first left her husband condoned any previous violence or other offences on his part, and protected him from all further suits by Mrs. Besant.

The only concession was an order from the Court enabling Annie Besant to see her children alone once a month, to receive weekly letters, and to have them with her for an annual three weeks' holiday, accompanied by their governess. Masterful as she has shown herself in her public relations, she was unable to work out a satisfactory adjustment of these terms. The monthly visit was difficult to arrange. It was a five-hour journey, with a change at Peterborough from the London express to a dawdling narrow gauge line, and an hour's drive after she left the train. Devoting all day and half the night to the trip, she had only three hours left to be with her children, unless she took another day and spent the night, and there was no place for her to sleep. It was not pleasant going back to Sibsey. The Vicarage was haunted by ghastly memories. She could not avoid encounters with her husband. She had to run the gauntlet of staring yokels.

The longer holidays did not work out any better. Her husband's governesses were so antagonistic that she could

not endure their presence. She felt that such visits were worse than none and she determined not to see nor correspond with either of the children until they were old enough to understand and judge for themselves. It was a drastic decision, but she kept it. She could scarcely have undertaken it had it meant to her what it would mean to most mothers.

She has described in her *Autobiography* her grief after Mabel was taken from her : " I listened for the patter of dancing feet and merry thrilling laughter that rang through the garden, the sweet music of the childish voice ; during my sleepless nights I missed in the darkness the soft breathing of the little child ; each morning I longed in vain for the clinging arms and soft, sweet kisses. At last health broke down, and fever struck me, and mercifully gave me the rest of pain and delirium instead of the agony of conscious loss. Through that terrible illness, day after day, Mr. Bradlaugh came to me and sat writing beside me, feeding me with ice and milk, refused from all others, and behaving more like a tender mother than a man friend ; he saved my life, though it seemed to me for awhile of little value, till the first months of lonely pain were over."

She referred to this illness in extravagant terms, as a long and dangerous illness. Checking up in the files of the *Reformer*, the bulletins show that she was still in bed but better, six days after the onset of the attack, and that she was dressed and moving about the house within three weeks.

In silence and rather philosophically she had accepted the loss of her little son. She has always referred to the loss of her daughter as the most agonizing experience of her life. The Judge who deprived her of her child called forth almost the only words of hatred in her autobiog-



raphy. She used the incident as a chief theme in her propaganda for several years. The question arises as to whether there was not a guilty conscience beneath her suffering. She had forced this situation against the warning of all her friends. Deeper than that, she was harassed by a suspicion which she could never admit that she did not really miss her children as much as the standards of 1879 demanded. The vehemence of her protestations suggests how intolerably the thought nagged her. During the next decade, by way of compensation, she devoted herself increasingly to the sufferings of the poor. Haunted by memories of the motherhood she had surrendered, she tried instead to be a Universal mother.

CHAPTER IX  
A LYRIC INTERLUDE

1879

BRADLAUGH was no ladies' man. His wife, his daughters, and Annie Besant are probably the only women who mattered in all his life. He was not demonstrative. His affections burned steadily rather than mounting high. Annie Besant was of a more impulsive and mercurial nature. Her instinct to dramatize her feelings and express them in vivid, searing words was the secret of her power to sway the emotions of her audiences. Mourning over the loss of her daughter, smarting over the insolence of Sir George Jessel, feeling herself persecuted by all the forces of society, law, Church and State, she turned to Bradlaugh, fourteen years her senior, with the bewildered grief of a child.

Insensibly, relations between them had changed. To the end of his life, Bradlaugh always gave her the tenderest affection, but for him their friendship was a costly one. His cherished Secularist Society had been split by jealousy of Annie Besant and her rapid promotion. Defence of the family limitation pamphlet had for the time being cost him the rest of his followers. Yielding to her pressure, he had plunged back into financial anxieties in establishing their publishing partnership. He had found himself, stripped of friends and money resources, forced in case of a prison sentence to entrust all the structure of his life's work to his frightened, inexperienced daughter.

Annie Besant and Bradlaugh came out of the ordeal

with that tacit understanding which is the product of mutual anguish. Their relationship had gained depths of beauty and assurance, but the romance was gone. First with regret and then rebelliously, Annie Besant sensed the change. She took heroic measures. She sued for divorce, using her last resource, the charge of cruelty against her husband, and it failed her. She faced an impasse. She and Bradlaugh could not marry. They were in a vulnerable position and well aware of shadowing detectives. Bradlaugh adjusted himself to the difficulties of this situation more easily than she. Loyalty to the cause to which he had devoted his life took precedence over all personal desires. He had, besides, ambitions for a political career. His daughter recalls his stretching out a powerful arm and saying, "I have not a passion that I could not crush as easily as an egg within my hand if it were necessary for the good of the cause I love."

It was not so simple for Annie Besant. She was younger. She had not learned the lessons that life had taught Bradlaugh. She was a woman, still seeking a mysterious something which had eluded her all her life. As the rainbow hues faded from her romance, Atheism too lost its glamour. She was to give it another decade of service, but it was an obstinate loyalty to Bradlaugh rather than the cause which held her. Atheism was—as all her later life proves—too cold and austere both as a creed and in its lack of ritual. Personally too, it had been disappointing. After the stormy sessions of the last two conventions, she realized that she confronted an implacable opposition. She could never hope to rise higher than her present position as one of the dozen vice-presidents of the society. It was in this restless and highly inflammable mood that she found herself in the midst of her next adventure before she had time to hesitate. She had recently returned to

work after a brief convalescence in Wales. Another court action by her husband was hanging over her. The loss of her daughter was still a recent memory.

Concerned as always to be of service to their father, it had occurred to Bradlaugh's daughters that if they studied law, they could help him prepare his cases. As a beginning, they enrolled at the University of London for courses in political economy and science. The idea appealed to Annie Besant. Legal training should be most useful. They would all three help Mr. Bradlaugh.

Dr. Edward Aveling, the girls' science teacher, was a brilliant and versatile person. Not yet thirty, he had several slender volumes to his credit, some scientific textbooks and essays on literary and artistic subjects. He held the chair of anatomy at the London Hospital and taught sciences at London University. Although a public school and University man, he was radical in sympathy, and was at once interested in his two new pupils as the daughters of Charles Bradlaugh, the notorious infidel. The girls invited him to dine at Oatlands to meet Mrs. Besant and their father. It was a memorable evening. Teaching science was still a novelty, viewed askance by the orthodox because it threatened to challenge Adam and Eve and Jonah and the whale. In America that same spirit is embalmed and perfectly preserved with the laws against evolution in Tennessee. Dr. Aveling was handsome in a showy sort of way, as irresistible to women as he was susceptible to them. He wore the loud checks and bright ties of the man about town. There was a fascinating touch of the diabolic about his handsome, intellectual face. He talked easily of the arts, the theatre, the pictures at the Academy, the newest books. His knowledge of the mysterious new sciences then just beginning their laboratory careers diffused about him an added glamour. Annie

Besant's big St. Bernard dog—given her by Bradlaugh—growled in an undertone throughout the evening. She remembered this afterward.

Events moved rapidly. There was no longer any talk of studying law. Annie Besant decided to take a science degree at London University. Dr. Aveling was to give her private lessons so that she might matriculate as soon as possible. Annie Besant has taken up a great variety of causes first and last. While each lasted, she gave herself to it with the enthusiasm of her eager, intense nature. *The National Reformer*, organ of Atheism and Freethought, reflected her absorbed interest in science and anatomy. Dr. Aveling's first article appeared the middle of January, 1879, "Darwin and His Views." A week later, Mrs. Besant with the fluency of a medical expert was reviewing a technical book, *The Localization of Cerebral Diseases*, all about the maxillary bones and sagittal sutures. On the following Sunday night, she lectured in the Hall of Science on the physical formation of the brain and nervous system.

Midwinter in London found Annie Besant and Dr. Aveling with crowded calendars. They ruthlessly cancelled evening engagements in order to prepare her for the University entrance examinations in June. In February she announced in the *Reformer* that, thinking it might add to her usefulness to the cause, she was taking some courses preparatory to trying for a degree at London University. She would therefore be unable to deliver any lectures during the week and could only accept Saturday and Sunday engagements. By the end of May, she had cancelled all lectures and for the first time discontinued her "Day-break" page. In July, Bradlaugh announced that she was an undergraduate of London University. She had justified six months of intensive effort.

Aveling now began a nimble-footed climb up the Free-thought ladder which rivalled Annie Besant's. An article by him in the next number of the *Reformer* confirms the natural suspicion that they had not applied themselves exclusively to the sciences during their six months' sequestration. With a classical flourish, Aveling called his article "Credo ergo Laborabo." It was even more flowery than its quaint Latin title : " I desire to make known in a manner as public as possible that I am a Freethinker." He mused on the value of small things ; remembered that the pebble rolling out from under his foot had its bonds of connection with the remotest star in the firmament ; he himself and his conversion to Freethought were only small things like the pebble, and yet, and yet! He wound up with a peroration about desiring only to toil and teach others to seek the truth, speak the truth and live the truth. One wonders what Bradlaugh really thought as he read it. Whatever he thought, he inserted in his " Rough Notes " a simple, straightforward paragraph of welcome to Aveling as a man of high ability, and asked English Freethinkers " to take him on our trust until they have learned to value him for the work which we know that he can do." Aveling, who by this time had been appointed to the staff of the *Reformer*, began in the same number a serial reply to Mallock's new book, *Is Life Worth Living?* With lyrical intensity, Aveling affirmed that it was !

The following Sunday night, Aveling made his début in the Hall of Science with a speech on Shelley. Bradlaugh, as it happened, was out of town. Mrs. Besant presided and wrote up the lecture for the *Reformer* under the caption, "A New Soldier." She said that Shelley's short biography, had been exquisitely told by Dr. Aveling, very simply, very lovingly. She congratulated the Freethinkers on their acquisition of the Doctor : " His language is

exquisitely chosen and is polished to the highest extent, so that the mere music of the speech is pleasant to the ear. Since to this artistic charm are added scholarship and wide knowledge, with a brilliancy of brain that I have not seen surpassed, and a capacity for work without which the intellectual power would be half wasted, our friends will not wonder that we who know him rejoice that our Mistress Liberty has won this new Knight." Ending his speech with Shelley's glorious "Cry to Liberty," "he sat down amid such a tumult of applause as is rarely heard—such indeed as I have never heard save for our noblest speaker, Charles Bradlaugh."

Since Bradlaugh was out of town Aveling must have been indebted to Annie Besant for the final accolade. His programme of lecture engagements appeared in a third little box directly under those of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, at the top of the "To Correspondents" column. In the meantime, strange, exotic zephyrs blew fitfully through the *Reformer's* pages, giving that staid journal something of the air of an elephant toying with spring fever. Atheism as viewed in its columns was a ponderous subject, devoid of humour. Annie Besant's original playfulness had disappeared. She dashed off her articles too hastily to achieve much sparkle. By contrast, Mr. Foote's rival paper, *The Freethinker*, followed a policy of ribald merriment with blatant headlines: "Cracked for Christ," "The Bible and Bung," "On the Advantage of Going to Hell"; a series of coarse "Comic Bible Sketches," and stories with a bar-room flavour about the women Bible characters from the Virgin to the Magdalene.

Annie Besant and Bradlaugh resented this want of dignity, but it was an almost total lack of sense of humour which made them both lean over backward in their own editorial policy. Year after year they wrote and edited

metaphysical arguments on the indestructibility of the soul, archæological arguments on the historicity of Jesus, theological arguments on eternal torture. For light reading they offered biographies of the Freethought martyrs, Bruno and Hypatia.

With the appearance of Dr. Aveling, a new theme rings out like Siegfried's bird-song motif in the Ring cycle. At the end of that first springtime of long evenings exploring the mysteries and beauties of this wonderful new world of science, Aveling wrote an article "On Personal Influence." If it was to be regarded as summarizing the trend of his past months of scientific work, it must have had a strangely heretical ring for the strait-laced Rationalist.

Dr. Aveling pointed out that the modern sciences of chemistry and astronomy were based on the discoveries of mediaeval alchemists and astrologers. Similarly, the myths and folk lore of all nations have been an expression of the world's groping for some science of the mind, such as we are beginning to find in psychology. Not too relevantly, he next asserted that in spite of scientific materialism, one dare not deny the possibility that the unspoken thoughts of one person may influence another . . . "when he remembers that some one woman holds him for ever enshrined in the sacred temple of her heart, and breathes as she wakes from slumber and as she sinks to rest his name." He analysed the power of human beings over each other, the physical beauty of woman, its effect on man. It was, he declared, "no feeling of coarse sensuality which moves us to deeper worship not of them, but of the universal loveliness whereof they form a part."

By the end of August, he found an excuse for making an analysis of pure affection: "Her life is as full of beauty as are her deep eyes. The loveliness of her face and form make a new joy in the world. The loveliness of her mind



increases that joy a thousandfold ; and whilst all around her may taste something of the happiness her presence diffuses, to me falls the deepest gladness, for her tenderest smiles are reserved for my eyes only ; her inmost thoughts are breathed to me alone." There followed an intense desire to be worthy of this true heart. "As I could not bear the thought that her love for me went hand in hand with a kindred love for another, she shall be the sole mistress of my life." He summed up, with naïve transparency, "To us, the most intense form of affection conceivable would be between a man and woman who both believed fully in the happier future of humanity and were both toiling to bring about that desired end."

As compared with the rash impetuosity which she was to display a few years later—in connection with Dr. Aveling—Annie Besant maintained an admirable reserve. Her most significant gesture was an effort to adopt a more debonair and belletristic style. The Secular Society's annual Almanack had always been a serious, rather heavy vehicle for propaganda. The 1880 Almanack was unique. Annie Besant attempted a new form—poetic allegory. She called it "Humanity and Its Teachers." It was about a naked infant lying on the shore of a mighty ocean, looking up through the branches of green trees at the blue sky and the birds flying about. With stilted unreality, various teachers strolled by and taught the child this and that about life. As much as it was anything, it was an awkward effort to express in semi-lyrical form a sentimental feeling for one's teacher. Aveling's contribution showed his usual facile fervour. He wrote "A Holiday Musing" about a stone bridge in Wales, and its romantic associations, a leafy tree that "leans out over the rushing water and says 'Kiss me' . . . an underfoam half seen under the pellucid

wave, as a maiden's love half reveals itself under her pure glance."

Annie Besant was a pioneer among women in her determination to make her life conform to her own interests and individuality, instead of adapting herself to the demands that fate in the form of some man might make upon her. She was especially fitted for temperament for such a departure. Her extraordinary versatility, her insatiable Ajax craving for more light gave her an unusual capacity for detachment, and for absorption in intellectual interests. There is another side of the story. Annie Besant was only thirty-two. Her pictures show an ardent woman of rounded curves, full lips and eager, responsive eyes. The most insidious thing about Aveling for Annie Besant was that she had never before experienced this type of attack. Frank Besant had to catch his train. Bradlaugh's tributes were of a rugged brevity. The tempestuous, extravaganza adoration of the Aveling school gives off a heady bouquet.

Suddenly, out of the blue this figure had arisen to fulfil her every need. They had in common their revolt against the established order. As a University man, he had a broader cultural background than the other Freethinkers. Best of all, he was a trained scientist, competent to direct her eager mind through all the intricacies and bypaths of this marvellous new universe opening before her. Permeating all, like a golden haze, there was his extravagant romanticism. Not the most involved equation could make him forget the magical lure of the woman beside him. He described his enchantment with the facility of a poet, flashing it before the blinking eyes of Heterodoxy with the recklessness of a Don Juan.

The summer holidays gave them a respite from scientific work, and they made intersecting lecture tours. The week after his maiden speech in the Hall of Science,

Aveling accompanied Annie Besant on the long trip to Edinburgh, and acted as chairman for her lecture on "Materialism and Spiritualism." Escaping the kindly hospitality of their Freethought friends, they spent an enchanted day roaming about the romantic city. She had often visited Edinburgh with Bradlaugh and his daughters, and she knew where to go. They turned out of the bustle of Princes Street, up the steep cliff to the Castle, across the ancient moat and drawbridge, dropping away the centuries as they climbed, until they stood alone together in the old grey quadrangle, thrilling to the glamour of the present as well as of the past. They wandered down High Street with its pock-marked alleys and gaunt tenements clinging to the hillside, out past Holyrood to that most romantic spot of all, Arthur's Seat, with its long unbroken vista of sea and sky.

In these hours of travel and relaxation, they planned for the winter. It was their golden moment. They were both young, both in revolt, both brilliant and capable, both fired with the intoxicating possibilities of using this marvellous new instrument of Science as a lever to help mankind shake off its bondage to priests and superstition, and rise in potential splendour, a world of freethinking men and women. Annie Besant might be circumspect in her writings, but she could not prevent this new *joie de vivre* from showing in her eyes, in her carriage, in the very sound of her voice. Provincial newspapers commented on the change. In August, a Manchester journalist wrote, "We do not think her face had such a sad and melancholy expression as it had when we heard her previously."

Early in the autumn, the *Reformer* announced that Dr. Aveling, assisted by Mrs. Besant, would teach sciences in connection with Freethought propaganda in the Hall of

Science. They organized classes in chemistry and physiology. They rigged up a laboratory. The auditorium walls blossomed with frescoes of skeletons and chemical charts. Dr. Aveling performed the experiments and Mrs. Besant assisted him. Afterward, Aveling took her back to Oatlands in a hansom. On moonlight nights, they walked home through the brooding silence of London in the 'seventies. Once or twice, Bradlaugh visited the class and gave them a paternal benediction in the ensuing "Rough Notes." One night all three were obliged to walk home. The fog was so thick that no cabmen were abroad, and they had to find their way for several miles by feeling for doorsteps as they fumbled through the mist.

Elocution was in its heyday. An unknown young dramatic critic named George Bernard Shaw was writing witty jibes about something called Delsarte. Dr. Aveling, in addition to his other accomplishments, was a gifted elocutionist and inspired Mrs. Besant to recite for the entertainment of their Freethought audiences. Once or twice they even persuaded simple old Bradlaugh to join them. As they settled down to their winter's work, Aveling's lyric outbursts were less frequent, but refreshingly unexpected. In a report of a lecture tour, he suddenly remarked, "with the softer influence of woman upon us, comes not only the impulse to gentleness, but a new, strange strength for work."

Annie Besant was mulling over the complexities of that eternal problem, the relations between man and woman. In an essay on Shelley and Milton she pointed out that Milton "wooded another woman while his wife was living apart from him. Shelley declared that the marriage tie unsanctified by love was a chain which should be easily broken, and like Milton, he sought the love of another

while his first wife was living." This was a new theme for Annie Besant.

D. M. Bennett, a prominent American Freethinker and editor of *The New York Truthseeker*, visited London on his way around the world and recorded his impressions of English Atheism for his American readers. He dined at Outlands several times with Mrs. Besant, Aveling and the three Bradlaughs. He paid conscientious tribute to Mrs. Besant's ability; an eloquent speaker, capable presiding officer, always busy with writing and correspondence, beside studying seven sciences. But he showed no enthusiasm. She evidently snubbed him.

While expressing an almost reverent respect for Bradlaugh, it was the young Doctor who fascinated Bennett. Aveling, an artist at creating first impressions, bore him off to the vast and glittering Criterion restaurant, and later to the theatre. Unsophisticated Bennett was overcome. The restaurant, he wrote home, was one of the finest in the whole world, the dinner an extensive one, taking nearly an hour and a half to dispatch! Dazzled by Aveling's display, the post-prandial glow, and the glamour of their private box at the theatre, Bennett felt that he was indeed seeing life. He confided to his wondering American readers that, "to a casual observer, it could hardly have been known that we were not of the aristocracy of the city." Bennett showed himself aware of the strange Secularist triumvirate but was discreetly reticent. Their followers, he said, had nicknamed them The Trinity.

At all the important events of the Freethought world that winter, where there had formerly been two guests of honour, two speakers, two chairs on the platform, there were now three. Among themselves the Freethinkers gossiped endlessly about this second spectacular début, only

five years after Annie Besant's meteoric flight across their heavens. The resentment of the old timers was intensified by this repetition of the playing favourites process which had constituted their chief grievance. Annie Besant never bothered her head about such things. She flaunted Aveling in her critics' faces partly in defiance, but largely because she lacked the sensitiveness which would have restrained her.

Bradlaugh was giving more and more attention to politics. A convention of The Land Law Reform League which he had organized was attended by 5,000 delegates. Aveling was selected to read the letters from prominent persons unable to attend. Absorbed in the activities of the convention, Annie Besant scarcely recalled meeting a quiet young delegate just down from Cambridge, named Herbert Burrows. But he remembered meeting her.

Bradlaugh, again standing for Parliament, spent the month of March in Northampton, accompanied by his two daughters. Mrs. Besant was too much occupied to report this campaign for the *Reformer* as she had done the previous one. In the middle of the month, she and Dr. Aveling made a flying visit to Northampton, and it was Aveling who wrote the *Reformer* article. He showed instinctive journalistic sense. In brief space, he gave an excellent picture of the confusion and bustle of an English provincial campaign in the 'seventies ; headquarters in the George, party colours everywhere ; 200 executives on the campaign committee ; captains, assistants, canvassers, all to be praised and blamed ; bills, placards, advertising ; canvassing books to be distributed ; cards with every elector's name and voting number to be filled in and forwarded ; small boy messengers to be organized ; letters written ; doubtful voters investigated ; dead men eliminated from the lists ; endless meetings ;

watching the opposition ; restraining impatient followers. Somewhere in all this whirl of excitement, Dr. Aveling found space for a reference to "her who has made the name of woman more sacred to everyone across the path of whose life she has moved."

Annie Besant and Aveling came back to Northampton for election day. They drove through the town and compared the showing of Bradlaugh's colours with the red of the Liberal candidate. When they returned to the George at four o'clock, they found Bradlaugh leaning back in an arm-chair looking very tired. "There is nothing more to do," he told them, "all our men have polled." At long last the returns came in—Victory ! After twelve years fighting, Bradlaugh had won his seat despite his Atheism, his defence of the Knowlton pamphlet, his anti-Imperialism, his Republicanism and attacks on the royal family.

Late that evening, the two successful candidates held an intimate celebration. Henry Labouchere, Bradlaugh's colleague and the Liberal candidate, was the editor of the popular weekly, *Truth*. University bred, he had spent most of his life in the diplomatic service, and knew all the gay capitals of the western world from St. Petersburg to Washington. He was a distinguished-looking man, slight, well built, a keen face, his hair touched with grey. He was as much an Atheist as Bradlaugh, but too sophisticated to permit such an issue to stand in his way. Under his man-of-the-world shell, he had a generous respect for Bradlaugh, even a certain tenderness for him, and he always supported him loyally in the stormy days ahead in the House of Commons. He was an excellent raconteur, and at his best in the pleasant glow of victory.

It was a thrilling night for Annie Besant. She had proven her disinterested devotion to the cause of Free-thought ; yet, after five years of strenuous writing and

lecturing, law suits and libels and insults, it was soothing to old bruises to feel the smoothness of this victory. After five years of the super-democracy of banquets and soirées and lecture tours, this exclusive little party was a grateful contrast. She looked fondly from her dear friend Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., flushed with victory, to her other dear friend, Dr. Aveling, brilliant and charming, easily holding his own. Perhaps, one of these days they would celebrate his election to Parliament. With her help, it could be managed.

Another springtime, the first since Aveling's publication of his confession of faith as a Freethinker, the Secularists gathered for their annual Conference. There were extraordinary causes for rejoicing. The election of their leader to Parliament was an incredible achievement for Atheism. The Society and the *Reformer* were both flourishing. The science classes had been successful, giving the society prestige. In Bradlaugh's presidential report, he made generous reference to Dr. Aveling who had delivered 116 lectures and held sixty evening science classes during the past winter.

Annie Besant as usual spoke next. She explained in detail why she had taken up scientific work so intensively during the past year, even at the cost of seeming to neglect her lecturing and other work for the Society. She was, she explained, so terribly lonely after her daughter had been taken away from her that she had felt a necessity to throw herself into something absorbing, and she believed that scientific work would be of the greatest value to the cause of Freethought. There was a vacancy among the Vice-Presidents. Bradlaugh nominated Aveling and he was elected. First Annie Besant and four years later Dr. Aveling joined the Secularists about the first of August, and both were elected Vice-President within a year.



At the close of the Conference, the London Free-thinkers gave a banquet of 300 covers to celebrate Bradlaugh's election to Parliament. It was a triumphant night. Nothing succeeds like success. Foote and some of the old guard who had not been seen since the split over Watts, reappeared to offer Bradlaugh their congratulations. Annie Besant sat in the centre of the speaker's table, with the guest of honour, the new M.P., her dear friend Charles Bradlaugh on her right, and the newly-elected Vice-President, her other dear friend, Dr. Aveling, on her left. Life was looking very rosy.

## CHAPTER X

# LAWMAKERS AND LAWBREAKERS

1880-1881

ANNIE BESANT gloated over Bradlaugh's election to Parliament. In spite of her reckless defiance of the polite world, its guinea stamp of rank and position held a secret glamour. Sharing the glow of Bradlaugh's victory on election night, she had accepted it as the end of his struggle—excellent repartee for Mrs. Grundy. The Tories, however, still had some badinage in reserve.

The newly-elected M.P. must first of all be sworn in, a bit of routine which proved to be charged with dynamite. Being an Atheist, an oath was meaningless to Bradlaugh. He had no scruples against taking it. As a matter of form, he preferred to make an affirmation. He talked it over with Annie Besant and decided to ask permission to affirm. The Speaker ruled that he must address the House. He did so and was instantly engulfed in an abyss of red tape which it took years to untangle. He waived his request for affirmation, and demanded that the oath be administered to him. Committees deliberated and reported; debates were held; divisions taken. Lord Morley in his *Life of Gladstone* referred to this as the "controversy that was probably more distasteful to him (Gladstone) than any other of the myriad contentions, small and great, with which his life was encumbered. It clouded the radiance of the party triumph, threw the new government at once into a minority, dimmed the ascendancy of the great minister, and, what was more, showed human nature at its worst."

During three long night sessions in June, 1880, the House hotly debated the subject of Bradlaugh. Parnell and the Irish Home Rulers were noisily threatening catastrophe. The Suez Canal had just been opened, a crisis loomed in Egypt. Such minor matters were crowded off the stage while commoners and titles joined in a flood of rhetoric against the rising tide of irreligion and indecency which menaced hearth and home. Hour after hour the debate swept on. It fills one hundred pages of Hansard. His colleague from Northampton, Henry Labouchere, although a member of Gladstone's party, loyally supported Bradlaugh. Morley makes the comment that Atheism was not the worst of Bradlaugh's offences, nor his Republicanism and attacks on the royal family. His extreme disadvantage was his re-publication of a pamphlet by an American doctor on "that impracticable question of population." Sir Henry Tyler was particularly offensive, even making a derogatory reference to Annie Besant, an unusual breach of Parliamentary decorum.

Bradlaugh was finally summoned before the Bar. The Speaker notified him that the decision had gone against him and ordered him to withdraw. Bradlaugh demanded another vote. Slowly the long lines of members straggled down the aisles. From the lobbies came the buzz of voices. In the empty House, the Speaker upon his throne in powdered wig and black silks, symbolized the authority and tradition of Great Britain. Halfway down the House stood the lone, powerful figure of Charles Bradlaugh in the clear-cut black and white of his full-skirted frock-coat and stiff white linen. The flickering gas lights showed his face white and drawn, but they showed too the courage of his fighter's jaw, and the unrelaxing glint of his steady eyes. Two hundred and thirty of his colleagues had sorted themselves into the Liberal lobby, voting for him, but

two hundred and seventy-five had thronged the Tory lobby and defeated him.

Bradlaugh was again ordered to withdraw. Again he refused. The Sergeant-at-arms, a tiny man, walked up to the six feet two inches of Bradlaugh, standing alone against the gloom of the dun-coloured carpet and, touching him on the arm, went through the form of ejecting him from the House and lodging him in the Clock Tower until the House should determine what to do with him—an embarrassing question.

Annie Besant rushed out to seize their opportunity at top speed. She had ready for the press a special edition of *The National Reformer* with Aveling's vivid description of the debate through the late afternoon. She herself sent down the final Stop Press item, telling of Bradlaugh's detention in the Clock Tower: "As the paper goes to press, I go to Westminster to receive from him his directions as to the conduct of the struggle with the nation into which the House of Commons has so recklessly plunged."

Through the silent midnight streets a solitary hansom galloped, carrying Anne Besant and Aveling back to Fleet Street after their conference with Bradlaugh. She dashed off a leaflet—she had been making notes for it in the Clock Tower, *Law Makers and Law Breakers*. Around the corner with the copy to the waiting gang of printers. All night long the presses shuffled and banged; the sound was music to Annie Besant, a syncopated obbligato quickening her pulse as she and Aveling bent over her desk, drafting telegrams, writing notes, compiling lists of names. Something of the magic of those long night hours, pulsing to the rhythm of the presses and their own eager heartbeats must have permeated their work, for it stirred up an amazing tumult. On the fifth day

following Bradlaugh's arrest, all up and down the land, two hundred meetings were held by Bradlaugh's followers to protest against these lawmakers turned lawbreakers.

This encounter was only a preliminary skirmish. More committees, conferences, debates, votes followed one another. The seat was declared vacant on various pretexts. Five times Bradlaugh's constituents, infected by his own grim determination, re-elected him as their Representative. The House cleverly shifted the field of battle. Wealthy Tories supplied the funds and the courts rained suits against Bradlaugh, brought by men of straw. He fought untiringly. If sometimes the pugnacity and aggressiveness of the man become a bit tedious, one forgives him, for he waged a gallant fight.

Year after year for six years, in spite of crowding, new interests, Annie Besant gave him devoted assistance in his long struggle to secure his seat. They had not realized the effectiveness of their propaganda until it nearly swept them off their feet. Mr. Gladstone's Liberal conscience pricking him more painfully than his religion, he promised to have an Affirmation Bill brought in. Later, he regretfully backed down and wrote Bradlaugh that he was obliged to drop the Bill. Bradlaugh determined to present himself again before the House, considerably waiting so that he should not obstruct the passage of the Irish Land Bill.

On August 2, 1881, large groups of his Northampton constituents and several thousand Secularists from all over England and Scotland arrived in London. In the afternoon they gathered round him in thousands in Trafalgar Square, and he realized with deep anxiety that they had not come to London just to pat him on the back. They had come, if need be, to see justice done the next day. When he took leave of Annie Besant that night, his last

words to her were, "The people know you better than they know anyone save myself ; whatever happens, mind, whatever happens, let them do no violence ; I trust to you to keep them quiet."

Next day, Annie Besant standing on the steps of the Public Entrance to the House of Commons, looked down on a sea of faces waiting grimly, implacably to hear how it fared with their Charlie. Finally she and those nearest the door heard ominous sounds—breaking glass and splintering wood. The throng muttered and grew restless. They were tired of waiting; "Petition, Petition," they shouted, "Justice, Justice," and they surged up the steps. It was an electric moment. Journalists, accustomed to feeling the pulse of crowds, said that it was touch and go. A cordon of police, ready for such an emergency, filed swiftly through the doors. But Annie Besant was quicker than they. Recklessly she flung herself between the police and the charging mob, waving it back. In their instant of hesitation, she appealed passionately to the people to remember Bradlaugh's last words, and for his sake to keep peace. The moment passed. She had held them. They were still patiently waiting when she slipped away in answer to a whispered summons.

Within its guarded walls, the House of Commons had witnessed a sinister scene, as incongruous as a taproom brawl in a cathedral. Weary of interruptions from this man as obstinate as themselves, the Speaker gave the word and a dozen burly policemen forcibly ejected Bradlaugh from the House. He did not fight, but exerted all his strength in passive resistance. He made an amazing struggle, bracing himself until his great body seemed rooted in the floor, and he had ruptured the sheaths of the muscles of his arms. The sight became sickening. Members, watching from their benches, lowered their eyes in

shame. In spite of the heat of conflict, Bradlaugh's face had gone ghastly white. He was gasping for breath.

Annie Besant and his daughters found him in the enclosed court of the Palace yard where he had been thrown. He was standing still and white, his coat torn, his face rigid, a motionless figure, as though carved in stone. He had resisted so vigorously that he had to be swathed in bandages for several weeks, and he never recovered his full vigour. Annie Besant took him away for a rest. His arms were in slings and he looked pale and haggard. As she and his daughters helped him out of the train at a little seaside resort, a passing clergyman said loudly, "There's Bradlaugh. I hope they'll make it hot for him yet."

The fight lasted six years from Bradlaugh's first election in 1880 until 1886 when he was permanently seated. Ultimately, he put through an Oaths Bill giving all Members of Parliament the right to affirm and making Freethinkers who prefer to make affirmation eligible as jurymen and witnesses. Annie Besant grew hard and bitter under the tension of the long controversy. The sight of Bradlaugh's white face in the Palace yard had outraged her. She almost regretted having kept faith with him in holding back his followers. Had either of them weakened for an instant in their iron resolution of no violence, that surging mob would joyfully have rushed the doors and given the staid old House of Commons a more dramatic spectacle than that of one man being ejected by a dozen others. The men themselves half reproached her, "Oh, if you had only let us go, we would have carried him into the House and up to the very Speaker's chair." The press commented on Mrs. Besant's new virulence. A Tory paper, questioning whether Bradlaugh had really been injured in his ejection from the

House, remarked that it was an effective pose, that of martyr, and beside, it gave him a convenient excuse to escape from Westminster so that he would not have "to carry out Mrs. Besant's wild programme of revenge."

It was a struggle which raised Bradlaugh to a loftier eminence than the platform of the Hall of Science. It lifted him, but not Annie Besant. Politicians were not squeamish. They could forget when they had to, but they owed no obligations of chivalry to the woman in the case.

A final echo of this grim struggle reached Annie Besant with the publication of Gladstone's letters. More than one vigil had been kept that June night when Bradlaugh was locked in the Clock Tower and she and Aveling had rushed *Law Makers and Law Breakers* through the press. Mr. Gladstone, returning late from the stormy session of the House, could not sleep. As the leader of the Liberal party, he had obligations of liberality and tolerance. Deeply religious, he found the situation peculiarly distasteful. It was a maze of pitfalls. Sir Stafford Northcote, leader of the Opposition, had seized it as a club for delivering damaging blows to the Ministry. There was the supreme danger of some chance rousing his not very tolerant Sovereign to catastrophic obstinacy. In all directions the ice was very thin. He sat long over a letter to his Queen :

"This day when the Speaker took the chair at a quarter past twelve, Mr. Bradlaugh came to the table and claimed to take the oath. The Speaker read him the resolution of the House which forbids it. Mr. Bradlaugh . . . then addressed the House from the bar. His address was that of a consummate speaker. But it was an address which could not have any effect unless the House had undergone a complete revolution of mind. He challenged the legality of the act of the House, expressing thereby an opinion



in which Mr. Gladstone, himself going beyond some other members of the Minority, has the misfortune to lean toward agreeing with him. . . .”

It was not until many years later that Annie Besant saw this letter. Most of the people concerned were dead. The high passions of the night and the soft June breeze blowing past a solitary hansom bound for Fleet Street, all alike had faded to ghostly memories.

CHAPTER XI  
BACK TO REALITY

1880-1883

WHILE it lasted, Annie Besant's friendship with Aveling was an enchantment. But the intoxication of romance is part of its unreality. It is as shimmering and fragile as a soap bubble. There was a mysterious hiatus during the second summer of the Aveling intimacy. *The National Reformer*, usually full of Annie Besant's doings, made no reference to her whereabouts for two full months of 1880. In the autumn, Aveling, with his air of swallowing a canary, wrote :

" Long, happy, never-to-be-forgotten days . . . stretched lazily on beaches made of myriads of shells smoothed and polished by the sea so delicately and fantastically that each might be the bridal bed of a sea goddess ; peaceful, dreamless nights, the rarest of companionship make certain August days in 1880 as moments in the passing, as years in the remembrance of them." It was his final rhapsody. With the autumn a change in their relationship became apparent. His articles in *The National Reformer* trailed off to uninspired essays. His New Year's greetings reflected a melancholy, contrasting with the exhilaration of previous years : " Each day follows another with the relentlessness of Fate. We name them Christmas day or New Year's day, our birthday, hers, that whereon her lips met ours for the first or last time. A thousand memories and pains cluster round this date and that. . . ."

Annie Besant was jealous of Aveling's outside interests,

especially his elocution evenings which he called "Readings Grave and Gay." He rented small West End halls in order to attract fashionable audiences, and was assisted by attractive amateurs, singers, violinists, stage-struck young ladies. She was uneasily aware of a background of sinister rumours which followed Aveling about. He was popular in the Fleet Street clubs, but members passed the word around "Don't on any account lend him money." He was always being caught in financial crises. Annie Besant believed his explanations and both she and Bradlaugh advanced him considerable amounts of money. Presently, there were even more disagreeable stories—whispers about women. It seems that he had a wife somewhere who had left him because of cruelty—an ironic repetition of a familiar charge for Annie Besant. She could not avoid seeing his sudden intimacies with girl students in the laboratory and with the young ladies who assisted him in his "Readings Grave and Gay." When he lost his chair at the London Hospital, he attributed it to his connection with the Freethinkers. With not quite her customary vigour, Annie Besant took up his cry of persecution in *The National Reformer*.

On the surface, things went on as before. Aveling continued to lecture for the Freethinkers, to write for *The National Reformer*, to assist Bradlaugh in his six-year fight for his seat in Parliament. With characteristic tenacity, Annie Besant kept up her scientific work through the wrench of readjustment. Interest in the teacher had drawn her into the work, but the associations of formulæ and test tubes were now fraught with sadness. A more than adequate alibi presented itself in the demands of Bradlaugh's Parliamentary struggle. Obstinate, her pride burning her like a flame, she persisted until she had taken firsts in seven sciences, covering all the scientific

subjects available at that time. For several years, she continued to teach science classes for two evenings a week, and was joined by Hypatia Bradlaugh.

Already turning off an incredible quantity of work, she reached out for new and diverting interests. In three months she translated a long German scientific book, Büchner's *Mind in Animals*. At the end of the year, she broke down. Bradlaugh wrote that in the judgment of her best friends, she had been working far too hard for the last two years. It was just two years since she had met Aveling and begun her scientific work. The possible dissent here implied is the nearest to an adverse comment that Bradlaugh ever made in print on their relationship.

Annie Besant's illness was as usual due to an emotional crisis. She had been deeply wounded. The lilting note disappeared from her writing never to return, though she was to maintain close and stimulating friendships with men all her life long. She plunged into a decade of almost delirious activity, searching, for ever searching, up this blind alley, and up that, for what, she did not know.

Weary of straight Atheism as she was, chafed and disillusioned over Aveling, Sir Henry Tyler, M.P., came to her rescue with a temporary stimulus in his efforts to keep Bradlaugh out of the House of Commons. As part of his campaign to discredit Bradlaugh, he attacked the fitness of the teachers conducting science classes in the Hall of Science. For a year he kept a motion on the order paper handed out daily to Members of the House stating that Dr. Aveling, Mrs. Besant and the two daughters of Charles Bradlaugh were not proper persons to be employed for the work of instruction in connection with the Science and Art department of Her Majesty's government. In debate he quoted Aveling's pamphlet, *The*

*Wickedness of God*, and Annie Besant's assertion that "God is left out of all calculations in science . . . science is by necessity atheistic."

The House of Commons, already saddled with the Bradlaugh controversy, refused to take an interest in this new heresy hunting bait. Sir Henry continued to revive the question on various pretexts, each time rousing Annie Besant to clamorous invective. "The Christian bloodhounds are loosed on the track of the heretics," she wrote. "We have the spectacle of Sir Henry Tyler buying off God by keeping an insulting notice levelled against three women on the paper of the House for months, like the coward that he is." Annie Besant had always been a hard fighter. Now, her temper wearing thin, she became shrill and ill-tempered. Partly the cumulative tension of continued attack, it was more largely due to her personal distress. She transferred the repressed irritation against Aveling to her persecutors. For a time these bitter controversies occupied most of her attention.

With relentless fury, she pursued the group of Lincolnshire gentry who had contributed to the fund "to drag a child from her mother's arms." A timely exposé of a bribery scandal in Boston involving some of these men was grist for her mill. A London preacher visiting Boston provided another opportune incident. He roused his congregation from its Sunday evening nap in old St. Botolph's by a violent attack on a former neighbour, Mrs. Besant and her notorious associate Bradlaugh, vile trash, etc., Mrs. Besant's daughter Mabel, now thirteen years old, and attending boarding school in Boston, was in the congregation. She rose in the midst of the denunciation of her mother, and left the church. One wonders if the preacher knew that Mabel was in his audience. The incident stung Annie Besant to the quick. It touched the

sensitive nerves of her relationship to her daughter. She sardonically suggested that priestly ingenuity which tortured a young girl in the face of a whole congregation would raise a sensation of envy in the breasts of clumsy practitioners like Sir Henry Tyler. For one of the few times in her life, and the last, she was moved to summarize the incidents leading to her separation from her husband, the living bestowed by her cousin at her request, her husband's cruelty, her surrender of her daughter's annual visits because they were cruelty to the child. She tauntingly informed her clerical slanderer that if her husband could have obtained a divorce he would have long ago done so. Her house had been watched, private inquiry agents had followed her to hotels, landlords had been interviewed, all to no purpose.

This continuous barrage against the polite world was not enough. She engaged in wordy squabbles with the opposition group in her own Freethought following. She scornfully refused to accept advertisements of Watts' paper, *The Secular Review*, on the ground that some of its writers were disgustingly coarse. She attacked G. J. Holyoake, who, in spite of his faults, was the veteran of the movement. He had served six months in jail for blasphemy before she was born.

In the roseate days of her early triumphs, she had not bothered her head over other peoples' feelings. Now, to work off her own chagrin, she smote and spared not. She comforted her disillusionment by seeing herself in the rôle of a martyr. This was the price she must pay for preaching to the world her vision of the truth. On the surface, her career continued on its spectacular way. Her reputation, her audiences, her income all increased steadily. In her heart, she was passing through an anguish that necessitated a reappraisal of all her standards of

value, and evidenced itself in a dramatically significant change of attitude.

One winter evening she was lecturing in Barrow. She had been lonely and distraught all day. It was brilliant moonlight. After the lecture, she struck out across the snow to the ruins of Furness Abbey, two miles away. With unwonted tenderness she described the experience in "Daybreak." Beside the ruins on that crisp, white night, there rose before her a phantom of stately processions winding through these transepts in the twilight of vanished centuries, white-robed choristers and scarlet-frocked acolytes, priests in chasubles of cloth of gold, clouds of incense rolling to the high-arched roof, dimming the gleam of countless lights as the peasants bowed low before the host, and the deep-toned benediction floated out over the heads of the kneeling worshippers. In the years since she left Sibsey Vicarage, the Church, the clergy and all religious forms had roused only scorn and contempt. On this night beside the ruins of an old Cistercian abbey she fell into a sympathetic reverie. Out of the depths of her heartache and loneliness, she had turned back to the forms of her girlhood with mellowed emotion.

She continued to write as a Materialist, but with a difference. For the curious doings of those anti-Materialists, the Theosophists, she showed a gradual tolerance, very different from the contempt of her earlier years. She explained that they attracted those forced to give up the ancient superstitions, and yet not strong enough to rest upon reason alone. Their teachings gave no definite statements beyond a dreamy, emotional, scholarly interest in the religio-philosophic fancies of the past. Her sudden loss of interest, first in Atheism, then in science, as soon as the personal interest waned had proven that these were not her true interests. Her increasing

irritation and inability to concentrate her energy on one line of work bore witness to her cumulative discontent. Now that the personal glamour had worn off, she was realising how incongruous was her association with these simple, earnest Freethinkers.

The vehemence of her rebellion against her marriage had betrayed her. She would not live with her husband. She refused to give up her heretical friends and live with her brother and mother. The tempered dissent of Thomas Scott and Voysey and Moncure Conway had not satisfied her. Having defied her whole world in her passion to achieve freedom, it was ironic to discover that her companions in revolt were also human beings, subject to the petty jealousies and bad tempers and backbitings of that sordid world from which she had escaped. She shrank from the suspicion that perhaps "our Mistress Liberty" was a mirage.

Swinging in the boughs of her Devonshire apple orchard, eight-year-old Annie Wood loved to play the part of Satan, and declaim "Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers." In later years, in her blind flight through outer darkness, leading her followers in a tumultuous revolt against God, the Church, and organized society, perhaps she again identified herself with Milton's rebel-hero in his flight, "headlong, flaming from the ethereal sky." And now, more than ever, when in the moment of victory, she tasted the ashes of defeat.



## CHAPTER XII

### LOVE AMONG THE SOCIALISTS

1883-1884

WITHIN two years of his swift conquest of Secularism, Aveling was deeply discredited in its inner circles. He was caught in contemptible pilferings, such as spending money collected for an old woman, a Nihilist refugee, on his dinner parties. He had used his prestige among the Freethinkers to borrow their money and seduce their women. The painter Dubedat in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* is, so they say, a picture of Aveling. And still Annie Besant hesitated. In addition to her secret heart-ache, he stood before the Freethought world as her protégé. She had vouched for this young knight of our Mistress Liberty. Every step in the process of casting him off, every implication that she had been duped was like dropping salt in the wound to her pride. When he publicly transferred his affection to another cause—Socialism, thinly veiling a woman rival, she let herself go in a fury unparalleled in her entire life. Only then did she bring herself to break with him.

While Annie Besant and Bradlaugh and Aveling travelled up and down England destroying the authority of organized religion, a manifesto by one Karl Marx had passed from hand to hand and from language to language over Europe. It left unrest and revolution in its wake. On the new basis of machinery and the industrial revolution, it classified society on economic lines of capitalist, bourgeoisie and proletariat. With stark forcefulness it

defined the issue between those classes. It coined phrases which seduced the imagination of every young idealist, and have since become world classics. "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite." The manifesto not only inspired the workers with a new hope; it cast a magic spell over the socially conscious intelligentsia of the world. With the irresistible momentum of youth and hope, their enthusiasm swept over Europe and England. They followed Marx in their thousands like some Pied Piper, organizing societies to translate him and study him and wrangle over him. France was deeply stirred. In Russia the Nihilists under Bakunin and Kropotkin dared to resist the Tzar. In Germany, the Socialists cast half a million votes.

Perhaps it was a matter of personalities or of chance incidents, but from the beginning the Secularists aligned themselves with their old foes the Tories and Conservatives in deriding Socialism. In spite of his rebellion, Bradlaugh was, after all, one of the prize products of the established régime, a successful Individualist of the good old sink-or-swim school. He had the self-reliance and stubbornness of the self-made man who has arrived. In addition, he was now nearing the successful climax of his twenty years' struggle for a seat in Parliament. Next to his devotion to Secularism, this was the most cherished purpose of his life. He had never faltered at shouldering burdens, as in his defence of Knowlton's birth control pamphlet. But Socialism was quite another matter—half-baked, plausible sounding, economically unsound—he attacked it furiously. In reply, Karl Marx called Bradlaugh "the huge self-idolator."

Karl Marx, exiled from France and Germany by his manifesto, had burrowed in the archives of the British

Museum for thirty years, building up with German scholarship his encyclopædic indictment of capitalistic society, *Das Kapital*. When he was not writing, he was pacing up and down the long parlours of his home on the edge of Hampstead Heath in endless economic discussions with his devoted collaborator, Engels, and other disciples. At first his followers were all Germans. About 1880 a young Englishman joined them, H. M. Hyndman. After him came others. Marx's youngest and favourite daughter, Eleanor, was by this time a girl in her twenties. She sat beside the fire and listened.

Dr. Aveling was one of the young Englishmen attracted to the Marx home, both by the Socialist theories and even more by the dark-haired girl before the fire. Eleanor was a typical, attractive Bohemian. She had fine eyes and curly hair. She talked well, smoked a great deal, and wore her clothes with picturesque indifference. Aveling was fascinated by her contrast to English pink-cheeked normality. There is a vivid picture of Eleanor, intense and exotic, in the autobiography of Mrs. Sidney Webb, who was then the fastidious Beatrice Potter. She happened to meet Eleanor one day in the Refreshment Room of the Museum. In spite of an upper middle class antipathy to anything foreign or Bohemian, she felt the girl's unusual charm. She noted that Eleanor was comely and had fine eyes full of life and sympathy but—disapprovingly—she showed signs of an unhealthy excited life, kept up with stimulants and narcotics !

It was in the Museum also that Aveling met Eleanor. She was looking up something for her father. Annie Besant met her there, too, and took an instant dislike to her. Eleanor Marx was one of the reasons for the violence of Annie Besant's early attacks on Socialists ; foreign agitators, and half-read dupes she called them. As the

months went by, the furore of the new programme of political salvation swept all the young idealists from the Universities into its ranks. H. M. Hyndman, the English discoverer of Marx, founded the Social Democratic Federation, the immediate ancestor of England's powerful Socialist party, and her Labour government. Hyndman was the son of wealthy parents, a University man, tall and handsome, with all the polite accomplishments, cricket, rowing, the proper clubs, literary tastes. He lifted Socialism out of its proletarian background and brought it to the attention of the English intelligentsia. Staid old London echoed with the clatter of processions, Hyde Park oratory, mass meetings among the bronze lions of Trafalgar Square. The magical exhilaration of youth and novelty and crowd psychology inspired the new movement. Annie Besant on her eternal round of lectures attacking the authenticity of Jesus and the sins of the Church, felt stinging pangs of envy. She buried them deep down, denying them, even to herself. By way of proving that she had not felt any such thing, she abused the Socialists more roundly than ever.

This was the way things stood when, early in 1883, Foote, belligerent leader of the Secularist opposition and editor of the profane, weekly *Freethinker* and the magazine *Progress*, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for blasphemy. Aveling, who was still lecturing and teaching at the Hall of Science, volunteered to edit his publications while Foote was in jail.

The same week that Aveling assumed the editorship of *The Freethinker* and *Progress*, Karl Marx died, leaving his daughter Eleanor peculiarly bereft. She had lost her mother, a sister and her father in three successive years. Karl Marx, at the time of his death, was still an obscure figure, on the eve of recognition and fame. Aveling

defended him and his work against the attacks of Annie Besant and others, eulogizing him in the magazine *Progress*, and printing a memoir by his daughter Eleanor. His recognition of her father as an unappreciated genius was an irresistible bond. Eleanor became Aveling's editorial assistant. *Progress* was a Freethought journal and its new slant toward Socialism was intolerable to Annie Besant.

Through her father's intimate contacts with all the radical leaders of Europe, Eleanor ran an excellent department of international Socialism. She had not Mrs. Besant's Gargantuan appetite for work, nor her aggressiveness, and by way of contrast, this constituted an added charm. She was deeply in love with Aveling. The months of intimate editorial work following immediately on her father's death had drawn them very close. Annie Besant writhed as she watched the new romance. She recognized Aveling's technique, although this time he was much less indiscreet. Burgeoning under the influence of young love, he burst into lyrics every month or two :

*"The trill of a lark ; the sound of a sea ;  
The voice of a maid ; a man's heart strife ;  
Green grass growing on a salt-sown lea ;  
Strong hopes growing in a storm-tossed life."*

Just as Annie Besant resented Socialism, Eleanor Marx was impatient of Secularism. As an expression of revolt it had been outmoded by the more fundamental economic appeal of Socialism. She took occasion to say so in answering a Secularist onslaught. Her mild derision was more infuriating to the Atheists than challenging attack. In the last century, she said, Atheism from being the privilege of the upper classes had descended to find its milieu among the workers ; a painful change because a

feeling of superiority was a necessity to the agnostic's nature, and how could he feel superior when the uncultured mob dared to think and speak more boldly than he? She asserted that Socialism had supplanted Atheism as a representative of labour by the recognition of its vital needs, thereby shoving Atheism along into its rightful position of opportunist and bourgeois conformity to the status quo. Agnostics conform to what respectability demands of them, and orthodox members of society are therefore justified in counting them as belonging to their own ranks. Answering a criticism that the Socialists were too strident and raucous, she closed her article with the defiant statement: "we shall continue to be strident and shout, even in the market places, that we will have none of your Christian or Agnostic gods."

In spite of herself Annie Besant recognized the element of truth in this article. It infuriated her beyond endurance. There is a theory that when we lose our tempers, we are usually in the wrong and a sense of guilt, even though it may be far below the surface of consciousness, causes the upheaval. Annie Besant came back at Eleanor Marx with a fury that was grotesque in its violence. She wrote in the next "Daybreak": "My name is being used by a Miss Marx, daughter of the late Karl Marx, to give authority to a gross and scandalous libel on Dr. Edward Aveling. She invented the libel and then promulgated it, giving me as the authority for the statement, hoping thereby to cause a breach and hinder and injure the Freethought cause by introducing discord and quarrelling among the co-workers in the ranks.

"So far fortunately the attempt has failed, for Dr. Aveling brought the statement to me when it reached his ears. As, however, it may reach many privately who will not have heard of the private exposure of the lie, I warn

all London Freethinkers, and especially those of the North Western London branch, against accepting any statements made in my name by Miss Eleanor Marx or any of her friends. We have enough open enemies around us ; warning should be given of strangers who try to creep into our movement with the object of treacherously sowing discord therein. Irremediable mischief may be caused by such persons, and they are the most useful tools employed by the Christian foe."

A few weeks after the appearance of this broadside, Eleanor Marx and Dr. Aveling, having previously joined Hyndman's Democratic Federation, announced that they had contracted a free union. Eleanor took the name Mrs. Aveling. They could not marry because of Aveling's wife. Faced with the alternatives of a clandestine affair or of making propaganda for marriage reform, they chose the latter course. In view of the abandon and lack of dignity of Annie Besant's attacks, it is interesting that she never uttered one smallest innuendo about the moral aspects of the Aveling-Marx liaison.

Her attitude toward sex had undergone a metamorphosis. With characteristic transparency, she reflected the change in her writings for *The National Reformer*. Until the end of this decade, she was to show a progressive tolerance of the sexual freedom of men and women, particularly attacking the ideal of celibacy. In reviewing Bebel's *Woman* she endorsed his argument that forcible suppression of sexual desire is destructive of health and a fruitful source of disease. She wrote : " Self-control in all things is good, but celibacy is no more admirable than self-starvation."

The following year, terming celibacy and prostitution the two sides of a diseased sexual system, she emphasized the relation of celibacy and insanity. The lunatic asylums,

she said, bear sad witness to the results of ignoring one of the most potent of physiological instincts.

She reached probably her most radical position in an essay on the economic position of women which appeared in *The National Reformer* for August, 1887. She wrote : "The closest of human ties may be the noblest or the basest of relationships ; freely and graciously given, it crowns friendship with its last perfection. Life has nothing fairer for its favourites than friendship kissed by passion into love." She had come a long way in the decade since she wrote the biography of Auguste Comte and earnestly defended the purity of his love for Clotilde de Vaux.

Ignoring the Avelings' morals, she continually took pot shots at them. He was finishing a serial on Natural Selection, one of his last contributions to *The National Reformer*. Elaborate editorial apologies followed minor inaccuracies in his text. "These sentences are, I fear, unintelligible, but Dr. Aveling is not in town and the copy is written by such a slovenly amanuensis that I have had to make the best of it throughout." This note was signed A.B. instead of the usual Ed. In the next number, Dr. Aveling gave the needed correction—there was only one, and it was in the nature of a coincidence. His amanuensis, Eleanor of course, had written *p-a-r-t* for *p-a-s-t*. The error suggests an unconsciously expressed wish that he might part with his past.

The Avelings were active in the work of Hyndman's Democratic Federation. Aveling wrote for the weekly paper *Justice* and used his old Freethought contacts to build up a Socialist lecture tour. In a eulogistic notice of Aveling, *Justice* quoted his statement that it had taken five years of deep study and close reading before he became a Socialist. This was too much for Annie Besant.



Once more she let herself go with extraordinary abandon. In her weekly "Daybreak" page for May 4, 1884, she wrote: "I am sure that Dr. Aveling never said anything so untrue. It is less than five years since Dr. Aveling joined the Freethought party. His declaration was made in *The National Reformer* for July 27, 1879. As his own friends closed their doors on him, I opened mine, and, save for the time that he was with his pupils and night-time, he made my house his home. All his work was carried on with me. During all that time, he never uttered a word on Socialism, nor studied it in any way. He and Mr. Bradlaugh and myself were constantly discussing politics, and he was quite at one with us, though his political knowledge, like that of most purely scientific and literary men, was very small. He had not a single Socialist book in his library, which was entirely literary and scientific. In fact, he never touched Socialism in any way or knew anything about it until in 1882, he took to reading at the British Museum, and unfortunately fell into the company of some of the Bohemian Socialists, male and female, who flourish there. Supposing that his was a 'sudden conversion,' Karl Marx acting as a Socialist Moody and Sankey, it could only have taken place two years ago. It is a pity that the reporters of *Justice* do not study dates before making wild assertions."

In her heart, Annie Besant knew that Aveling was a liability and that the Secularists were well rid of him. And yet it was two years before she could make herself leave him alone. In vain Bradlaugh tried to appease her. In the same issue in which this last broadside appeared, and as though in apology, Bradlaugh inserted a mildly pleasant notice about the Avelings. Ultimately Annie Besant learned her lesson. Later on in that year of 1884, when she wrote her *Autobiographical Sketches*, she ended them

with the spring of 1879. This shut out Bradlaugh's election to Parliament, the greatest Freethought achievement of her lifetime. But it also enabled her to omit all mention of Aveling, and her science studies.

For a short time, the Avelings stood at the forefront of the Socialist movement. Joining William Morris, poet and craftsman, in a revolt against Hyndman, they helped to establish the Socialist League and its daily, *The Commonweal*. After a tour of the United States, becoming involved in further financial scandals, Aveling was expelled from one organization after another. Through it all, Eleanor clung to him loyally. In 1897 Aveling's wife died. Instead of marrying the woman who had made every sacrifice for him, Aveling secretly sold as much of their joint property as he could lay hold of, and eloped with a young actress, Eva Frye. He was getting too old for such escapades. Falling sick, he left his new wife and returned to Eleanor who nursed him through an operation. The shock had been too much even for Eleanor's courage. One morning, she took poison, leaving behind her a brief message, "How sad life has been all these years." A day or two later, Aveling was found sitting in the sunshine with a book open before him. He too was dead and by his own hand.

In a later edition of Annie Besant's *Autobiography* she dismissed Aveling with a paragraph. In all the years since, she has never mentioned his name. In her distress over him, she had for a moment surrendered her dignity and good taste. There is no evidence of any other relationship in her life which approached this one for emotional intensity. As an old lady, long after the death of both Aveling and Eleanor Marx, she delivered a lecture on "Peace." She must have been remembering Aveling when she said: "Even life's sharpest pains seem strangely

unreal thus contemplated by a personality that has greatly changed. Our whole life was bound up in the life of another, and all of worth that it held for us seemed to dwell in the one beloved. We thought that our life was laid waste, our heart broken when that one trust was betrayed. But as time went on the wound healed and new flowers sprang up along our pathway, till to-day we can look back without a quiver on an agony that well-nigh shattered life."

CHAPTER XIII  
SOCIALISTS, POETS AND IDIOTS

1884-1887

ANNIE BESANT was tossed between the horns of a dilemma. Eleanor, as the daughter of Karl Marx, had an almost proprietary interest in Socialism. Aveling's apostasy to false gods and his surrender to this false goddess had caused Annie Besant the bitterest humiliation of her life. It was unthinkable that she should tolerate Socialistic theories. And yet, to her horror, their insidious appeal was every day more clearly forced upon her.

Her last broadside against the Bohemian Socialists, male and female, who flourished in the British Museum, was dated May, 1884. Long before that, her interest in Atheistic propaganda had reached a vanishing point. Pride and loyalty to Bradlaugh had kept her at her post, but she occupied herself with discussions of economic and social questions. Temperamentally, she had never for a minute belonged among the Secularists. It was Bradlaugh's powerful personality rather than an intellectual response which had identified her with Atheism. Its inadequacy to hold her interest is demonstrated by an analysis of her writings. She published most of her longer serial articles for the *Reformer* as books and pamphlets. Their titles furnish an excellent record of the shifting of her interest from year to year.

In the first ten years of her career from 1874 to 1884 she published fifty-one books and pamphlets. Their subjects were :

Religion	19
Science	12
Politics, Labour & Social Reform	20

Their spacing is significant. She wrote eighteen of the nineteen anti-religious publications in the first five years of her association with Bradlaugh. Similarly, her scientific work was turned out in the first flush of enthusiasm. She wrote twelve science text-books and pamphlets during the first two years of her work with Dr. Aveling and after that never again wrote anything primarily scientific. After her break with Aveling, her output made a great jump. She had been publishing four or five titles a year. Now for several years she averaged more than one a month. She tried to resume her attacks on Christianity and in 1883, published Part I of *The Christian Creed ; Or What It Is Blasphemy To Deny*, but she could not finish it and Part II never appeared. Instead she turned to studies of the French Revolution. In the last five years of her career as an Atheist lecturer and writer she had published twelve books and pamphlets on science, sixteen on social and political questions, and one—which she left unfinished—on religion !

Now came Socialism to supplement the bleak intellectualism of Freethought. Its humanity and concern for the poor and oppressed answered the human craving which she had been trying to satisfy with charities and benevolent leagues. Socialism held other lures. It had by this time split into three organizations and attracted to itself the Bright Young People of the day who took pains to be very polite and to let her see what a good time they were having. She was recognized as a valuable asset to any unorthodox cause.

After a decade of abuse and libel it was a pleasant contrast to be surrounded by attractive men of her own class,

as indifferent as she to the conventions which she had defied. It was agreeable to watch them making intellectual sheep's eyes. Spectre-like in the background loomed the Avelings, writing, lecturing, teaching the new gospel. How they would gloat if she surrendered. And how bitterly it would grieve and disappoint her dear comrade and friend, Charles Bradlaugh !

No sooner had Aveling joined Hyndman's Democratic Federation than *Justice*, their weekly paper, challenged Bradlaugh to debate Hyndman on Socialism. The largest hall available in London was crowded to the doors. Both men were commanding figures, tall, well-built, powerful personalities. Bradlaugh with thirty-five years' experience was the most skilful debater in the country. Hyndman had the advantages of University training and accent, the assurance of social position and the broader economic appeal. Annie Besant reported the debate for the *Reformer*. Mentally shaken, as she has since confessed, she did not let it show at the time. Her pique on discovering that some of Hyndman's friends—presumably the Avelings—were seated on the platform while she and Bradlaugh's daughters were in the body of the hall took up half a column. She had sat among the audience for five years listening to her husband's sermons and she did not propose to sit there any more. She coolly awarded all the laurels to Bradlaugh, dismissing Hyndman as fluent, shifty and shallow and Socialism as a passing whim made fashionable by the interest of such wealthy dilettantes as Hyndman and William Morris.

For a year after the Aveling defection, Annie Besant doggedly held firm. Another Socialist influence had entered her life. A young Scotch philosopher and literary man, J. M. Robertson, had come to London. She had been attracted to him on her lecture trips to Edinburgh

and had gone sightseeing with him around the old grey city as she had in earlier years with Aveling and before that with Bradlaugh. She travelled up to Edinburgh for the farewell banquet to Robertson when his admirers presented him with a gold pen and pencil and other literary baggage. In a felicitous speech, she apologized to his townsmen for stealing him away to London. Young Robertson's reply, wrote Annie Besant, was deeply moving, full of emotion, his voice almost broke.

Young Lochinvar journeying to London to seek his fortune was at once appointed to the staff of *The National Reformer* to fill Aveling's place. He took one of the extra rooms in Annie Besant's large house—she also had two women friends as lodgers. He was an engaging young Scot. After the braggadocio of Aveling, his quiet assurance was soothing. He was the first real scholar she had known intimately. He is to-day a well-known historian and authority on nineteenth-century England. Still in his twenties—being some ten years her junior—he tried to maintain a philosophic poise, but he was youthfully inclined to the Socialist point of view. He interested her and constituted another argument for Socialism.

Inwardly, she was in constant turmoil, more and more preoccupied with social and economic questions as the drift of her writings evidences. Whether deliberately or unwittingly, she committed herself on an issue which was the essence of her susceptibility to Socialism. For months *Justice*, the Hyndman weekly, had campaigned on behalf of free lunches for Board schools, arguing that it was neither humane nor true economy to provide teachers and books for children who had no breakfast. This issue was identified with Socialism. It was midwinter and Annie Besant was haunted by spectres of ragged, shivering children sitting in school all day dazed with hunger. In

her Christmas "Daybreak" of 1884, she endorsed free lunches for Board school children. Doctrinaire Secularists raised a hubbub of protest. They taunted her with surrendering to sentimentalism. Her article, they jeered, sounded more like an illogical and unscientific Socialist than a sound Individualist.

It was George Bernard Shaw who proved Annie Besant's undoing. He had already worsted her in an encounter one night when Bradlaugh spoke against Socialism at the South Place Institute. In the discussion following, a Russian, a Pole, a German, and an Englishman who described himself as a "loafer" took part. In her report for the *Reformer*, Annie Besant made short shrift of the German who had favoured revolution, advising him to go home and make one in Germany. She was always especially intolerant of *German* Socialists! She also handled Mr. Shaw unceremoniously, failing to recognize his irony in calling himself a loafer. She was, she said, fairly astounded at this audacious confession that he led so shameful a life. "The only fair answer to him would be, 'Go and work before you set yourself to teach workers.' Mr. Shaw's description of himself is, I am inclined to think, pretty accurate and explains a thing that has often puzzled me, why he should be so marvelously shrewish and 'crooked' in discussion." Of course she had to retract all this in the next issue, and her apology was as lacking in humour as her original statement, winding up that why, under the circumstances, Mr. Shaw should so unjustly brand himself with a dishonourable name, she had no means of knowing. It is fantastic to think of these two becoming warm friends, as they were soon to do. But Annie Besant's charms more than compensated for a sense of humour, even to Shaw.

It was a year later, in the spring of 1885 that Shaw was



invited to address the Dialectical Society on Socialism Hearing that Shaw was to speak, Annie Besant appeared and created a small sensation. Shaw has described the incident: "I was warned on all hands that she had come down to destroy me and that from the moment she rose to speak, my cause was lost. I resigned myself to my fate, and pleaded my case as best I could. When the discussion began, everyone waited for Annie Besant to lead the opposition. She did not rise ; and at last the opposition was undertaken by another member. When he had finished, Annie Besant, to the amazement of the meeting, got up and utterly demolished him. There was nothing left for me to do but to gasp and triumph under her shield. At the end, she asked me to nominate her for election to the Fabian Society, and invited me to dine with her."

Of the three Socialist organizations she had chosen the Fabians by a process of elimination. Temperamentally she belonged to Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. Hyndman had a flair for headlines and publicity effects. He organized the Saturday afternoon *Justice* parades, when half a dozen men, each with a bundle of *Justices* under his arm, threaded their way through the crowds like a line of extravaganza sandwich men. Hyndman led them, tall, confident, wearing his silk hat, fresh gloves and the new frock coat in which Shaw said he was born. Champion followed, a former artillery officer who had recently resigned as a protest against British policy in Egypt, another tall, impressive figure. Next perhaps came Herbert Burrows, recently down from Cambridge, a gentle-looking dreamer and idealist with unlimited courage for fighting. The London crowds gaped at this first sight of haughty English gentlemen stepping down off their pedestals. While they gaped, they bought copies of *Justice*. The circulation soared, everyone talked, it was

excellent publicity. *Justice* was by far the most readable and ingenious of the radical publications. Each week, within a broad black mourning border appeared a list of names and ages or descriptions of those victims of starvation whose bodies were picked up on the Embankment and streets of London after almost every cold night during the hard-times winter of 1884-85.

Herbert Burrows, one of Hyndman's most active associates, was a warm friend of Annie Besant's, one with whom she was to work closely in the years ahead. But the associations of the Social Democratic Federation were too painful for her to contemplate. Hyndman had in the first place made friendly overtures to both Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant. But after the Avelings joined him, she attacked him so bitterly that a reconciliation was out of the question. After a brief career with Hyndman, Aveling had left him to help William Morris organize the Socialist League. This left only the Fabians. Dominated by the academic intellectualism of Sidney Webb, they were the most brilliant group of radicals in London, but they were right-wing radicals. Their publications were censored and checked as though they came from a University Press. They were an extraordinary group of untried youngsters. With a surprising cohesion they have held together to show in the end a rare average of worldly achievement. Sidney Webb, now Lord Passfield, a famous economist, has twice been member of the British Cabinet. Bernard Shaw has become one of the most famous essayists and playwrights in the world. Sydney Olivier, now Lord Olivier, has been Secretary of State for India. Graham Wallas is an eminent economist. In the 'eighties they were struggling young journalists and civil service clerks. Annie Besant was better known than any of them, and from a publicity viewpoint, the most valuable member of

the group. In addition to the pages of her weekly and monthly Freethought journals, which she filled with straight Socialism, she also had a publishing house and printing plant at her command. She was familiar with the mechanics of publicity, getting out pamphlets, organizing appeals. She was beside the only really gifted woman speaker in England, and with her feminine charm and emotional appeal, probably more effective than any man. Best of all, she had a devoted working-class following. This was of primary importance to these Socialist idealists who had no notion of how to get a hearing from the chief object of their concern, the working class.

The flavour of human interest in the columns of *Justice*, the dash of the Social Democratic Federation, the fireworks and dramatics of its methods were more appealing than anything the Fabians had to offer. But the personal equation was too strong. And with the Fabians, there was the compensating equation of George Bernard Shaw. In spite of their false start, they had become fast friends. Shaw took charge of the dramatic and art criticism in her magazine *Our Corner*. He spent long evenings with her in St. John's Wood, playing duets. A friend who lived in her house at the time says that she used to work for hours practising her parts.

They must have been an odd pair, for ever at cross purposes ; Shaw, a tall, Mephistopheles figure, with red hair and pointed sandy beard, mocking eyes and iconoclastic humour, lazily deriding everything. And Annie Besant, impulsive, dynamic, incorrigibly earnest and intense, half puzzled, half annoyed by his refusal to be serious, and charming in her bafflement. Her hair had been cut short when she had rheumatic fever. It came back in curly ringlets which were so becoming that she kept it short, thereby adding bobbed hair to her other

pioneer ventures. She had abandoned the bustles and hoops of the mode and the tight, high-bosomed waists encrusted with passementerie. She dramatized her economics by dressing à la proletariat : a loose blouse and flaming red tie, shortish skirts, heavy shoes, a red tam pulled down over her curls. It was a day of plastered down ringlets and prim hair nets. Her curly mop added to the illusion of boyishness, oddly mixed with her challenging feminine charm. Her earnest straightforwardness and lack of apparent coquetry gave her an engaging air of camaraderie and a provocative appeal.

Shaw found in her so much of ability and magnetism, so much of gallantry and courage that, in his ironic way, he tried to teach her not to be so serious and absorbed in her sense of a mission to perform. He writes : " The chief fault of her extraordinary qualities was that she was fiercely proud. I tried by means of elaborate little comedies to disgust her with beneficence and to make her laugh at her pride ; but the treatment was not, so far as I know, very successful. . . . Though I succeeded sometimes in making her laugh at me, I never succeeded in making her laugh at herself or check her inveterate largesse. I ought to have done much more for her, and she much less for me than we did. . . . I do not like the proverb " Love me little, love me long," but whoever invented it had a narrow escape of finding its true form, which is, ' Love me lightly, love me long.' And that is how I loved and still love Annie Besant."

Affection for Bradlaugh impelled Annie Besant to keep up her "Daybreak" page for another two years. She never announced her acceptance of Socialism in the *Reformer* which for eleven years had printed every detail of her work, her domestic troubles, her holidays, her illnesses. All her supersensitive pride, of which Shaw was to try in

vain to break her, shrank from the banter which she knew would greet her conversion. Her secretiveness did not help matters. The wits on both sides were for ever making unfortunate remarks, stirring things up just when she had them nicely arranged. Hyndman took a malicious pleasure in twitting her about her friend Bradlaugh. Not content with baiting her, *Justice* sniped at Bradlaugh. Herbert Burrows, who was in process of succeeding to the position of Annie Besant's closest friend, took a particularly belligerent attitude. He heckled Bradlaugh at his meetings, and went around lecturing on "Charles Bradlaugh, Revolutionist and Renegade." He accused Bradlaugh of having advocated violence in the past, in helping the Irish to draft their Fenian Manifesto, adding that he had now sold out to the reactionaries in return for his seat in Parliament. Bradlaugh charged the Socialists with advocating violence, and called Burrows a liar and a coward. Burrows came back with "untruthful egotist." The audiences hissed and shouted. Bad feeling ran high. Like a mother hen, Annie Besant, on the edge of the conflict, clucked and ruffled her feathers in distress.

She promoted neutral conferences at which all sides should have their say, confident that if these dear wrangling friends of hers could only be held still long enough to argue for a few hours, their difficulties would vanish like smoke. She helped the Fabians to organize a three-day conference on the Nationalization of Land and Capital. Two Members of Parliament and most of the well-known progressives attended. In the late afternoons, after speeches all day, they adjourned for sixpenny tea in a vegetarian restaurant across the street, gathering around the tables in excited groups. They came trooping back in the evening. Annie Besant hovered over them, watching Bradlaugh anxiously, fostering each and every

Fabian as though he were her individual protégé. The Universal Mother they called her. She made the closing speech, assuring them with passionate intensity that they were all working for the same ideals, that their differences were imaginary, mere quibbles over words.

She found Bradlaugh distressingly uncompromising about everyone except herself. In all the heat of controversy, he showed his old comrade the gentlest consideration. In reviewing her Socialist writings for the *Reformer*, he even tried to explain away her apparent inconsistencies: "she states her case with great force. The want of clearness is due to the difficulties of her position." Only once did his foot slip. One evening in a speech in the House of Commons, he classified the Socialists as a few poets, a few idiots and some others of whom he could not use such kindly words. The press made headlines of it. With amazing humility, the following week Bradlaugh published an explanation; his remarks had not applied to such Socialists as his brave and loyal co-worker who had stood so bravely to plead for poverty's cause in 1877—he was referring to the family limitation pamphlet—and who had given ungrudging service to the cause of reducing poverty and lessening its miseries.

His opponents ignored his apology and shrieked with glee. **ICONOCLAST ASSAULTING HIS PARTNER** shouted *Justice*. "Poor old Iconoclast,<sup>1</sup> he has kicked over his partner and smashed himself to powder. . . . Our Atheist Ananias of Circus Road says all Socialists are humbugs and idiots. Now then, fair partner of the illustrious Charles Bradlaugh, how many more of these resounding slaps on the face do you mean to take peacefully? We call it nothing short of brutal assault."

As though competing with Bradlaugh's magnanimity,

<sup>1</sup> Pen name used by Bradlaugh for his early atheist writings.

LIVING WITH THE

Annie Besant in her next "Daybreak" contrasted the power of the Secularists and Socialists among the working class, giving the Secularists all the best of it. She repeated her old charge that the leading Socialists were wealthy dilettantes. This was partially true. It was a point on which they were especially sensitive, and drew recriminations which made her wince.

No heroine of a French triangle farce was ever subjected to more perpetual, raking scrutiny than was Annie Besant, torn between her host of former adherents watching her every utterance for disloyalty, and her new colleagues, suspicious of her orthodoxy. She indiscreetly advertised a pamphlet on Socialism in the *Reformer* as the first clear and definite popular exposition in English, etc. *Justice* taunted her with having merely paraphrased Hyndman's earlier work, and not having the courtesy to acknowledge it. It was pull dick and pull devil. In a penny pamphlet on Socialism she said—and a propagandist must generalize—that Socialism was the one name recognizable all over the world as opposed to political and social tyranny. Screams of anguish from the Freethinkers. Had she forgotten this and that?

The most formidable Secularist attack was a booklet by W. P. Ball. Well written, it was sufficiently true to make her writhe. Ball paid glowing tribute to her past services to Freethought, and as the heroine, almost the martyr of the cause of Malthusianism. He described the pain and astonishment of her friends as she now proceeded to mingle the fervid sophistry and undaunted dogmatism of a St. Athanasius in petticoats with the earnest simplicity and credulity of a world-reforming schoolgirl. He accused her of repeating phrases glibly without waiting to find out their meaning—a mind like a milk-jug, he said. Her efforts to reconcile Bradlaugh and her present colleagues

were like the man who jumped off the Monument. As he was falling, he saw that the ground was strewn with broken glass, so he prudently stopped and went back.

Annie Besant was intolerant of even the most friendly criticism. Ball's irony made her physically sick. She particularly resented his charge that she was susceptible to the influence of her men friends. It is the truth that hurts. The controversy ran on for weeks in the Secularist press until she again fell ill, a sure indication of the stress of her conflict. Bradlaugh intervened with a touching appeal. He reminded his readers of her faithful and devoted service to their cause, the years of going back and forth, through rain and fog to teach her science classes at the end of a hard day's work ; her only recompense, for she received no pay as teacher, the moral satisfaction of helping these young men and women to a higher education. It was every word true and she deserved it. But it was no less gallant of Bradlaugh.

She escaped her persecutors by giving herself up to superactivity for her fascinating new cause. Within a few months, she was a member of the Fabian Executive Board. One of the articles in the famous *Fabian Essays* is by Annie Besant. She toured the provinces organizing branch societies. She conducted a Fabian department in the back of her magazine, *Our Corner*. She published serials on "Why I Am A Socialist" in *The National Reformer* and delivered Socialist lectures on Freethought platforms until the patient Secularists complained.

The Fabians frequently held their meetings in her commodious home on Avenue Road. One night when she was in the chair, Shaw read an essay which later appeared as *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. When they did not come to her house, they gathered at the most select rendezvous in London, Willis's Rooms, St. James. It kept up the



old-fashioned ceremonial of crimson tablecloths, silver candlesticks, liveried footmen in powdered wigs. The Fabians had been turned out of Anderton's Hotel because their discussions were too vehement. Sydney Olivier imperturbably applied at Willis's and, to their chuckling amazement, they were accepted. The respectable management had never heard of this assortment of brilliant, impudent young people, and inferred from their classic name that they were a learned society. During the summer of '87, they amused themselves with a Charing Cross Parliament. H. H. Champion, the ex-artillery officer, "cold as ice," was elected Prime Minister; Annie Besant, Home Secretary; Sidney Webb, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Bernard Shaw, President of the Local Government Board.

In the autumn, they forgot their Parliament to face more serious issues. The Conservatives under Lord Salisbury had just come into power. Faced with industrial panic, they fell back on the good old Conservative panacea of autocratic repression. As the winter advanced the unemployed, the beggars and hurdy-gurdies and women with babies in their arms increased until, giving each other courage, they marched through the streets and held meetings in Trafalgar Square.

It was tragic, but also opportune. The eager young Socialists were uneasily aware that so far they had merely theorized. They were impatient to prove themselves. Here was their opportunity. Tradesmen complained that the crowds of unemployed frightened away lady customers. The police chased them hither and thither and arrested them for obstruction. The unemployed had to stand somewhere, they drifted about the parks. The police raided Hyde Park, clubbing and arresting, and carrying them off in clanging patrol wagons. Annie

Besant responded as though to a fire alarm. Overnight she provided bail for the political prisoners and began raising funds for their legal defence.

One winter afternoon a crowd of unemployed poured out of Trafalgar Square, heading toward the West End, the section of exclusive shops and clubs. The streets were being paved and piles of cobbles lay ready to hand. It was too much for the crowd's self-control. Pling pling went the plate-glass windows of smart Pall Mall clubs and Piccadilly shops. Aristocratic knees secretly shook as they climbed into their carriages. Tradesmen with no such traditions to maintain, hastily barricaded their windows. The West End trembled.

There was another day, still remembered by the older generation as "Bloody Sunday." In England, the name has a curiously shocking sound! All the Radical organizations of London had planned a joint protest against the Government's Irish policy for Sunday, November 13. The Commissioner of Police, Sir Charles Warren, forbade all processions. The Home Secretary being induced to announce that this did not apply to genuine political meetings, the Radicals went ahead. Then came "Bloody Sunday." Without warning, the horse police charged at a gallop and the foot police in columns, clubbing men and women right and left. When the thousands had been dispersed, the wounded with broken legs and arms were carried away in ambulances to the police stations. That night Annie Besant called together the liberal men and women who had been furnishing bail money. She organized them into the Socialist Defence Association, pledged to obey telegraphic summons, night or day, and bail out prisoners arrested for violation of the rights of free speech and free assemblage.

Here at last, after thirteen years, she and Bradlaugh

reached the parting of their ways. Bradlaugh disapproved of demonstrations by the unemployed, of defying the police, of anything which might lead to violence. He had fought his fights legally in the courts all these years—and won. He had no patience with defiance of the slow-moving wheels of government. Bradlaugh has been accused of becoming a good Conservative as soon as he was seated in Parliament. The Socialists put it more bluntly and accused him of selling out to the Tories in return for their support of his pet Bills. It is true that the Tory press which had libelled him obscenely for years now referred to him as a refined and courteous gentleman, a kindly, cheerful soul, delighting in innocent pleasures, with a roystering, jolly laugh like some Titanic schoolboy. He was even mentioned as a likely member of the Radical Ministry. Bradlaugh was neither dishonest nor insincere. He had rather the uncompromising, stubborn integrity of the fanatic.

This *volte face* toward Bradlaugh is one more illustration of money's greater importance than morals. In the palmy 'seventies, English gentlemen had insulted and libelled Bradlaugh for his Atheism and the immoral Knowlton pamphlet and meant every word of it. Suddenly the face of their world had changed. A new economic order threatened them. They realized that questions of morals were mere conversation in comparison with this new menace which challenged their fortunes. Some of those shrewd old squires anticipated such logical sequences as super-taxes, confiscatory death duties, unemployment insurance and even a Socialist Prime Minister and Cabinet. It is no wonder they turned purple and patched up old quarrels.

Annie Besant has said that she deliberately pulled away from Bradlaugh at this time because she realized

that she handicapped him with his new friends. With her impulsive, generous nature, she was capable of such a gesture. It is also true that the time had come when it was a relief to break off this old connection. The effort to bridge the abyss between Secularist and Socialist was too exhausting to be borne. She was utterly weary of Atheism. For months, her contributions to the *Reformer* had stood at a minimum. She wrote her farewell notice as editor. For a long time there had been increasing complaints from readers in regard to the paper's divided editorial policy on Socialism. She wrote a bit stiffly, expressing no regret. She had attempted to resign some months earlier, she said, but Mr. Bradlaugh had postponed action in the hope that their differences would adjust themselves. Instead of disappearing, they had increased.

There was undisguised sorrow in Bradlaugh's paragraph. He reluctantly agreed that a journal must have a distinct editorial policy. He reiterated his appreciation of his colleague's years of self-sacrifice and invaluable aid to their cause. It was a generous tribute, reflecting credit both on the woman who called it forth, and on the man who made it. For thirteen years their two names had stood together at the masthead. In October, 1887, Bradlaugh's name once more stood alone : " Edited by Charles Bradlaugh." Annie Besant picked up the paper and stood looking at it. It was strange and sad. And yet, and yet, she had so much to do, meetings, lectures, people. She had no time for heartaches.

Bradlaugh missed her bitterly. He had never entirely recovered from the shock and strain of his ejection from the House of Commons. Now suddenly, he was an old man. The *Reformer* office had become a lonely place. Much as the prestige and power of an M.P. pleased him,

there were times when, looking back, he would have renounced it all to slip back into the quiet intimacy of those early years with the woman he always continued to love, Annie Besant.

CHAPTER XIV  
DYNAMITE AND MATCHES

1888-1889

THE FABIAN SOCIETY was named after the Roman General, Fabius Cunctator, who said, "For the right moment you must wait and, when the time comes, strike hard." Waiting was exactly what Annie Besant would not do. She had crossed that tragic Rubicon, her fortieth year. Her contemporaries were putting on white lace caps and drawing their chairs back out of the draught. Annie Besant had no such notion. Her curly hair showed streaks of grey. She had a slight stoop from years of desk work. Her eyes had a tired questioning look and there were lines where she had puckered up her forehead, trying to think things out. But she had not begun to relax. She was, indeed, more impatient than ever of maxims about waiting for the right moment.

Haunted by a sense that time was flying, the new year of 1888 found her embarked with a new associate, William T. Stead, upon a new crusade. It lacked cohesion, direction, organization. Her original comment on Stead, four years earlier, had been "mawkish religious sentimentality." Her Freethought bridges burned, her Fabian associates neglected, she found herself hand in glove with Stead on an intense and shortlived adventure which her earlier phrase sums up rather neatly.

A man named Linnell, victim of the police clubbing on "Bloody Sunday," died. Annie Besant organized his funeral. It was a simple cortège that started from Little

Windmill Street ; a band playing the Dead March ; half a dozen stooping, white-haired veterans of the Chartist riots ; the coffin under a crimson pall, heaped high with red roses and bearing an inscription, " Killed by the Police." Annie Besant walked beside the coffin. The other pallbearers were men, among them, Herbert Burrows and W. T. Stead. Two mourning coaches followed and some straggling radical delegates bearing red and green banners, draped in black. As they turned into the Strand, crowds left the sidewalks and followed them down Fleet Street, past the offices of the great dailies which had mocked their " Bloody Sunday."

Looking up, the marchers saw a tall, dark lady and a light-haired man standing on the balcony of the *Telegraph* building. A howl went up from the crowd, and in an instant the street was a sea of angry white faces looking up, groaning, hooting, hissing. With a shudder, the couple on the balcony disappeared. Up Ludgate Hill the crowd surged. It was the same route that Mrs. Besant and Bradlaugh had followed the day of their arrest for publishing the family limitation pamphlet. Then they had none of the exhilaration of public sympathy. Their only escort had been Bradlaugh's two black-gowned daughters with white faces and reproachful eyes. To-day, Bradlaugh was no longer with her, but in his place, Burrows and Stead and 100,000 people. Mounting the crest of the hill by St. Paul's, she turned to look at the sea of heads below her, stretching back, dark and menacing as far as she could see. They had taken possession of the street, blocking the trams, cutting the traces of horses and carts that got in their way.

Annie Besant responded to the potential, dammed-up power of this multitude as to an electric charge. Life could never be the same again. She must re-dedicate

herself in some new and tangible mode to this world of suffering, struggling men and women who surged about her. They filled her with an ecstasy of passion to serve them, to save them, to be in truth a universal mother. Dressed in black, her face white with emotion, she and her men companions marched for miles beside the glowing crimson pall covering the body of the dead. The ceremonial, the tragedy of death suffused her with sublime exultation. There was something seductive in the abandon of this vibrant woman to the sacrificial pageantry. She showed no shrinking from the groans and trampling and potential violence of the mob. Each of the men beside her felt himself her especial protector and dreamed of the mob's slipping out of control and of carrying her away to safety in his strong arms. In after years, Stead wrote, "We worked together, wrote together, spoke together and more than once, it seemed by no means impossible, so fierce was the tumult and so savage the violence of the police, that we might die together."

When Stead succeeded John Morley as editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette* in 1883-84, Annie Besant had commented on that journal's deterioration to a tone of mawkish sentimentality. She was to say far worse than that. "Daybreak" picked on him: "For absolute imbecility, *The Pall Mall Gazette* has no rival in the press." Stead was a pioneer of modern sensational journalism. His most spectacular *coup* was to muckrake the white slave traffic in collaboration with General Booth and the Salvation Army. To support his charges, Stead bought a thirteen-year-old virgin from a procurer, took her to a brothel for half an hour and then shipped her ("as pure and innocent as ever") to the continent, presumably for immoral purposes, but really into the pious hands of General Booth's agent. With noisy headlines and aggressive



charges Stead played up his story. He created more of a sensation than he had planned. The English courts unsympathetically sent Stead to prison for three months for acting as procurer in the sale of a girl. The conservative London press, even the radicals, annoyed by Stead's antics, tittered and guffawed. Hyndman's paper, *Justice*, summed it up as erotic cant and said Stead deserved three months for being such a fool. Annie Besant, as was her wont, took the incident seriously, turning sentimental over the girl; "the life of a woman child who has been taken by a man to a brothel is ruined for ever." She insinuated that there was no knowing what had happened in the half-hour at the brothel and asked how many more of Stead's pretended revelations had been mere filthy inventions. Mrs. Besant's warm friendships with both Stead and Bernard Shaw followed her aggressive attacks. It is a tribute to the power of her charm. Male esteem does not usually prosper on such beginnings.

Stead, whose emotionalism was more sentimental, less exalted than Annie Besant's, had been captivated by her magnetic, black-clad figure marching beside him through the glamour of that funeral pageant. Using the power of the *Gazette* and his contacts as a journalist, Stead organized a mildly radical group, outraged by the violence of "Bloody Sunday" into a Law and Liberty League. It began under distinguished auspices, Jacob Bright acting as chairman for the first mass meeting. Impulsively sweeping his plume in the dust, Stead laid this organization at Annie Besant's feet. With it as an instrument, together they would hasten the millennium. It is difficult to describe the new movement adequately because they both used so many metaphors and such a boundless range of symbolism. It was to be an Army of the Commonwealth, a militant crusade for the rights of the poor and oppressed.

It was also to be the Church of the Future, teaching social Duty, upholding social Righteousness, establishing Justice, building up the true Commonweal. The regeneration of humanity and the secular and temporal salvation of all people were details of its programme.

Before criticizing their efforts, it would be unfair not to make allowance for the shifting values of the time. While all Europe rocked with revolution and bloodshed, England had been quietly passing through drastic changes. With her adroit statesmen and her genius for compromise she had placated her proletariat by sweeping reforms in the very teeth of her lords and squirearchy. Successive reform acts since 1832 had realized fundamental democratic ideals in the enfranchisement of labour, land taxation, compulsory education and the liberalizing of the Established Church. The radical intelligentsia could scarcely keep ahead of Parliament itself. They tried all sorts of experiments. Every day a new commission was announced : on the sweated trades, on housing, on the scientific study of poverty. Charles Booth was making his monumental study, *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Canon Barnett was founding Toynbee Hall, the original university settlement. Those were blissful dawns for young reformers. Anything might be possible. We hear only of the movements which survived. For everyone of these, there were countless abortive efforts such as this Law and Liberty League, of all degrees of impracticable idealism. The spectacle of Annie Besant and Stead working together suggests a spiritual incest. They were too much alike. Each of them was a genius and each needed the restraint of a more judicial temperament. Egging each other on, they intensified each other's weaknesses.

In their respective journals they advertised the Law

and Liberty League. Annie Besant's magazine, *Our Corner*, now five years old, had never paid its way and was beginning to bore its editor. Instead of turning it into the official organ for the new movement, she and Stead founded a brand-new weekly paper, *The Link*. A monthly magazine was too slow for her present mood. She would have preferred a daily, and compromised on a weekly. Annie Besant was in heroic mood and harked back to the old Prometheus symbolism again. *The Link* was to be a torch to light up the dark places of the earth. It might seem, she told her new readers, that factories, trams, commercialism had taken all the romance out of life, but she knew that the breath of the older heroism was beginning to stir again. Still the quest of the Holy Grail exercised its deathless fascination over the hearts of men.

With her instinct for elaboration, she started the Law and Liberty League heavily organized. The membership was divided into Circles. Each Circle consisted of 240 persons in twenty groups of twelve each with a hierarchy of officials heading up in Stead and herself. Each Circle had its name and number and six Duties. There were beside twelve Objects and a constitution with twelve Planks.

The dynamite lay in an inner set of Circles of twelve members each, known as Ironside Circles. Their Pledge and Duties were shrouded in secrecy. They reported to the hierarchy cases of police violence, persecution of the poor by the rich, election bribery, extortion. The hierarchy warned offenders. They enforced their warnings by threats of publicity in a department of *The Link* called "The Pillory." As an ultimate penalty, they threatened boycotts. Deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice were also to be reported weekly in a "Roll of Honour." The boy-scout naïveté of it all is rather appalling.

In practice, the Roll of Honour never came off. No one bothered to search for good deeds in this naughty world. In all the hectic ten months of this grotesque fantasy, only two or three incidents qualified for honourable mention. But "The Pillory" waxed and flourished. Annie Besant as editor invited any and everyone to submit grievances. She changed the column's name to one of even more sinister memories, "The Lion's Mouth," recalling the orifices carved in the marble walls of the Doge's Palace. Here in the days of the Inquisition, Venetian citizens with a quick thrust of the wrist might deposit anonymous charges for the eyes of the Council of Ten. Such associations of terrorism and tyranny should normally have been repugnant to Mrs. Besant. That her good sense did not assert itself to repudiate such a name and such methods proves the violence of her emotional reaction.

The Law and Liberty League's power to do good and its hope of not doing harm depended on the omniscience of its executive. They must distinguish false from true so that none of the scores of minor officials should be able to use the League for personal revenge or for purposes of blackmail. As an organization, it had much in common with the late Ku Klux Klan. Both violate something fundamental to Anglo-Saxon psychology. The League roused bitter opposition. Charles Bradlaugh with his trained legal mind saw its weaknesses but criticized it gently. In spite of her reversion to ecclesiastical metaphors—Stead was a Christian—Annie Besant made a determined effort to secure the affiliation of the Freethinkers.

In Bradlaugh's absence she hurried a favourable resolution through a special meeting of the Secularist Society. Bradlaugh promptly had the action rescinded and

notified the League that no co-operation was possible until they modified the objectionable rules affecting the Iron-side Circles. Annie Besant pleaded in vain. She had already resigned from the *Reformer* and she threatened to leave the Secularist Society. She attacked the Secularists in *The Link* for standing churlishly aside from good works because they did not approve of subsidiary details. Bradlaugh stood his ground. He believed, he said, in the good intentions of the founders, but was opposed to their principles and methods. He pointed out legal difficulties. Their chief weapon, the boycott, was not only illegal, involving conspiracy, but it offered an opportunity for blackmail and gross immorality. Annie Besant was petulantly angry at Bradlaugh. In the past, when she really made up her mind, she had usually been able to influence him. Even though their old relationship was long since abandoned, she resented his opposition and was thrown back more than ever on Stead.

Stead was a new type, quite different from the men who had previously interested her. He was rather short, with a reddish beard, light blue eyes and an impulsive manner which made him look a good deal younger than she, although he was only two years her junior. Nervous and highly strung, he never sat still, marking with a pencil on a bit of paper all the time he talked. He would throw himself in a chair "with American disregard of angles or of society postures," comments his biographer, Frederick Whyte. He had, too, an American fondness for slang and racy phrases and a complete disregard of appearances.

After years of Bradlaugh's dispassionate judgments, Annie Besant was fascinated by the headlong impulsiveness of the man. In addition to their daily conferences, she wrote to him, frequently twice a day. He was Sir

Galahad. She was—St. George ! She used square note paper with a big, gold-lettered ANNIE in the corner giving her letters a jolly, school-girlish look which was quaintly incongruous with the tense seriousness of her mood. Her letters show a pathetic restlessness and discontent. She gave Stead surprisingly outspoken admiration, and, after all these years, was not above quoting Scripture for her own purpose. In one letter she referred to his curious power of making her feel content although there was nothing to be contented about. " I suppose it is because you are so good that your very presence is like the ' Peace be still ' of the Christ, and there is a great calm."

All this time, she was working with an intensity which was abnormal, even for her. She bore the brunt of all the hardest, most disagreeable tasks. Responding instantly to summons from radical organizations, she plunged into the streets at all hours of the day and night to gather up bondsmen and secure the release of newly-arrested political prisoners. The hardship, lack of sleep, physical exhaustion gave her satisfaction. She was weary of intangibles. Here was something definite.

The League's elastic constitution permitted her continually to add on new and irrelevant purposes and duties. Reverting to old-fashioned philanthropy, she appealed for volunteers to take convalescent poor children into their homes from the city hospitals, commended the Salvation Army's work in Limehouse, she to whom Booth had so recently been a target for derision. *The Link* became more and more a chamber of horrors : gruesome stories of atrocities, cruelty to children, to animals, medical inspection of prostitutes, rape of servant girls, torture of child wives in India.

She found herself helping to celebrate the anniversary of the Paris Commune with her old adversary, Hyndman,

as chairman, and a group of left-wingers and anarchists, Prince Kropotkin, William Morris, and even Eleanor Marx Aveling! She was seeing more of Hyndman's militant followers than of her Fabian colleagues these days. The Fabians were as embarrassed as Bradlaugh by her new departure and dropped into the background. She even defied the police. They forbade the taking up of collections at open-air meetings. She announced that she had taken up a collection on Clapham Common that week and proposed to take another at Victoria Park the following Sunday. The authorities discreetly ignored her.

It was incoherent and utterly disjointed. But it took her out of herself. Fortunately the dynamite got wet before it exploded into libel suits and catastrophe. Complaints poured in on her and Stead. Reluctantly they realized that they were being used to vent the spite of this person and that; that the unscrupulous were taking advantage of their trusting idealism. It was a sorry world. Stead dashed off to Russia, leaving Annie Besant to handle the situation.

Suddenly, after all this muddling and waste motion, she was in the midst of one of the brilliant and important achievements which stud her career, diamonds and paste all mixed up together. In Stead's absence she had been working with Herbert Burrows, one of the leaders of Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation; the man who had led the attack on Bradlaugh. For several months Burrows and Champion had been talking about the intolerable conditions among the unskilled women workers of London, and especially in the match industry. Champion, the ex-Artillery officer, asked Mrs. Besant to post the Bryant and May match factory in "The Lion's Mouth." One noon-day, she and Burrows visited the factory and won the girls' confidence. A sensational article, "WHITE SLAVERY IN LONDON" appearing in the

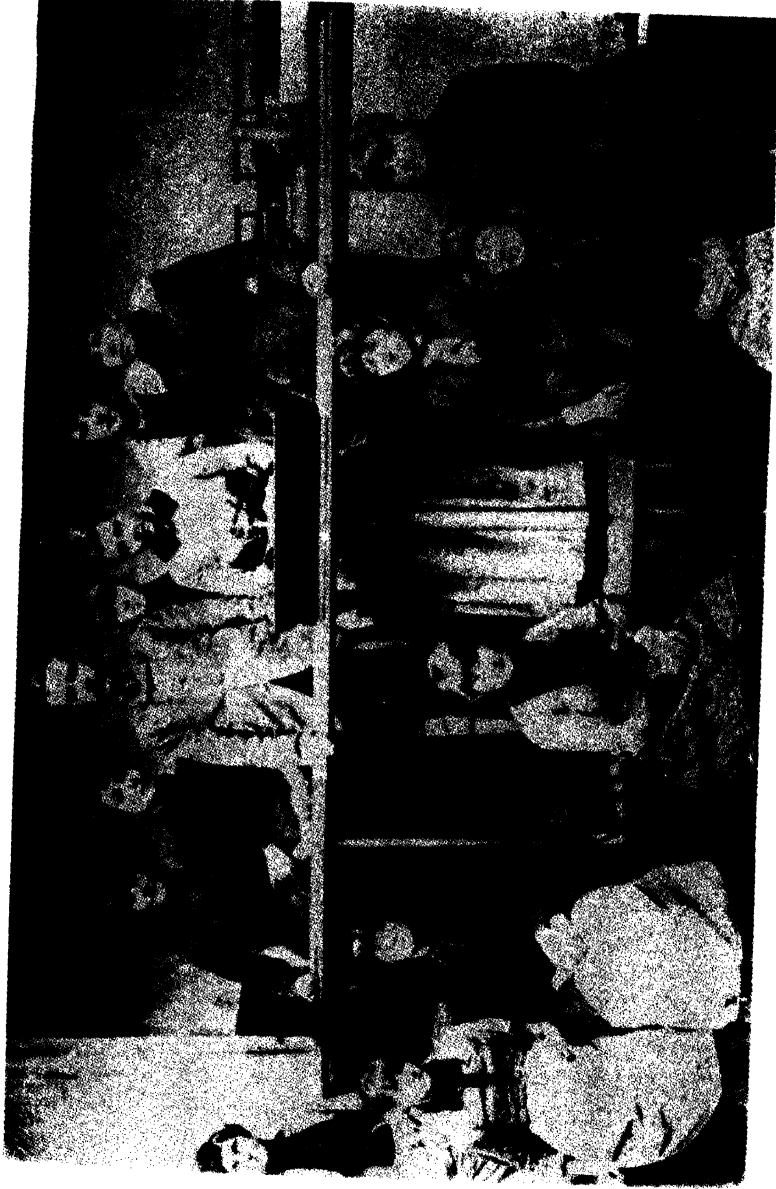
next number of *The Link*, demanded a boycott of Bryant and May matches by all members of the Law and Liberty League. Bryant and May discharged the employees who had talked. In their brief contact with Annie Besant, the match girls, the most listless, down-trodden creatures of the London slums, had somehow caught a new spirit of hope and courage. In protest against the discharge of their comrades, they struck and marched *en masse* across the city to Annie Besant's Fleet Street office to ask her advice and help.

The strategic importance of this strike in first breaking through the inertia of London's unskilled labour is admitted by English historians though they are chary about giving Annie Besant credit. "The first skirmish of the new Unionism," writes Trevelyan in *British History in the Nineteenth Century*, "was the successful strike in 1888 of the London girls employed in making lucifer matches; one of the most dependent and helpless sections of labour, who could never have won their fight unaided or in a hostile social atmosphere. Friends pleaded their cause in the newspapers and subscriptions from the public pulled them through." Annie Besant was the "friend." She gave them all her strength, enthusiasm, ingenuity. She was at her inspired best. In response, they worshipped her and used to crowd and push around her to touch her skirt—to kiss it. She it was who let all London know that the Bryant and May girls worked fourteen hours a day for wages of four shillings and tenpence a week. Mr. Bryant had presented a statue of Gladstone to the city, and she made him regret having docked each of his helpless employees a shilling—nearly a quarter of their week's wage—to help pay for it. She covered the front page of *The Link* with two-inch headlines and dramatic appeals to shareholders :



“Do you know that girls are used to carry boxes on their heads until the hair is rubbed off and the young heads are bald at fifteen years of age? Country clergymen with shares in Bryant and May’s, draw down on your knee your fifteen-year-old daughter; pass your hand tenderly over the silky, clustering curls, rejoice in the dainty beauty of the thick, shiny tresses. Then, like a ghastly vision, let there rise before you the pale, wan face of another man’s fifteen-year-old daughter. Truly, the Master you profess to serve showed fine sense when he said the harlots should enter the Kingdom of Heaven before you.” Perhaps the Rev. Frank Besant owned some Bryant and May stock.

As the strike gathered momentum, her old friends rallied to her aid. Bradlaugh asked questions about the strike in the House of Commons and arranged for her to lead a delegation of the girls to the Parliament buildings where the Members interviewed and questioned them. The Fabians and all the other liberal and radical societies made speeches, organized meetings, raised money. Strike benefit paydays at Mile End Hall in the depths of London’s festering slums became exclusive functions rivalling the salons of the famous French beauties. Annie Besant’s brilliant men friends flocked about her, eager to help. On the first payday, Bernard Shaw and Graham Wallas brought two hundred pounds in cash with them. Pouring it out on a table, they set to work to count it into heaps. Mrs. Besant’s young Scottish friend, J. M. Robertson, marked off the seats allotted to the various factories. Sydney Olivier and the Rev. Stewart Headlam acted as Mrs. Besant’s factotums. Herbert Burrows, as chairman, opened the meeting. Annie Besant, beautiful and ardent, moved among them like a princess. After her inspiring speech the girls stamped and waved and cheered in a



1888

ANNIE BESANT AND HERBERT BURROWS WITH THE  
STRIKE COMMITTEE OF THE MATCH MAKERS UNION.



WILLIAM T. STEAD

REVIEWING "THE SECRET DOCTRINE" FOR  
MR. STEAD GAVE ANNIE BESANT HER INTRO-  
DUCTION TO THEOSOPHY.



*I am interested in  
Mrs. Besant's! I'll write in  
the attempt to review her. You  
must write on my tomb. "See*

frenzy of enthusiasm. Robertson read off the girls' names. Shaw and Olivier acted as cashiers. Annie Besant, on the edge of the platform, smiling down at the entranced girls, herself put the benefit money into their hands as they filed past.

There were only two such paydays. Before the end of the third week, the Messrs. Bryant and May had bowed to defeat. Annie Besant with her gallant, unpredictable courage had dived into the unplumbed depths of the misery and hopelessness of the East End and had nonchalantly undertaken what no one else had ever attempted. As in her publication of the Knowlton pamphlet, she made a permanent contribution to the progress of women. The effects of her work are still accumulating. After her match girls had won their strike, the Trades Union Council for the first time brought pressure to bear on the organized men's trades to help with the organization of women. It was the entering wedge. As for Bryant and May, they have ever since been known as one of the model factories of the city of London.

For some years, Annie Besant and Burrows kept in touch with the match girls, serving as secretary and treasurer of the Union. They raised funds and built a clubhouse for them. Annie Besant considered the possibilities of trade unionism. She and Burrows prospected about among the tin box makers and other unskilled trades. But lightning does not strike twice in the same spot. They had stumbled upon such a spectacular success with the match strike that they were rather spoiled for the drudgery of ordinary labour organization routine. The strike, really an offspring of the Law and Liberty League, had forged far ahead of its parent. All London knew about the match girls ; comparatively few knew the meaning of the initials L.L.L. By the time Stead returned from Russia, both the

League and *The Link* were dying on their feet and Annie Besant was absorbed in a new interest.

Burrows had stood as candidate for the School Board in a slum district of London the previous year. Following up his defeat, Annie Besant stood for the same constituency that autumn and was elected. The progressive element on the Board at once made her their mouthpiece to propose and sponsor motions with her brilliant eloquence. A clergyman, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, became her ardent ally. She exposed the low wages and working conditions in factories manufacturing Bibles for use in the city schools: "They may well provide a Chaplain for the girls they have driven into prostitution," she scornfully told the Board. She secured the appointment of a committee to investigate labour conditions in all concerns furnishing School Board supplies, with no concession because of the orthodoxy of members of the firm! She made a precedent soon to be adopted by organized labour not only in London, but all over the world: "No contracts to sweaters" and the corollary that only firms maintaining fair working conditions and a union scale of wages were eligible to bid for city contracts. This is now universally accepted practice. Annie Besant was a pioneer in its establishment.

She was accomplishing sound, practical results on the School Board, but neither School Boards nor match strikes could satisfy her. The previous year she had been planning the regeneration of mankind and the secular and temporal salvation of the world. This was anti-climax. She was profoundly unsettled. The Law and Liberty League had proved a bitter and humiliating disappointment. Financial worries pursued her. She had always to make up a deficit for *Our Corner*. Now *The Link* was also in the red. Her salary from *The National Social Reformer*

had stopped. Her popularity as a Freethought lecturer had been undermined by her defection to the Socialists. She had a large house on her hands, a staff of servants, grounds to keep up, a burdensome standard of living.

Looking back, Mrs. Besant has said that from 1886 until 1889 she suffered acute distress over her philosophy of life. Materialism and science were not enough. The extremity of her mental turmoil is proven by the spectacular swing she was about to make, far beyond the conventional orthodoxy of the Church of England to the extreme pole of mysticism and the supernatural. Her naming the date 1886 suggests the question as to what precipitated her conflict in that particular year.

She joined the Fabians in 1885. By 1886, she was still taking an active part in their work, but she had had time to find their approach to life disappointingly academic. She rebelled against defending her conversion to Socialism from the onslaughts of satirical Freethinkers when, in her heart, she realized that the change was not worth the candle. An incident in January, 1886, emphasized her sense of desolation. Bradlaugh took his seat in the House of Commons. Ignoring the six-year struggle, he was accepted complacently enough by his colleagues and the Tory press. Annie Besant has never been satisfied with vicarious achievement. Always she has demanded the right to be herself and win her own rewards. None of the glamour of Bradlaugh's achievement was reflected upon her, the partner of his years of struggle. Nor could she see any comparable goal looming through the mists of her own future.

Such was the background of her overwhelming sense of disillusionment in 1886. It helps to explain her increasing detachment and incoherence ; the strange vagaries of her

Law and Liberty League. Annie Besant's beauty, her charm, her brilliant gifts as an orator—all constituted a crown which she was finding most uncomfortable upon her head. Other people could change their minds, and what of it? Her every move must be accompanied by a witches' chorus of jeers. Her pride and her lack of humour have always prevented her from accepting the obverse side of her fame with complacency. Every jibe pierced to the quick.

For the first time in the fifteen years since she left Sibsey, her literary output dropped off, reaching the lowest ebb of her entire career in 1888. This was the only year in over half a century, from 1873 to the present time, when she did not publish one single book or pamphlet. At the end of that same year, she abruptly terminated both of her publications, her six-year-old magazine *Our Corner* and the weekly *Link*, official organ of the League. She had kept them alive to see her through the School Board election in November. Announcing her success she thanked her supporters in the December number. That was the end of both journals. She made no farewells. They simply stopped. More than half of the last two issues of *Our Corner* were thirty-page instalments finishing Shaw's novel, *Love Among the Artists*. The various departments and features of the magazine she had dropped overboard as unceremoniously as she has always dropped subjects when tired of them.

Through an extravagant inner turmoil, she was reaching a reluctant realization of the inadequacy of materialism. Desperately she groped for the reassurance of authority. London at the moment was investigating Spiritualism. She and Burrows entered a circle, inviting Stead to join them. He declined, although he was a little later to become an ardent Spiritualist. One night the

table tapped out a message about the death of a clergyman, a member of their group who was visiting in Ireland. The story was circumstantial. The dead clergyman's spirit hovering about sent them a message. They were vastly thrilled. The effect was interrupted by the arrival of a late-comer, who proved to be the clergyman himself, suddenly returned from Ireland. In spite of occasional disappointments, they persevered. Annie Besant, rebelling against the disillusionments of this world, was particularly susceptible to investigations of another life. She remembered the successful séances and forgot the fiascos. Experiments with clairvoyance and clairaudience convinced her of their reality. She longed to experience these sensations for herself. Burrows, as interested as she, escorted her faithfully through all her adventures.

It was Stead who unwittingly provided the stepping-stone for her next plunge. He gave her *The Secret Doctrine* in two large volumes by a Russian woman, Helena P. Blavatsky.

"Can you review these?" he asked, "my young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them." In the rambling pages of *The Secret Doctrine* Annie Besant found something infinitely alluring—mystery, occultism, knowing references to the secrets of alchemists and magicians through the ages. Here was the comforting vagueness of the supernatural dissociated from the embarrassing associations of Christianity.

Her mind leaped ahead in anticipation, and gave her that pleasant, confused sense of having known all this before—perhaps in other lives. Yet it was difficult reading. In spite of her expertness in reviewing scientific and philosophical treatises, in four languages, she found this



book heavy going. She stopped to write a note to Stead on one of her little square sheets of notepaper,

“ I am immersed in Madame Blavatsky ! If I perish in the attempt to review her, you must write on my tomb, ‘ She has gone to investigate the Secret Doctrine at first hand ’ ” (see facsimile facing p. 209).

Her eyes shining with delight, she shared the book with Burrows. Happily under her spell, partly too on his own account, he agreed that this was the Oracle for whom they had both been waiting. She wrote and secured an invitation to call on the high priestess. Keyed up by years of frustration, tremulous with anticipation, one soft spring evening Annie Besant with Herbert Burrows beside her walked down the quiet streets of Notting Hill to 17 Lansdowne Road. There was a pause in the hall, a dazed passage through ante-rooms ; folding doors were thrown back ; they were standing before a figure in an armchair. A vibrant voice said :

“ My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you.”

Annie Besant looked down into fathomless, azure blue eyes that held and searched her, but were as inscrutable as Isis in her many veils. In a whirl of emotion she sank into a chair and tried to follow the casual conversation of her Oracle who smoked incessantly, rolling Russian tobacco between long, exquisite fingers. Still in a daze, Annie Besant rose. Again she looked long and passionately into those blue eyes and mastered a desire to bend down and kiss the strange creature who had set her mind reeling. With an effort, she pulled herself together, made her adieus and went out into the night in silent ecstasy, unconscious of the awe-struck man walking beside her.

CHAPTER XV  
PRIESTESS OF THE OCCULT

1889

TAKING one cause after another for a brief but energetic lecture tour, Annie Besant had, during the past fifteen years, tried and discarded every phase of radical thought. Suddenly, at first sight, a strange woman cast a spell over her. The magic of that enchantment has weathered the storms of forty hectic years. A few days after her first meeting with this priestess of the occult, Annie Besant returned to ask some questions.

Her association with the Fabians had done much to rehabilitate Mrs. Besant with the world at large. Her public had been extended far beyond the walls of the old Hall of Science. Madame Blavatsky was well aware of her value as a propagandist and was watching her eagerly. Both Madame and her Society were under a cloud, suffering from unfortunate publicity. The Society for Psychical Research had investigated Madame's phenomena and, in a widely read report, had arraigned her as an imposter. When Annie Besant showed her interest by calling again within a few days, Madame took the bull by the horns.

"Have you read the report about me of the Society for Psychical Research?" she asked, looking up from the depth of her vast arm-chair at the eager eyes smiling into hers.

"No ; I never heard of it so far as I know," said Annie Besant. Madame's blue eyes held the brown ones for a long hypnotic minute.

“Go and read it,” she commanded, “and if after reading it, you come back”—she hesitated—“well?” She put a caressing sweetness and mystery into the interrogation.

It was the charm of the supernatural which had drawn Annie Besant into the study of Spiritualism and supernatural phenomena had played a spectacular part in Madame's life. Madame had built modern Theosophy around a supernatural hierarchy. At the top was the Absolute Being who rules this world, the divine Logos, commonly called God. Beneath him were the Mahatmas or Masters who, after millenniums of reincarnations had completed their human evolution and achieved perfection. Altruistic Mahatmas were permitted to aid mankind on its age-long pilgrimage. They selected as “chelas” or disciples, human beings nearing perfection, becoming their personal “gurus” or teachers. A liberal use of Sanskrit terms lent atmosphere. Out of all the world, the Mahatmas had selected Madame as their first chela to organize the Theosophical Society. As a proof that she was their authorized chela, the Mahatmas permitted her to perform miracles—until the latter caused trouble. Madame had called them phenomena.

Annie Besant was fascinated by accounts of Madame's manifestations in India. Unseen bells tinkled, piano keys played, pictures painted themselves. When Madame joined a picnic party in Simla and the tiffin basket lacked a cup and saucer, she supplied the missing dishes by magic; the new cup and saucer even matched the set in the tiffin basket. Marvels occurred at the Adyar headquarters. Madame had a black lacquer cupboard or “shrine.” Chelas leaving letters in this astral post-office found answers from the Mahatmas, written by hand on a mysterious rice paper. Lost jewellery, vases, portraits

were materialized by Madame. Broken dishes placed in the shrine were found mended. Rare flowers appeared. Sometimes the rice-paper letters, instead of being deposited in the shrine, fluttered down on visitors' heads from the ceiling cloths which are used, in India, to prevent spiders and insects from dropping down one's neck.

Monsieur and Madame Coulomb, a French couple of the beach-comber type that drifts about the Orient, had found shelter at Adyar, accepted half as protégées, half as upper servants. Madame Coulomb, a furtive, witchlike creature, was discontented with her status. She was for ever hinting that the phenomena were all fraud and that she would expose them. Madame Blavatsky, who had a short temper, for some reason put up with this woman for several years. During Madame's absence in Europe, however, a committee of chelas left in charge of Adyar, ejected the Coulombs from the compound. A little later, the Christian missions magazine at Madras, which had always fought the Theosophists, published a series of seventy letters purporting to be from Madame Blavatsky to Madame Coulomb. They gave minute instructions for materializations in Madame Blavatsky's absence. They were intended to convince the sceptical that the phenomena were not dependent on her presence and connivance. Madame Coulomb had carried out her threats.

The Society for Psychical Research had undertaken to investigate Madame's phenomena in the spring of 1884, before the scandal of the Coulomb letters broke. They appointed as investigator a young Cambridge man, Richard Hodgson. It was his report which Annie Besant carried home with her. Hodgson arrived in Adyar in December on the heels of the publication of the Coulomb letters and found the Theosophists in a spiritual cyclone cellar. The famous black lacquer cabinet, centre of

mystery and phenomena, had disappeared. No two chelas agreed on what had happened to it or on anything else. A chela from America, Dr. Hartmann, had written a pamphlet exonerating Madame Blavatsky. Under pressure, this pamphlet was disavowed as inaccurate. The Indian chelas lied flagrantly and transparently. Mr. Hodgson went ahead with his investigation. He measured and drew charts of what was left, the empty shrine room and bricked-up walls which had opened into Madame's bedroom. He interviewed everyone and made notes. He extracted from Dr. Hartmann a confession that they had burned the shrine in a panic, and from Madame Blavatsky the admission that many of the Coulomb letters were genuine ; she insisted that the incriminating portions, in some cases pages long, were forgeries. At the end of 200 pages of evidence, the Report concluded : that the Theosophical phenomena in India were part of an elaborate, fraudulent system, worked out by Madame Blavatsky with the assistance of confederates ; that she wrote most of the so-called Mahatma letters ; and that not one single genuine phenomena had occurred. Madame was pronounced " one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting impostors in history."

It was under the spell of this fascinating woman that Annie Besant went home with the volume of *Psychical Research Proceedings* under her arm. Its disastrous effects were to cause her no concern. The most prominent English Theosophists had resigned. The Society had been split into two factions, for and against phenomena. Raging like a wounded lioness, Madame had threatened libel suits which did not materialize. In Annie Besant's infatuation, the circumstantial evidence and cumulative coincidences of the Report made no impression. After

a superficial reading, she threw it down impatiently. She had only, she says, to remind herself of "the frank, fearless nature that I had caught a glimpse of, the proud, fiery truthfulness that shone at me from the clear blue eyes, honest and fearless as those of a noble child. Was the writer of 'The Secret Doctrine' this miserable impostor, this accomplice of tricksters, this foul and loathsome deceiver, this conjuror with trap-doors and sliding panels? I laughed aloud at the absurdity and flung the Report aside with the righteous scorn of an honest nature that knew its own kind when it met them, and shrank from the foulness and baseness of a lie."

Theosophists accept Madame's assertion that her books, dictated to her by the Masters, divulge esoteric truths never before revealed. The ponderous volumes show wide familiarity with the lore of occultism. Scholars do not concede their originality. Most of the material in *Isis Unveiled* has been traced back to 100 standard sources. Whether or not the revelations in her books and her phenomena depend on supernatural inspiration is immaterial to Madame's great achievement. Her place as one of the famous women mystics is secure. She left behind a system of thought which brings comfort and inspiration to thousands of men and women. Annie Besant was one of them. As she reached the end of *The Secret Doctrine*, all her puzzles and problems seemed to disappear. She closed the book reverently, "I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found."

Annie Besant has defined Theosophy as "the body of truths which form the basis of all religions and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any." The Society has no dogmas. Its platform is limited to three Objects: 1, To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race,

creed, sex, caste or colour. 2, To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. 3, To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the power latent in man. Theosophists are students, belonging to any religion in the world, or none, who are united by their approval of these Objects.

While subscribing to no formal creed, in practice Theosophists have accepted certain doctrines, notably Reincarnation and Karma. Both appealed to the aggressive individuality of Mrs. Besant. She found reassurance in the survival of this person, Annie Besant, as she worked her way through a hundred thousand years of spiritual evolution to an ultimate perfection. Karma was especially comforting ; whatever her lot in this life, good or ill, she was paying penalties or reaping rewards for the merits and demerits of past lives. Her failure to find happiness, either in personal relationships or in her public career, had been intolerably tantalizing, an aspersion on her capacity for living life successfully. Theosophy explained it all away.

The Society for Psychical Research had called Madame Blavatsky an impostor. From the human side, she was more than that. Her voluminous correspondence, published by the Theosophists with disarming good faith, shows a fascinating woman, impulsive, tempestuous, brilliant. She had a rollicking sense of humour, laughing at everyone, including even herself and her Mahatmas. She was genuinely unconventional in a way that Annie Besant for all her courage and defiance, would never understand. She had an abominable temper and little self-control. It is noticeable, however, that while she used to berate stupid old Colonel Olcott like a pickpocket, she did not try it on those chelas who would not stand it—Annie Besant, for instance. Madame's genius more than

compensated for her lapses. She leaves a sense of human richness and fascination. Her ability, through it all, to command the loyalty of scholars and men of integrity argues something real and powerful beneath the strange exterior.

It was a bold stroke for Madame to aspire to capture the most brilliant propagandist in England. Identified as Annie Besant was with science and materialism, her endorsement of Theosophical phenomena would startle all London. But Madame had been reading *The Link*. Its emotional vagaries gave her a clue. For several years she had published flattering references to the most eloquent woman in England. Annie Besant was at what has been called the dangerous age. Some women turn to gigolos, others to religion. Mrs. Besant was to choose the latter. By temperament, she was susceptible to religion. As a girl, grieving for the intimate reassurance of her home, she had found comfort in a fantasy world. For this middle-aged woman, day dreams were not enough.

The very day after reading the Report, she applied for membership in the Theosophical Society and, receiving her diploma, hurried to Madame. It was an impassioned meeting. Madame was secretly exultant. For Annie Besant it was a sacred moment. She brought to this strange, compelling woman a heart hungry for love, an imperious, egotistical nature, thwarted by the disappointments of life. She was relieved to find Madame alone. She could not trust herself to speak. Silently, she crossed the room, and bending down, kissed the strange, old face. Madame looked up.

"You have joined the Society," she said.

"Yes."

"You have read the Report?"

"Yes."



“ Well ? ” Madame asked unflinchingly.

Annie Besant sank to her knees and, holding the slender Russian hands against her throbbing breast, she looked into the azure eyes and solemnly replied :

“ My answer is, will you accept me as your pupil and give me the honour of proclaiming you my teacher in the face of the world ? ”

There were tears in Madame Blavatsky's eyes as she tenderly placed her hand on the dark hair streaked with grey, and said softly :

“ You are a noble woman. May Master bless you ! ”

## CHAPTER XVI

### CHELAS AND GURUS

1889-1891

NEITHER Annie Besant nor Madame Blavatsky liked women. Each was the only woman of importance in the other's life. For Annie Besant, the Theosophical Society of 1889 was a step down rather than up in her career. To Madame Blavatsky, her accession was providential.

The intimacy between the two women developed rapidly. Annie Besant, who had never been further away from home than Paris, was fascinated by Madame's stories of roaming up and down the world ever since, as a girl of sixteen, she had escaped from her husband, a Russian Governor and Councillor of State, many years her senior. Madame Blavatsky came of a noble Mecklenberg family. She was born a psychic and a Bohemian. She had studied occultism and searched out mystics and sorcerers in every corner of the globe. She claimed to have spent seven years in Thibet where she prepared for her life work under direct instruction of the Masters.

In 1873 she landed in New York City for the last time, forty-two years old and penniless. She lived for a time on the lower east side, making cravats for a living. She met a Colonel Olcott who, like herself, was an active Spiritualist. A not very successful lawyer, he had a brevet title from the Civil War. Joining forces, for several years they experimented with Miracle Clubs and similar efforts. In 1875 they held the first meeting of the Theosophical Society in Madame's parlours on Irving Place in New

York City. The ideas were all Madame's. The unsophisticated Colonel was used as a disarming figurehead. Repudiating and attacking Spiritualism, Madame spent the next two years writing her first important book, *Isis Unveiled*.

Annie Besant easily accepted Madame's theory that every incident in her life had been part of the Masters' plan for presenting Theosophy to the world. Madame explained away all apparent inconsistencies. She reconciled her former spiritualistic activity with her present antagonism ; the Masters had commanded her to prevent the world from surrendering to Materialism until the time was ripe for the presentation of Theosophy. Spiritualism had been an opportunist measure. At the end of the first four years, the Theosophical Society had made so little progress that Madame, in response to supernatural advice from the Masters, decided to move to India. She and the Colonel sailed in 1879, leaving little more than a paper charter of the Society in the hands of their American representative, a restless clerk in a law office, William Q. Judge.

Mrs. Besant was impressed by the coincidence that 1879 also marked the beginning of her own active interest in India. In that year she had published, in booklet form, her *National Reformer* articles on "The Story of Afghanistan : or, Why the Tory Government Gags the Indian Press. A Plea for the Weak against the Strong." In the decade since, she and Bradlaugh as anti-Imperialists had maintained an active interest in the Indians, and Bradlaugh had made speeches on their behalf in the House of Commons.

Within three years after their arrival in India, Madame Blavatsky and Olcott had interested some wealthy Princes, started their magazine, *The Theosophist*, toured

thousands of miles over India, and managed to buy an estate at Adyar on the outskirts of Madras, which is, to-day, the international headquarters of the Theosophical movement. Madame's adroit use of phenomena, the Colonel's instinct for publicity had put them over. The Colonel had believed in and encouraged Madame's phenomena with the naïve delight of a child. He had endured her rages and abuse philosophically, as the price he had to pay for this fantastic life. But when, because of the bungling of Madame's phenomena, the S.P.R. report discredited them both, he turned on her in a panic. He was too simple to realize that it was the eccentricity of her genius which had enabled her to create Theosophy. With the conceit of mediocrity, he believed that, rid of her, he could lead the Society to a brilliant future.

Madame was shipped off to Europe. Reduced to drab lodgings and one disciple, the Countess Wachtmeister, she did not for an instant give up to despair. She raged and cursed and wrote tempestuous letters, but she courageously went to work on another book. Her first had been a two-volume encyclopædia of occultism. This one, *The Secret Doctrine*, was an exhaustive exposition of Theosophy. It was the book which brought her the devotion of Annie Besant. Still nursed by the Countess, Madame had been in London two years when she met Annie Besant. Some young University men interested in mysticism and the supernatural had gathered about her. During their separation the differences between herself and the Colonel had been intensified. She resented his continual efforts to concentrate control of the Society in his own hands. She organized her chelas into an independent group, the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. They made secret pledges to her. She warned the Colonel that if he interfered in any way, they

would secede. This organization, known as the E.S., has ever since been the nerve centre of the Society and has played a star part in the drama of the latter years.

Spurred by the antagonism between herself and the Colonel, Madame was the more intent on finding someone with a personality capable of defending her policies after she was gone. With the acquisition of Annie Besant, she gave a sigh of relief. Mrs. Besant was her chela for only about eighteen months, but she appraised her shrewdly. A few weeks before her death, Madame wrote to Judge, her representative in the United States, "Judge, she is a most wonderful woman, my right hand, my successor when I will be forced to leave you, my sole hope in England as you are my sole hope in America."

Madame understood her chela's limitations as well as her possibilities. She could laugh and joke about her Mahatmas, but she warned Judge never to let Annie hear any light or irreverent talk about occultism, or "the slightest exaggeration or deviation from fact." Annie would not understand. Madame continued, "It is only a few months that she studies occultism with me in the innermost group of the E.S., and yet she has passed far beyond all others. She is not psychic nor spiritual in the least—all intellect; yet she hears Master's voice when alone, sees his light and recognizes his voice. . . ."

Madame had emphasized, and deservedly, that Annie was "the soul of honour and uncompromisingly truthful." Her heart was "one single unbroken diamond, transparent . . . and filled to the brim with pure, unadulterated Theosophy and enthusiasm." So strong was this enthusiasm that, in spite of her excellent mind—"all intellect," she was to prove exceptionally suggestible. She not only believed whatever Madame told her, but

she could go away afterward and see lights and recognize voices just as Madame had told her she would.

Annie Besant's first psychic experience under Madame's influence occurred shortly after joining the Society. Attending a Labour Congress in Paris in July, she impulsively persuaded Madame to accompany her. They spent a night at Fontainebleau, sleeping in adjoining rooms. Suddenly awakened in the night, Annie Besant sat up in bed and was "startled to find the air of the room thrown into pulsing, electrical waves, and there appeared the radiant, astral figure of the Master, visible to my physical eyes."

Hypnotists usually find that the suggestibility of their subjects varies in direct proportion to the emotional rapport established. Whether it was hypnotism or some other influence, it is a measure of Annie Besant's contentment that, in spite of not being psychic or spiritual, within two months of joining the Society, she could believe that she had seen the Master. Annie Besant buried her head against her strange old guru's breast with a sigh of happiness. For the first time since she was torn away from her mother as a little girl, she found herself emotionally at peace.

Before the end of the summer, she had moved Madame and all the chelas to her establishment on Avenue Road. It recalled her pleasure in taking her mother under her own roof. She paid off the mortgage and gave the house to the Society. The chelas occupied themselves with publishing Madame's magazine, *Lucifer*, and editing a new edition of *The Secret Doctrine*. The manuscript made a pile three feet high! They answered Madame's letters, did her research work, studied her teachings. The E.S., Madame's Esoteric Section, was not sufficiently exclusive, and they organized an I.G.—Inner Group. Initials were

popular ; Madame was and still is H.P.B. The I.G. took double-eternal oaths of secrecy and obedience to H.P.B. Remodelling her house to provide a luxurious apartment for Madame, Annie Besant also built a secret, windowless room, roofed with blue glass, for the I.G. and their studies in occult art. Only the I.G. knew of its existence. Anyone might join the Society, but applicants for the inner circles were carefully tested. Except that they make use of hypnotism and suggestion, their studies and practices remain largely a mystery.

The chelas prized their esoteric isolation. Such outside contacts as they maintained were for the sake of propaganda. After a vegetarian dinner, they gathered in Madame's downstairs sitting-room where on certain evenings she held a salon, attended by mystics and celebrities from all over the world—Europe, America, Ireland, Russia, India, Japan. Yeats, the Irish poet and mystic, has described this salon as composed of devotees who came to listen and cranks who came to talk. One of them said to him, "She has become the most famous woman in the world by sitting in a big chair and permitting us to talk."

With the years, Madame had become increasingly gross. She wore a spotted red flannel dressing-gown, covered with grease spots, ink, cigarette holes. In spite of her liverish skin, criss-crossed by a thousand wrinkles, her wide mouth, her untidy habits, she kept her amazing power over people. During the At Homes, she dominated the room from a capacious arm-chair. On a card table always before her, she played a perpetual game of patience, dealing and shuffling and smoking perpetual cigarettes as an outlet for her nervousness, totting up the score on the green baize tabletop with a bit of chalk. Sometimes she interrupted her game to draw white pictures against the



1831 - 1891

HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY  
INSCRUTABLE AS ISIS IN HER MANY VEILS





*S. M. J. J. J. J. J.*

**THEOSOPHY IN SOCIETY.**

"How is your Karma?"

FROM THE CARTOONS OF LONDON'S GAY NINETIES

green, hermetic symbols, signs of the zodiac, strange diagrams. All the time she was following the conversation, often leading it with whimsical brilliance. She had cultivated mystics all over the world, long-haired ascetics in Russian caves, black voodoo conjurors in the swamps of Louisiana, Copt soothsayers in Egypt. She had dabbled in magic with Georges Sand ; disliked de Musset for his morbidity.

Mrs. Besant and the other chelas gazed in crystals, cast horoscopes, hypnotized each other, played with magnetic devices operated by the then mystifying new power, electricity. They experimented with henbane and hashish. They searched out recipes from the old alchemists. Yeats tells of their burning a flower to ashes, putting the ashes under glass and holding it in the moonlight so many nights, when the ghost of the flower was supposed to appear, hovering over the ashes. It was a bizarre atmosphere, dominated by a magnetic old woman, always ailing and dying and recovering through supernatural intervention.

Theosophical gatherings have always included a percentage of freakishly dressed, middle-aged women. It is amusing to find that some of them objected to Annie Besant's appearance, for she was still wearing her proletarian costume. They wondered among themselves whether her living at headquarters—her own house, by-the-way—might not alienate possible converts. Colonel Olcott, visiting London, has described her as she looked that first season with " her air of a woman of the toiling class, her thick, laced boots, her skirts somewhat shortened to keep them tidy when trudging through the muddy streets of the East End, her red neckerchief of the true Socialist tinge and her close-cut hair, in short, an Annie Militant. Some of our people in the upper class

in society were prepossessed against her, thinking that no great good could come from her importation of her fads and cranks into our respectable body."

Annie Militant was soon to change her costume to suit the new rôle. After her years of social exile, she was taken up by that fringe of society which leans to mysticism. For the fascination of the supernatural cuts across all grades of intellect and social status. It is an attribute like being musical or having red hair. She made her re-début at a luncheon given by Mrs. Cooper-Oakley in an Oxford Street restaurant, to be opened as a semi-philanthropy for working girls. Her militant tweeds offered a picturesque contrast to the floating pastel scarves and Burne-Jones effects of her new associates. After luncheon, Madame Blavatsky and Oscar Wilde shared the centre of the stage in a brilliant exchange of epigrams, Madame leaning back in a large wicker chair, smoking her eternal cigarettes. The other guests, Ladies and Honourables and a Baroness, gathered round, coffee cups in hand. Outside, *hoi polloi* flattened their noses against the window panes, attracted by the coronetted broughams at the curb and the strange sight of a lady smoking.

Mrs. Besant's boy and girl were now nineteen and twenty years old. Free to choose, they promptly left their father and came to her. To be thus vindicated by her children was gratifying. Mabel joined the chelas on Avenue Road. But Mrs. Besant was too deeply involved in her new work to have much time for the young people ; they were almost grown now and had their own interests. A few months later, her daughter married an Australian newspaperman and sailed away to the other side of the world. Her son set out on the long years of faithful routine which have made him a member of an eminent London firm of chartered accountants and a

Fellow and Director of several commissions and societies.

Her vivid relationships with her old world withered into unreality. Bradlaugh was very sick. It came to her as in a dream. Then she heard that he was dead. It was a fearful shock. He was gone and she had not even seen him during his last illness. She attended his funeral swathed in thick black crêpe. When the mourners handed a spade about, each one throwing a clod of earth into the grave, she was so overcome that she was unable to take it in her trembling hand. Among the little group of Indians standing bareheaded in the rain was one whom she was to know many years later, and who was to succeed her as the idol of the Indian people. He was a young law student named Gandhi.

Annie Besant had surrendered to her new cause with characteristic abandon. Declining to stand for re-election to the School Board, she said she had determined to devote her life to Theosophy. In an impatient note to the Fabians, she asked them to discontinue sending her notices. She resigned from the Secularist Society, parting with them too on bad terms because, after two years, they would not permit her to continue lecturing on Theosophy in their halls. She accused them of intolerance and of violating their own principle of free speech. With astonishing humility, she subordinated herself to her new guru's authority. Stead was puzzled: "Blavatsky became everything to Mrs. Besant," he wrote, "she was proud and glad to kneel at her feet and drink in her teachings as if they were the oracles of divine wisdom."

With incredible agility, throwing off her former personality like an empty shell, she reversed the trend of her entire life. Instead of deriding celibacy she embraced asceticism. In her latter years, Madame had insisted on

the utmost sexual austerity. Even married couples aspiring to follow the secret path must live as brother and sister. It is a doctrine strangely at variance with the Elizabethan raciness of Madame's personality.

The most dramatic evidence of Annie Besant's willingness to renounce all that had been precious in the old life was her repudiation of the principle of family limitation. Her pioneer work with Bradlaugh in defence of the Knowlton pamphlet stands out as the most valuable achievement of her life. It cost her most, for it cost her all the years of her little daughter's girlhood. Even this dearly-won victory she sacrificed upon the altars of her new faith. She withdrew her pamphlet from circulation. It had been selling steadily all these years. Refusing the publishers' liberal offers for the plates, she had them destroyed and wrote instead a pamphlet, *Theosophy and the Law of Population*. She explained that the practice of birth control was inconsistent with Theosophical ideals of man as a spiritual being.

The Theosophists had received her with honours. She was immediately appointed co-editor of *Lucifer* with Madame Blavatsky. Within six months, she was president of the Blavatsky lodge and a member of the Appellate Board of the Society. In the intimacy of the I.G., however, she humbly collaborated with the other chelas. She and Herbert Burrows prepared a glossary of the Sanskrit terms in common use by Theosophists. In the autumn, she wrote a pamphlet of thirty-one pages, *Why I Became a Theosophist*. She had only written a few magazine articles the previous year, and this was her one pamphlet for the year 1889.

There were two reasons for this unique pause. She was finding for the first time an adequate emotional fulfilment. Secondly, she was finding it necessary to make a

considerable mental readjustment. Fresh from her work in laboratories and reviewing and translating scientific works, she had acquired habits of rational thinking along empirical lines. With her gift for analysis and logical organization, she stood on the threshold of a subject which defied all such mental habits. It demanded faith, imagination, suggestibility. Even the fluent Annie Besant wrote no more that year.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH

1891-1894

ON the May morning in 1891 when H.P.B.'s spirit took leave of the tired old body, Annie Besant was far out at sea. She was returning from her initial trip to the United States where she had attended a Theosophical convention and met, for the first time, Madame's American representative, William Q. Judge. He was to be an important figure in her life for the next few years. Herbert Burrows hurried to Queenstown to meet her and gently break the news of their bereavement. Madame's associates were later to describe in detail their instant psychic awareness of their guru's death. But they prudently waited for finite confirmation of the news before acting upon it.

Olcott was in distant Australia. As co-Founder, he hoped that the way would at last be clear for him to monopolize Theosophical attention. But he was to find out that he did not really count. Madame Blavatsky had called herself Secretary of the Society and had flattered Olcott with the presidency. Her death therefore only meant filling the secretaryship. During the years of friction with Olcott, she had cleverly emasculated his position and left him down in Adyar holding a bag which, though it bore the imposing title of President, was almost empty. As Head of the Esoteric Section, Madame had controlled, pledged to unquestioning obedience to herself, all members of the Society of potential importance either for psychic or financial endowments. Madame's would-be

successors were at first content to leave the Colonel as the figurehead President. They were interested in the E.S.

Annie Besant was first on the spot. Her personal magnetism and her value to any cause as its public representative were additional advantages. Madame had left Annie her intaglio ring. It was a large green stone, flecked with veins of blood red, and engraved with the exotic symbols used by occultists through the ages : superimposed triangles within the circle of a serpent swallowing his tail and the Sanskrit characters for *SAT*—life. It was a gift, Madame had said, from her Indian guru. Annie Besant always wears it, and displays it prominently in her photographs. With the years, legends have gathered round it, and it is supposed to be endowed with extraordinary powers. Annie Besant also had a written Order from Madame : “I hereby appoint, in the name of the Master, Annie Besant Chief Secretary of the Inner Group of the Esoteric Section and Recorder of the Teachings.”

By virtue of seniority, Judge, the American, was in a much stronger position for the succession than Mrs. Besant. He had been a charter member way back in 1875 when the Society was formed in Madame's parlours on Irving Place. Letters from Madame, full of superlatives, appointed him her sole representative in America “in virtue of his character of a chela of thirteen years standing, and the trust and confidence reposed in him.” In another letter she declared that “the day W.Q.J. resigns, H.P.B. will be virtually dead for the Americans.” Taking the first boat after news of Madame's death, Judge cabled London, “Do nothing until I come.”

For a fortnight, everything was at a hushed and mourn-



ful standstill on Avenue Road. With Judge's arrival, things began to happen. Mrs. Besant found notes among her documents, scribbled in red or blue crayon on rice paper in a familiar script. They corresponded exactly to the messages from the Mahatmas formerly received by H.P.B. The chelas were vastly relieved that their guru's death had not closed their channel of communication with the supernatural world. The messages all endorsed Judge: "Judge's plan is right," "Judge leads right. Follow him and stick"—rather slangy for a Mahatma.

Annie Besant was deeply impressed by these messages and by Mr. Judge. In the race for succession she could have interpreted her Order from H.P.B., which was so loosely worded, as making her head of the E.S. in both Europe and America. She could have used her legacy of the magic ring as a symbol of succession. Very discreetly she refrained. Perhaps she remembered the unfortunate results of rising too rapidly in the past. In the end, she and Judge reached a happy compromise. They constituted themselves joint Outer Heads of the E.S.; the Inner Heads being the Mahatmas. This gave virtual control of the movement to Judge in America and to Annie Besant in England and on the Continent. It left the Colonel as before with his title of President and the meagre financial resources of the Indian membership. He was also allowed to assume a life tenure of his position as President-Founder.

For the next several years, the leading Theosophists played politics until they lost their bearings and staggered into a startling dénouement. It was partly due to their jockeying for favourable positions in anticipation of the death of Colonel Olcott. The Colonel, feeling no intimations of mortality, was busy scheming to consolidate

ower in his own hands and curb the menace of the E.S. It was to be a fight to a finish between Olcott and Judge. Annie Besant was to hold the scales of victory, but she would be spattered with gore from the conflict. The concessions which she felt compelled to make as emergencies developed, became still another psychological turning-point in her life.

It all started as a delightfully flattering situation, with both sides courting her. Before it was through, it had turned into an ordeal by fire which tested her to the uttermost and permanently shaped the direction of her life and character. Confidences were broken and secret papers published. Stirring over these files and records of forty years ago, they leave a mouldy odour of sordid politics ; no more sordid, however, than the magnitude of the opportunity made inevitable. Even the loftiest idealism has always been subject to the ambitions and jealousies of men and women. Defying all the checks and standards of ordinary life, Theosophy is peculiarly exposed. Annie Besant with the egocentric ambition of her genius had plunged blindly into a furnace.

From Madame's death in 1891 until the summer of 1894, the two Americans, Judge and Olcott, played a game of cut-throat politics for the advantage position, played it with the recklessness of mining camp poker. Each recognized the other as a formidable rival. Each sought to secure a two-thirds vote by an alliance with Annie Besant. Judge was a much cleverer man than Olcott and at first he held all the cards. Mrs. Besant had accepted him with her usual impulsiveness. The two carried things with a high-hand reminiscent of her early Freethought days. When two of Olcott's leading disciples wrote an article making veiled insinuations about the authenticity of the messages from the Mahatmas-via-

Judge, the two dictators of western Theosophy suspended them from the E.S. without a hearing.

Adyar was trying desperately to induce Mrs. Besant to visit India, even raising money towards the expenses of her trip. For two years Judge checkmated them. On one occasion, he induced Mrs. Besant to cancel her reservations at the last moment on the score of ill health, and instead of sailing for India, to cross the Atlantic for another tour of the United States. The story is that he cabled her peremptorily not to go, and forwarded a warning from the Mahatmas that there was a plot to poison her and put her out of the way. After consulting with Mrs. Besant, he brought charges of immorality against the Colonel, involving a wealthy and eccentric spinster Theosophist. He gave the Colonel his choice of resigning by cable or standing trial. The Colonel, who was by this time quite an old man, was so intimidated that for a few weeks he actually resigned his presidency.

In the meantime, Mrs. Besant had been busy electioneering. Even into the brief folders on *What is Theosophy?* which were distributed free to all inquirers she found space for glowing tributes to Judge. At the annual convention, following close on Olcott's enforced resignation, Judge was swept into the presidency on the wings of one of her eloquent nominating speeches. All this time he was continuing to receive messages from the Mahatmas. The important chelas found notes in red and blue crayon, endorsing Judge's plans on the margins of their letters. The messages even gave warning that Olcott would probably accuse Judge of having forged them, as in the following note received by Colonel Olcott. Written in red pencil, it had been slipped into the sealed envelope of a letter addressed to him.

Judge is not the  
forgetter you think  
and did not write  
"Annie" My seal  
is with me and he  
has not seen it but  
would like to. Both  
are doing right each  
in his own field. Yes  
I have been training  
him and can use  
him when he does not  
know, but he is so  
new it fades but  
often as it may  
in this letter from  
an enthusiast  
~~it for you~~  
Know Me w'

Olcott was almost out of the game. He had been allowed to withdraw his resignation and resume the presidency. But it was an empty title. Suddenly, whimsically, he had a marvellous streak of luck, personified in the person of a learned Brahmin, G. N. Chakravarti. It was 1893, the year of the Chicago World's Fair. The Indian Theosophists sent Chakravarti as their representative to the World Parliament of Religions held at the Fair. A professor of mathematics in an Indian university, he had been educated in England and admitted to the English bar. With his western education he combined the suavity and mystery of the East. He was also skilled in hypnotism. He spent several months in England en route as a guest of the household on Avenue Road. In September, Mrs. Besant accompanied him to Chicago. Together they represented Theosophy and made a brilliant impression.

Annie Besant had by this time discarded her proletarian costume and adopted the robes of asceticism. She draped herself in the graceful folds of white *saris* which blended with the silver of her hair and softened the contours of her grave, sweet face. Her brown eyes burning as intensely as ever, she made an appealing figure on the Parliament platform, surrounded by pundits and pontiffs from every corner of the world. She adopted not only the costume but the customs of the East. While travelling, she carried her own table utensils and china and rigidly followed the practices of occultism at whatever cost or inconvenience.

On this, Mrs. Besant's third visit to the United States in two years, Judge discovered that an ominous change had come over their harmony. Mrs. Besant gave him and his plans only perfunctory attention. Her opportunity to study magic and philosophy as the personal pupil of a great eastern guru absorbed her.

Judge could see that the eastern guru was profoundly

impressed by this beautiful and accomplished western woman, so interested and so well informed. Chakravarti had become Annie Besant's especial guardian. He directed her studies. He spread before her the glories of India's golden age, the pride of blood and position of India's Brahmin caste as the most aristocratic lineage in the world. He whispered secrets of Hindu ascetics and yogis and gave her tantalizing glimpses of his own occult powers. He magnetized her with secret charms in order to increase her receptivity to desirable forces. At night, he slept on the floor outside her door in order to protect her from unfavourable occult influences. With all his profound learning and his indubitably high rank in the occult hierarchy, he maintained an attitude of punctilious deference and admiration.

Judge watched the new intimacy uneasily. He reminded Annie of the rules governing the relationship of probationers to their teachers. Chakravarti, although a Theosophist, had never joined the E.S. He was, in a way, the head of a cult of his own. The implication was that he had his own direct means of communication with the Masters. Judge reminded Annie Besant that the relationship between herself and her Brahmin guru was arousing comment and was in violation of certain rules of the E.S. But Chakravarti's psychic powers did more than dazzle Annie Besant ; they filled her with an intoxicating hope. Just as Madame had acquired miraculous powers from her Thibetan Mahatmas, she too might plumb the mysteries of occultism with the aid of this marvellous Brahmin. She suspected that he might be one of the Mahatmas in disguise. If not, he was at least in the final stages of reincarnation—a soul on the threshold of perfection.

Judge warned her a second time, but Judge was no match for Chakravarti. Nothing he could say would

prevent Annie from going to India that winter and being subjected to sinister influences. With prophetic forebodings, he stood on the dock waving his handkerchief as Annie and her Brahmin guru set sail for England. Chakravarti returned to India early in October and was followed a week later by Annie Besant and the Countess Wachtmeister. Judge and his warnings against the Colonel were all forgotten.

At Adyar Annie Besant fingered over the relics of Madame Blavatsky with a rush of nostalgia ; the tea-cups and vases and paintings Madame had materialized ; the mass of Mahatma letters on the strange rice-paper ; she could feel the magnetic Russian woman standing beside her repeating her benediction. The Adyar chelas, young English University men, although charming to her, had a sinister attitude toward her dear friend William Q. Judge. When she reached Allahabad, the home of her revered guru, she received a staggering blow. He laid before her evidence to show that Judge had written all the Mahatma letters received since Madame's death. On Judge's arrival in London, he, as the oldest chela, had taken charge of Madame's things. The theory was that he had helped himself to her secret hoard of rice-paper as well as to other stage properties. In consternation Annie Besant listened to a maze of charges. The sub-plots and counter-plots were as elaborate and confusing as a mystery thriller. They involved Madame's jewellery ; copies of her magic ring ; a little brass cryptogram of the letter M, the initial of the Mahatma Morya ; suspicious circumstances connected with the posting and receipt of the Mahatma letters, and similar clues.

Her veneration for her Brahmin guru was such that Annie Besant found it flattering to be consulted by him in regard to Judge. Yet it placed her in a peculiarly

embarrassing position. Her solemn pledge, given to H.P.B., bound her not to listen to unproved evil concerning another E.S. member. Chakravarti was not even a member of the E.S. Her loyalty to Judge should take precedence over anything he, as an outsider, could say. And yet, surely Chakravarti was a privileged being to whom even the E.S. rules did not apply. The stream of consciousness in such a conflict is as chaotic and confusing as the panic of a mob evacuating a city. Annie Besant struggled passionately.

She determined to test her months of meditation and Yoga exercises. Encouraged by her guru, she made a direct appeal to the Master for guidance, telling him that she felt some doubt as to Judge's integrity in regard to messages supposed to be from the Mahatmas. Just as when she was Madame's chela, she was again granted the reassurance of seeing the Master. She wrote, "He appeared to me as I had so often before seen Him, clearly, unmistakably and I then learned from Him directly that the messages were not done by Him and that they were done by Mr. Judge . . . and I was bidden to wash away the stains on the Theosophical Society. 'Take up the heavy Karma of the Society. Your strength was given you for this.' How could I who believed in Him disobey?"

With Colonel Olcott nearing seventy, this attack on Judge neatly coincided with Mrs. Besant's interests. Judge was the logical successor. With Judge eliminated, her own considerable abilities stood a better chance of early recognition. Mrs. Besant was far too honourable to permit herself to scheme to get Judge out of her way. But when the evidence against him was presented with such convincing dignity her unacknowledged wishes supplied an added incentive that was irresistible. It was only a few



months since her fervid eulogies had swept Judge into the temporary presidency of the Society. Her vision of the Master, however, put an end to her compunctions. Un-speakably grieved, she acquiesced in the suspicions against Judge as precipitately as she had previously accepted the accusations against Olcott. Indeed, she was so outraged that, while staying at Chakravarti's home, she wrote, on behalf of the Society, the letter formulating the charges. Accusing Judge of "forging the names and handwritings of the Masters" and misusing them for his own advantage, she demanded an investigation. The very next day the Colonel forwarded her letter to Judge in America. With it he enclosed, in ironic imitation of Judge's earlier letter to him, an ultimatum giving Judge the choice of resigning by cable or standing trial. Whatever the outcome, it was specified that the entire proceedings must be made public. When, a month later, the letter reached Judge, he cabled a sweeping denial. Reassured by her guru and by additional messages from the Mahatmas, Annie Besant met the situation aggressively. She volunteered to serve as prosecutor in the case against her former colleague. Chakravarti solemnly placed all the papers in her hands and she sailed back to England.

The scene which followed might have been adapted from *Alice in Wonderland*. The inquiry was to be held in London that summer of 1894 with Annie Besant as the Red Queen. After days and nights of wrangling, the Judicial committee solemnly announced that there would be no trial. Judge, himself a lawyer, had insisted that the committee could not inquire into the charges since they involved passing on the question of whether or not the Masters existed. The Theosophical Society makes a great point of having no dogmas. While in practice they accept certain doctrines, they have no formal articles of belief.

The Judicial committee therefore upheld Judge, deciding that it would be impossible to make an official pronouncement on the existence of the Masters. An inquiry into the authenticity of Judge's messages would necessitate such a pronouncement. Since such a pronouncement could not . . . etc., around and around in a circle.

Not only was the trial called off, but nothing was to be done about Mr. Judge, who would remain in statu quo. In other words, it was all to be hushed up. The Judicial committee used the words themselves. Mr. Judge has many devoted defenders, especially in this country, but the cynical interpretation of this sudden change of front was that Judge had threatened to open up old Adyar scandals, such as that of the black lacquer shrine. Someone remembered that he was the very chela who had burned the shrine. The idealistic disciples from the Universities were outraged. If there were to be no trial, the Judicial committee must fulfil the conditions of its appointment and publish the minutes which led to its decision. Even gentle Herbert Burrows wrote an ultimatum to the London press : " A reply we must have or I leave the Society."

It was a critical moment. Eloquently, Annie Besant tried to persuade everyone that it would be inadvisable to publish the proceedings. At last it came out that she herself had burned the papers—Mahatma messages and all ! It was as poor strategy as burning the shrine. Mrs. Besant did not know that one of the Adyar chelas, Mr. Old, editor of *The Theosophist*, had taken the precaution to copy all the papers before they were handed over to her. Old ingenuously offered his copies to the committee which still refused to publish them. Mr. Old considered this bad faith. Resigning from the committee, he undertook to fulfil the Judicial committee's pledge. He gave

the papers to a clever journalist on the *Westminster Gazette*. They were published at great length with mocking comments under the ironic title, "Isis Very Much Unveiled." For three weeks they continued to appear. Many prominent members of the Society resigned.

Thunder roared and lightning flashed within the Society. Annie Besant issued statements drawing fine distinctions between physical and psychical forgery. She did not charge Mr. Judge with this . . . but with that. . . . It reached the nicety of the old argument as to how many angels could balance on the point of a needle. Annie Besant and Judge made a gesture of coming before the curtain holding hands. Behind the scenes, their joint office of Outer Heads of the E.S. was abolished. It amounted to the same thing, however, as Judge kept the American section and Annie Besant controlled the European. They all hurried away from London; Judge to America, Olcott to India. Armed with a document from the Colonel, conferring upon her full presidential powers, Annie Besant rushed off to Australia. Under her emergency powers, she organized numerous lodges, some of them, it has been charged, existing chiefly on paper. In December, returning to Adyar, she announced that she had behind her the votes of an entire continent, the newly-formed Australian section to join with those of Europe and India in demanding Mr. Judge's resignation. It made three sections against one. Before the annual conference could meet, the American section of about 6,000 members, voting their confidence in Judge, had seceded.

Judge's American triumph was short-lived. He was only forty-four years old, but he died within the year of his secession. The wear and tear had been too much. It was a costly experience all around. The Society suffered

in loss of prestige. It had the effect of weeding out the more normal element in the membership. Only those of a fanatical stripe could stand such extravaganza. Through America's secession, the Society lost not only two-thirds of the world membership of the E.S., but it undermined its most promising future field with material for endless splits and dissensions.

For Annie Besant personally, the fiasco was catastrophic. With the brutality of a hold-up, the emergencies of this scandal had forced her to stand and deliver. In spite of all the libels and abuse of her career, Annie Besant had deservedly won a reputation for courage and honesty. Priding herself on these qualities, she cherished the confidence of her thousands of followers. Her dearly-paid-for family limitation pamphlet she had given up without a murmur. But any tampering with her conventional standards of honour was an agonizing test. Yet what was the alternative? She was publicly committed to this cause. Her pride could not endure the ridicule that would greet another change of faith.

William Butler Yeats, poet and mystic, has described the lure of mysticism in a phrase: "One has had a vision; one wants to have another; that is all." It is a perfect description of what had happened to Annie Besant. She was unprepared for such a readjustment of standards as was suddenly demanded. The process had been incredibly painful. For the only time in her life, her photographs show her looking wan and exhausted. (See p. 233.) Shrewd old Madame Blavatsky had read her aright when she wrote to Judge that Annie was the soul of honour and uncompromisingly truthful. Her warning never to shake Annie's confidence by the slightest exaggeration or deviation from fact assumed a sinister significance.

Annie Besant's unconscious confession of the conflict which was rending her is to be found in her constant reiteration of her own and her colleagues' passionate devotion to Truth. She harped on the sanctity of truth in the titles of numerous pamphlets occasioned by the Judge case : *Truth before and in all things ; Occultism and Truth ; " There is no religion higher than the truth."* In the volume of *Autobiography* which she now published she gave further evidence of her conflict.

She had reached the end of an epoch in her life. Ten years earlier, during that restless period before joining the Socialists, she had written her *Autobiographical Sketches*, bringing them down to 1879 when she lost her daughter and met Dr. Aveling. She now re-wrote this material, carrying it down to the death of Madame Blavatsky. It is interesting to compare the two accounts of her life. Only a decade apart, they present totally different points of view. She wrote the first as one of England's leading materialists. Ten years later she was writing from the outposts of the anti-materialists. In length the two accounts are almost identical, about 70,000 words. She has added new material and made many cuts. She took out incidents, the small homely details which made the first a more readable narrative than the second. She substituted interpretations of her early life. Most of her interpolations bear on the point she was so anxious to establish with herself—her horror of any shadow of falsehood or untruth. In the earlier *Sketches*, she had written with normal emphasis. Her exaggerated insistence in the latter account is the more significant by contrast.

In enumerating her mother's sterling qualities in the *Sketches*, she made the simple statement that Mrs. Wood was keenly sensitive on every question of honour.

In her later edition, she elaborated this phrase into an essay, beginning : " To her the lightest breath of dishonour was to be avoided at any cost of pain, and she wrought into me, her only daughter, that same proud and passionate horror at any taint of shame or merited disgrace . . ." and so on for two pages. The reiteration comes to have the tragic quality of a smothered cry of distress, under goading of intolerable emotion.

The Judge case had demanded even more than her turning against Judge and playing into the hands of his opponents. By sinister coincidence, she had made her most spectacular public act of allegiance to Theosophy in connection with the very Mahatma messages which were now so painfully discredited. Two years after her conversion by Madame Blavatsky, the Secularists had declined to continue her on their winter programme because she insisted on talking Theosophy. It was shortly before the opening of the attack on Judge, while she was still completely under his influence. It was arranged that she should deliver a farewell speech to the Secularists. The hall was crowded with hundreds who had loved her for years and were bitterly grieved over her defection to what seemed to them a fantastic futility. She was roused to a high emotional pitch ; crusading enthusiasm for her new vision of the truth, resentment at being dropped by her old audiences, associations of all the years she had stood upon Secularist platforms. That night she made the most moving speech of her life. Forty years later, men and women grew misty-eyed and choky as they described the magic spell that she cast over them. With effortless skill she led them, step by step, to her powerful peroration.

" You have known me in this hall for sixteen and a half years. You have never known me to lie to you. My worst

public enemy through the whole of my life never cast a slur upon my integrity. Everything else they have sullied, but my truth never ; and I tell you that since Madame Blavatsky left, I have had letters in the same writing, and from the same person (i.e., from a Mahatma). Unless you think that dead persons write—and I do not think so—that is rather a curious fact against the whole challenge of fraud. I do not ask you to believe me, but I tell you this on that faith of a record that has never yet been sullied by a conscious lie. . . . It may be said, ‘ What evidence have you beside hers ? ’ (H.P.B.’s statement). My own knowledge. For some time all the evidence I had of the existence of her Teachers and the existence of those so-called ‘ abnormal powers ’ was second-hand, gained through her. It is not so now ; and it has not been so for many months ; unless every sense can be at the same time deceived, unless a person can be at the same moment sane and insane, I have exactly the same certainty for the truth of those statements as I have for the fact that you are here. Of course you may be all delusions invented by myself and manufactured by my own brain. I refuse—merely because ignorant people shout fraud and trickery—to be false to all the knowledge of my intellect, the perceptions of my senses and my reasoning faculties as well.” (Speech delivered in St. James Hall, August 30, 1891.)

It was ironical that the wheel of fate should lay it upon her out of all the Society to impugn the authenticity of these letters on which she had staked her faith to the world at large. Without too definitely saying so, she deliberately gave the impression that the Mahatmas had communicated with her directly : her knowledge, she said, was no longer second-hand, and “ I have had letters in the same writing.” She strengthened this impression

by statements to the press and in her articles for *Lucifer*. It would have been an insult to her integrity to suspect that she based these emphatic statements on hearsay or on any source other than immediate personal knowledge. Her statement not only caused a brief furore in the outside world, but enormously increased her prestige in the E.S. Such distinctions conferred by the Mahatmas raised her to an eminence approaching that of H.P.B.

Her later admissions, after she had turned against Judge, as to the way those red and blue chalked messages were shuffled in among her papers are a sad anti-climax. She made no general public retraction of mis-statements in her speech to the Secularists. Her only acknowledgment was in a speech to the Theosophists in 1894 which received no general publicity : " When I publicly said that I had received after H.P.B.'s death, letters in the writing H. P. Blavatsky had been accused of forging, I referred to letters given to me by Mr. Judge, and, as they were in the well-known script, I never dreamed of challenging their source. I know now that they were not written or precipitated by the Master, and also that they were done by Mr. Judge, but I also believe that the gist of these messages was psychically received, and that Mr. Judge's error lay in giving them to me in a script written by himself and not saying that he had done so. I feel bound to refer to these letters thus explicitly because, having been myself mistaken, I in turn misled the public."

The awkward fact was that she had only those second-hand Judge messages on which to base her sweeping statements. But she had intensely wanted to believe in them, and for her temperament, that made all the difference. Her speech to the Secularists was an entering wedge for the insidious demands which occultism was to make upon her. It was not by such casuistry that she had in



the past built up the reputation to which she so confidently appealed.

In spite of a natural reticence on the subject, Theosophical literature contains frequent admissions that almost any expedient to protect the Society is considered ethical. It is the old principle that the end justifies the means. An example is to be found in one of Madame Blavatsky's impulsive letters dated February 16, 1886. She was repudiating some scandalous charges, later proven true, against one of her Hindu chelas. She wrote : (the italics are Madame's) "*And you know that had I even believed in my heart that he was guilty, I would screen him, a chela, one connected with the Masters—with my own body, not for his own sake, for I would have done everything secretly and underhand to rid the Society of such a hypocritical monster—but I would have cut off my tongue before saying it or confessing it to anyone. It would have been suicidal for the Society and myself, and have thrown a new slur on the Masters.*"

It was perhaps Annie Besant's lack of sense of humour which made the necessity to compromise so damaging to her. The psycho-analyst might explain it in terms of defence mechanisms and feelings of insecurity. So swift was the warping process that, by the time of the Judge case, she was ready to turn overnight against the man who bore H.P.B.'s highest credentials and with whom she had been intimately associated in the sacred pledges of the E.S. She did not hesitate to assume his prosecution, to burn the papers in the case, to hurry off to Australia to play politics against him.

From now on, Annie Besant appeared with a second personality as dissociated from the Annie Besant of the old Hall of Science days as Morton Prince's case of Miss Beauchamp and Sally.

## SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH 223

Whatever her course through the years, Annie Besant has always been able to justify it to herself. When she has been in the wrong, it has never been wilfully or maliciously. She is of a subtler and more difficult type, the self-deceived. Having found reality too stark and raw, she could not risk facing it. Secretly uncomfortable about what was happening to her old standards, she could only reassure herself by long asseverations of her integrity, as in a panegyric to Truth of several pages toward the close of her *Autobiography* :

“ That one loyalty to Truth I must keep stainless ; whatever friendships fail me or human ties be broken. She may lead me into the wilderness, yet I must follow her ; she may strip me of all I love, yet I must pursue her ; though she slay me, yet will I trust in her ; and I ask no other epitaph on my tomb but :

‘ SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH.’ ”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ISIS VERY MUCH UNVEILED

1893-1894

THE Judge trial brutally deflated public interest in Theosophy. Since H.P.B.'s death, Annie Besant as head of the movement had enjoyed a pleasant and picturesque popularity. The daily press printed column-long accounts of her Queen's Hall speeches. They might jeer, but their very jeers reminded the world of her and of her cause. A beautiful woman, they were glad to use her picture now and again. Between speeches there were interviews, articles, cartoons. *Saint Stephen's Review*, a popular weekly, appeared with a double page cartoon in colours which traced the history of "How to Become a Mahatma." Her old friend Stead, smothering his aversion to Theosophy, gave her loyal publicity in his various journals.

Her crowning accolade, although sharp-edged, was a leading article in *The Nineteenth-Century Magazine* for September, 1894, written by none other than William Ewart Gladstone, very recently Prime Minister of England. Entitled "True and False Conceptions of the Atonement," it was a careful review of her *Autobiography*. Regardless of what he said, the recognition involved was in itself a dazzling tribute. This judgment of Annie Besant, written in the middle-nineties by the most illustrious survivor of the dying century, gains interest in that he had stood in the advance guard of respectable Liberalism. His most flattering tribute—and it is an important



1891

HOW TO BECOME A MAHATMA.

CARTOON FROM SAINT STEPHEN'S REVIEW.

1. SHE MARRIES A VICAR.
2. STANDING BESIDE BRADLAUGH, PREACHING FAMILY LIMITATION.
3. SOCIALISM IN A SHOWER OF VEGETABLES.
4. SHE BECOMES A HINDU.
5. A MAHATMA WHISPERS IN HER EAR.



**"WHEN AUGUR MEETS AUGUR"—**

"It is rather a squalid fight between the augurs that the curtain has been raised upon; but it has got to be fought out now before the public, and it is in vain to try to ring the curtain down again."

1894

*Cartoon from "Isis Very much Unveiled" published by The Westminster Gazette.*

one in view of the progressive demands which Theosophy has made upon her—was to reiterate her sincerity. Whether or not Mrs. Besant has been able to maintain her inward sense of sincerity through these latter years must be a matter of individual opinion. It is reassuring that this critical Victorian, writing three years after her conversion to Theosophy, reaffirmed his belief in her honesty. But it was at the expense of her intellectual pretensions.

The article is quaintly dated by Mr. Gladstone's Victorian standards. The characteristic which gave him deepest concern was her lack of a sense of sin : " In all her different phases of thought, that place in her mind where the sense of sin should be appears to have remained all through the shifting scenes of her mental history an absolute blank. Without this sense, it is obvious that her Evangelism and her High Churchism were alike built upon the sand and that, in strictness, she never quitted what she had never in its integrity possessed." Again granting her entire sincerity, he suggested that it was her egregious self-confidence which led her astray.

He was appropriately intolerant of her defence of the family limitation pamphlets and characterized her temperate account of that episode as bordering on the loathsome. He showed himself at once sympathetic and playful in his opening paragraphs : " This volume [the *Autobiography*] presents to us an object of considerable interest. It inspires sympathy with the writer not only as a person highly gifted, but as a seeker after truth. The book is a spiritual itinerary and shows with how much at least of intellectual ease, and what unquestioning assumption of being right vast spaces of mental travelling may be performed. The stages are indeed glaringly in contrast with one another ; yet their violent contrarities do not

seem at any period to suggest to the writer so much as a doubt whether the mind which so continually changes its attitude and colour can after all be very trustworthy. This uncomfortable suggestion is never permitted to intrude ; and the absolute self-complacency of the authoress bears her on through tracts of air buoyant and copious enough to carry the Dircean swan. Mrs. Besant passes from her earliest to her latest stage of thought as lightly as the swallow skims the surface of the lawn, and with just as little effort to ascertain what lies beneath it."

Mr. Gladstone's thoughtful syllogisms had barely disappeared from the news stands when the *Westminster Gazette* began publication of *Isis Very Much Unveiled* and all England laughed. Theosophists were reclassified by the man in the street ; those who were not dishonest were gullible fools. Annie Besant drew especially severe criticism ; with her scientific training, how could she surrender to the dubious devices of occultism ?

Annie Besant never faltered under abuse. But ridicule was more than she could bear. In vain she had made humiliating compromises to avoid a public exposure of those Mahatma messages on which she had staked her faith. Day after day the inner secrets of Theosophical politics were satirized in a penny paper for all the world to read. *Isis Very Much Unveiled* smote her quivering pride like the flagellation of raw sores. She sought desperately for an escape and found it in martyrdom. Once again thwarted in her pursuit of happiness, she would make an asset of her unhappiness. Under the brunt of past libels, she had sometimes fallen back on a self-pitying martyrdom in *The National Reformer*. From now on, however, her emphasis on persecution became somewhat pathological.

Once more her *Autobiography* is the clue to her state

of mind. Her *Sketches* of ten years earlier had maintained a normal tone. In the *Autobiography* of 1894, however, self-sacrifice was verging on an obsession. Second only to her interpolations about the importance of truth and honour rang the new note of martyrdom. She wove it back into her childhood. She inserted an account of her little girl daydreams in the later volume ; of being an early Christian, flung to the lions, stretched upon a rack, burned at the stake. " I passionately regretted that I was born so late when no suffering for religion was practicable." Such thoughts are strange and morbid fancies for a wholesome child of eight. Their omission from the more spontaneous first volume suggests that they were an unconsciously inspired after-thought.

Annie Besant was now forty-seven years old. Her career had been a succession of spectacular achievements. Far from being exhausted by twenty breathless years, they had only served to whet her appetite. Her capacity and effectiveness were at their zenith, with the exception of this strange delusion of persecution, a speck of menace on her horizon like a cloud no bigger than a hand. Chafing against the bitter cynicism of *Isis Very Much Unveiled* and the slump following the Judge trial, she turned for contrast to enchanting memories of India. For her, India had been a land of dreams come true, a reincarnation into another world. She had been received with an acclaim surpassing all anticipations. Annie Besant was a beautiful woman with all the earmarks of the *pukka Memsahib*. No one is more shrewd in appraising the status of a western visitor than the Indian, schooled by generations of English administrators. Mrs. Besant spoke with the orthodox accent of the English upper class. Beneath her graciousness, Indians recognized the proper assurance and hauteur. When she praised their



traditions, their culture, their temperament in extravagant terms, they could scarcely believe their ears.

It was not a pose. She saw India through a glamorous mist, created by her Brahmin guru. With characteristic emotional abandon, she was quite sincere in declaring herself a Hindu by spiritual kinship. When she adopted the Hindu name Annabai, her audiences were charmed. When she showed herself familiar with their history and their heroic traditions, they were captivated. She reminded them that they were the earliest of the Aryan people and the firstborn of the mightiest of races, that India was old before Egypt was born ! India, she told them, had been the cradle of every religion. The roots of every philosophy—Egyptian, Greek, European could be traced back to its soil. Annie Besant personified everything which Indian men would most abhor in their own women. She had left her husband—an unpardonable sin. She went about in public, speaking to vast, mixed audiences, trespassing on man's most sacred prerogatives. Because she was white and beautiful and a marvellous orator, they vied with each other to do her honour.

For five months she remained in India, travelling 6,000 miles and delivering 120 public addresses. Her tour was a royal progress. Anglo-India was annoyed by her breach of their own caste. Their press diverted and scandalized them with stories of her goings-on. She had become a Hindu and bathed in the sacred and very dirty river Ganges at Benares. On the steamer, for fear of losing caste, she refused to eat with her white fellow passengers, but dined alone in her stateroom. Some of the stories were absurd, others true.

The superciliousness of Anglo-India was more than offset by the idolatrous adulation of the Indians. With processions of turbanned *vakils* and *zamindars*, priests

and nautch girls, to the beating of tom-toms and blowing of conch shells, they came down the dusty yellow roads to meet her. They carried her into their cities in bright yellow palanquins, badge of the highest honour. They garlanded her with marigold and sprinkled her with sandalwood and rosewater. Temple elephants in gold and silver trappings gave her the royal salaam. Brahmin priests invited her to speak in the twilight of their ancient temples. They took her into their shrines and into the presence of holy ascetics. Maharanees sent messages begging her to come and see them behind their heavy curtains. When she came, they loaded her with garlands of roses and rare Kashmir shawls. Maharajahs opened their Durbar palaces and served as chairmen of her meetings. They presented addresses phrased in the flowery hyperbole of the Orient, enclosed in caskets of ivory and sandalwood. She was hailed as the goddess of Ind', as the reincarnation of Sarasvati, goddess of wisdom.

The story spread that, in a former life, she had been a Hindu pundit. After enduring a period of exile in the West, she was now returning to bring to her motherland whatever was of value in occidental civilization. She came to believe the story, and after her return to England, yearned for the East. The winds and fogs of London chilled her. The reserve to which she had been born and bred seemed icy and forbidding.

Her personal ties with England were snapping one by one. Her son and daughter had married and established homes of their own. Her husband's brother had been knighted, Sir Walter Besant, and also her own brother, Sir Henry Wood. Their paths never crossed. Bradlaugh and H.P.B., the man and woman who had meant most in her life, were dead. Some of her closest friends had been alienated by the Judge scandal.

Her heart turned back longingly to India. All the magical lure of the East summoned her—the exotic pageantry ; that strange, oriental fragrance of spices and perfume and decay ; the golden sunshine ; the turquoise sky ; the voluptuous pleasure of the Hindus' idolatrous appreciation. And then there was her Brahmin guru. She would go out to India and begin life over again as Annabai. In a glow of anticipation, Annie Besant sailed away into the glamour and mystery of the East.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SHANTI KUNJA—GROVE OF PEACE

1894

FOR forty years, half of her life, Annie Besant has counted herself a Hindu by adoption. Her two main contributions to India have been her work for education and, later, a brilliant interlude of political leadership. Sooner or later, she always becomes involved in political and social reform, but on her arrival in India, she announced that she would devote herself to educational work.

She outlined her ideals in an early lecture. There were, she said, three main functions in public life : first and greatest, the thinker ; second, the teacher ; third and far lower, the man of action, the politician. Between the lines there lingers a pervasive sense of the personality of that suave Brahmin thinker, G. N. Chakravarti, whose ideas she echoed with eloquent skill. With her ready emotional response, she had found in him her thinker, and had identified herself as the teacher.

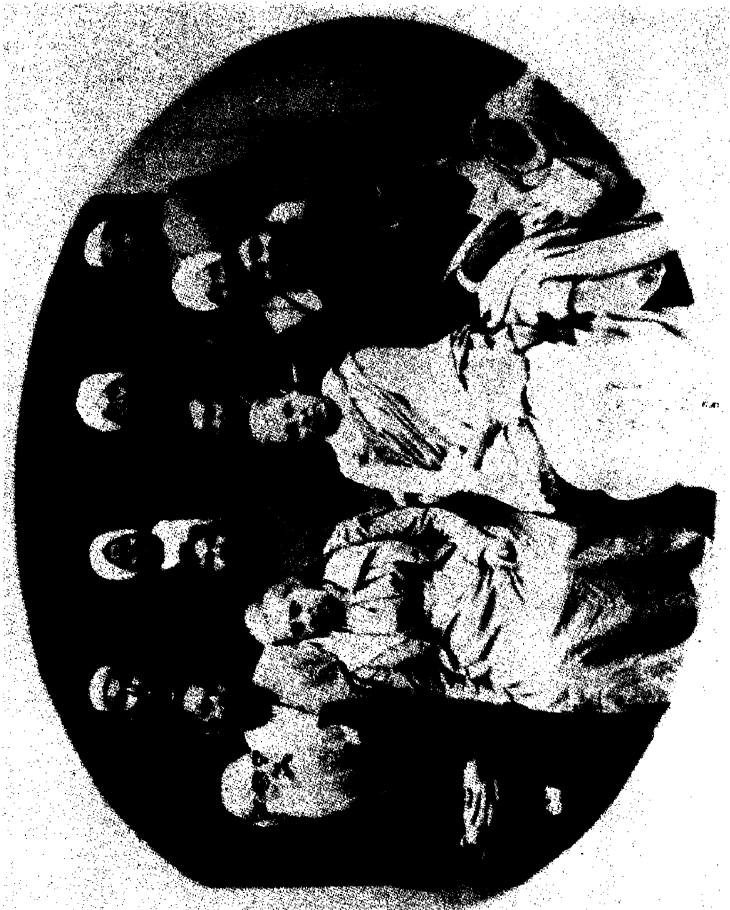
Annie Besant established herself in Benares, the holiest city in India. Her guru lived in nearby Allahabad. She had put 1,600 miles between herself and Adyar. Colonel Olcott had welcomed her warmly, but she did not like his hearty, crude Americanism. Shanti Kunja, Sanskrit for Grove of Peace, was the poetic name that she gave her new Hindu home. It was to prove inappropriate. Her life in India has been if anything less peaceful than her earlier career in England. Annie Besant is a stormy petrel.

Ganesh with his pot belly and elephant head smiled down from his niche over the entrance gate of her compound. He is the god of wisdom and good luck, and one of the most popular deities in the Hindu pantheon ; but he infuriated the missionaries, who called Mrs. Besant idolator. She furnished her bungalow in Hindu fashion with rugs, cushions, *charpoys* instead of western furniture. At meal times, cross-legged on the floor in her white *sari*, using her fingers instead of fork and spoon, she ate her Indian food, curries and *chapatis* from green leaves or from deep-rimmed plates of shining brass. The floor was sanded in gay patterns with coloured sands. She opened a Theosophical reading room, library and bookstore and organized her own publishing company.

Her educational work began modestly with four classes in a house on her compound. Within a year, she had interested the Maharajah of Benares who gave her an ancient summer palace of his father's and a large tract of land in the residential section of the city. She made the most of the dramatic setting. After the heat of the day, the school assembled on the low roof of the old palace for exercises. The terra cotta walls of the bungalows clustering about the compound glowed in the evening light, a luminous setting for the virginal whiteness of the school's temple to Sarasvati, goddess of wisdom. The students sat cross-legged on carpets spread across the roof. The mass of turbans, green, orange, crimson, swayed like flowers in a breeze as the students bent forward to salaam before their beloved Annabai advancing toward them, escorted by H.H. the Maharajah of Benares. Barefooted, in her white sari, she was a figure of majestic simplicity, contrasting with the exotic pomp of the Maharajah in his brocaded coat of peacock blues and greens, his dazzling white turban, and his strings of emeralds and diamonds.



SHANTI KUNJA—GROVE OF PEACE  
ANNIE BESANT ON THE STEPS OF HER BUNGALOW IN BENARES



1894

WITH HER NEW COLLEAGUES IN THEOSOPHY.  
FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: COLONEL OLCOTT, COUNTESS WACHMEISTER,  
ANNIE BESANT, UPENDRANATH BASU.

They seated themselves in throne-like chairs upon a dais at one end of the terraced roof. Beyond them a solitary palm, green and slim, pierced the twilight against the sapphire blue of the evening sky. The liturgy was borrowed from Hinduism, the prayers and *mantras* familiar to the students at their mothers' knees. The Maharajah awarded scholarships and prizes. Annabai in her rich golden voice talked to them of honour and spirituality and the glories of India's past. All their lives, these students remembered with profound emotion her talks on the roof.

Her choice of educational work as a major interest was most practical. Illiteracy and poverty are to-day the gravest problems confronting Indian Nationalists. Progress is discouragingly slow in a population which is 92 per cent. illiterate. The British educational system in India is modelled upon the outlines laid down by Lord Macaulay a century ago. It was frankly adapted to the needs of the British who required a large force of clerks and petty supervisors to administer the wheels of government for a population of 320 millions. Younger sons of English families have occupied the higher paid positions. They needed competent secretaries and subordinates. The system provided a small white collar group educated through the B.A. degree. It made no effort to reach the masses and has left India with one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world.

In an India dominated by English customs and English prestige, Annie Besant founded the Central Hindu College. She reached the heart of orthodoxy by requiring instruction in the Hindu religion in all her schools, just as Christianity was taught in all the missionary schools. English educated boys must study Sanskrit and vice versa. With all her eloquence she revived the heroic legends of



Hindu history, and made her lectures into text-books. She wrote a Hindu catechism. Indians pay grateful tribute to the Central Hindu College as a pioneer. It interpreted their own culture to the generation of men who, to-day in their prime, are attempting to reassert Indian Nationalism. Year after year Annie Besant worked and inspired others in building up a staff of devoted teachers. She brought to the service of the old Hindu culture the best of western pedagogy. Again, she was doing pioneer work.

She won recognition from Anglo-India as well as India. The Viceroy, Lord Curzon, directed his secretary to write expressing his sympathy with her work, as did also the Lieutenant-Governor. By 1905, the College was sufficiently important to be included in the itinerary of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the present King and Queen. The Princess graciously asked for her autograph and on her return to London sent Mrs. Besant an autographed portrait of King Edward for the school's assembly room. For all her Irish blood and rebellious spirit, Annie Besant was British enough to be deeply stirred by the royal token.

Mrs. Besant has been severely criticized by the missionaries for failure to attack the evils of India's social system. Under the glamour of an exotic setting, Annabai lent herself to strange scenes and doings in those early years. There was the incident of the *sannyasis*—holy men—who walked barefoot on burning coals. It was arranged that following her address at the Benares Theosophical Convention of 1898, the delegates should adjourn to the villa of a neighbouring Maharajah. *Sannyasis* were to demonstrate the power to resist ordinary pain and danger which may be acquired through the practice of Yoga exercises.

## SHANTI KUNJA—GROVE OF PEACE 235

All the afternoon coolies had fed a gigantic fire of tamarind trees in a pit three feet deep, and measuring sixteen by eight feet across. In the evening, they pulled out the unburned tree trunks and levelled the surface to a glowing mass of red-hot embers. The heat was so great that they worked with long iron rakes. As the swift tropical darkness fell, the gardens became a setting for a scene from the Inferno—mysterious pools of blackness under the banyan trees ; naked ascetics and holy men daubed with white ashes and red paint crouching in their shadows ; gigantic reflections of men and women dancing about the sinister incandescence of this glowing heart of darkness. It was a pantomime, magnified with tropical prodigality of the age-old theme of the moth and the flame.

A group of priests carried Agni, the fire god, with crossed swords lying before him, in a yellow palanquin round and round the fire. Dancers followed with whirling torches. Boys crashed coco-nuts on the ground at their feet. Against the pulsing undertone of drum beats, rose the chanting of the celebrants, the crash of coco-nuts, the screams of the obsessed *sannyasis*. Worshipers edged up toward the fire to cast their offerings into the flames—bowls of food, fruit, flags, tapers burning in mud lamps. The procession halted. Agni's naked swords were presented to the two raving *sannyasis*. With maniacal screams they plunged down the sloping runway, into the dreadful glare of the pit, and, barefooted, across the red-hot coals. There was a moment's awed silence. Again and again, in mounting frenzy and with wilder screams, they dashed across the glowing coals, until they had to be restrained.

Despite Annie Besant's experiments with the occult, there is no question that her influence in India has

been wholesome and constructive. When during those early years she was roused to crusading pitch by the social abuses of Indian life, particularly the hardships of Indian women, her guru restrained her. India, he told her, was hypersensitive to foreign criticism after generations of a contemptuous foreign bureaucracy ; she must win public confidence before she could become an effective critic. She profited by the advice. When she touched on the sore points of child marriage, illiteracy, caste and outcaste, she took pains to point out comparable abuses in western industrial life. She was, however, only postponing her more aggressive attack. She began with child marriage. As soon as she had enough pupils to make it practicable, she refused to admit married boys to the elementary departments, and doubled the fees for boys who married while in college. She initiated her work among women by opening elementary and high schools for girls. She also worked earnestly on Theosophical propaganda.

Theosophists make extravagant claims for the importance of every phase of their work in India. Whether by divine plan or coincidence, their influence has, in the last half century, admirably supplemented the revival of Indian pride and self-respect. Several of the early Theosophists were associated with the founding of the National Congress in 1885. Sir Valentine Chirol, a conservative British authority, has stated in his book *Indian Unrest*, that the advent of the Theosophists in India, heralded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, gave fresh impetus to the rising tide of Indian nationalistic spirit. Of Annie Besant, he wrote, “. . . certainly no Hindu has done as much to organize and consolidate the movement as Mrs. Besant who in her Central Hindu College at Benares and her Theosophical Institute at Adyar near Madras has

openly proclaimed her faith in the superiority of the whole Hindu system to the vaunted civilization of the West." It is not surprising, he commented, that the Hindus should turn their backs on our civilization when Mrs. Besant, a European of highly-trained intellectual power and with an extraordinary gift of eloquence, tells them that they have possessed from all time the key to the supreme wisdom of religion, philosophy, and morality on the higher planes.

Theosophists were the first to inspire countless thoughtful Indians to an interest in Hindu culture. When Gandhi was a young man studying law in England, he met two brothers, Indian Theosophists, to whom he is indebted for the discovery of *The Bhagavad Gita*. It has become his cherished favourite of all the Hindu sacred writings. In his *Autobiography*, Gandhi acknowledges his debt to Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. It was this book, he writes, which attracted him to his own classics and dispelled the notion, fostered by missionaries, that Hinduism had nothing to offer but discarded superstitions.

Annie Besant was to fill a more important rôle in Indian life than her original modest assignment as teacher. But her later, spectacular achievements were based on the foundation of her firm faith in and years of skilful service to the spirit of Hindu culture.

CHAPTER XX  
AN ASTRAL SVENGALI  
1895-1906

ANNIE BESANT wanted to become a famous occultist. This was the secret of G. N. Chakravarti's hold over her from 1893 until 1906. It was the secret also of another intimate relationship which was developing during those years and which, in the end, ousted Chakravarti from his position as confidential adviser. The new Warwick was an Englishman named Leadbeater. Oddly enough this man, who was to wield incomparably the longest and strongest influence in her career, had a similar background to the first man in her life, her husband. Charles Webster Leadbeater was a product of Oxford and holy orders. He was born in the same year as Annie Besant, 1847. A curate in a country village until he was thirty-seven, he had been, like most of the early Theosophists, an active Spiritualist. Meeting Madame Blavatsky in 1884, he shed his old life like an empty skin and a few days later sailed with her for India. During five years of Theosophical missionary work in Ceylon, he specialized in the education of boys. In 1889, Sinnett, a prominent English Theosophist, offered him the post of tutor to his son in London. Leadbeater made only one condition. He had a protégé, a Sinhalese boy, C. Jinarajadasa whom—he told Sinnett—the Masters had entrusted to his care. Eager as he was to leave Ceylon, he could not abandon this boy. Sinnett had recently returned to London after several years in India as editor of a leading newspaper. Originally a Spiritualist, he had been one of Madame's earliest and

most influential converts. She singled him out to receive through her a series of letters from the Mahatmas extending over several years. Sinnett, who had all the Anglo-Indian hauteur toward dark skins, did not fancy accepting the Indian boy in his household, but he was determined to have Leadbeater at any cost and agreed.

When Annie Besant returned from her first trip to India, she found Theosophical London abuzz over the remarkable messages which Sinnett's London Lodge was receiving through the mediumship of Mr. Leadbeater. H.P.B. had violently disapproved of Sinnett's efforts to establish communications with the Mahatmas through mediums. She had quarrelled with him and cut off his letters from the Mahatmas. As head of the rival Blavatsky Lodge, built around Madame, Annie Besant had inherited the feud. However, Madame had been dead for two years and Mrs. Besant was on the alert to find new interests which would divert attention from the ghosts of the Judge scandal. She promptly joined the London Lodge.

Leadbeater at once impressed Mrs. Besant. She determined that he must join her household of chelas. Persuasively she described to the wealthy young men on Avenue Road the advantages of securing Leadbeater as an inmate. Promises of mysteries to be revealed have marvellous power with wealthy young men. They agreed to guarantee him a certain sum if he would leave Mr. Sinnett and join them. He did so and his influence at once became apparent. In lectures and articles he began his life work which Maeterlinck, a mystic, has called "building in the clouds," but which he and Annie Besant regard as scientific research.

Mrs. Besant was from the first susceptible to his influence. He helped her surmount her prosaic mental habits and soar into an empyrean of ineffable delight.

Sometimes he and little Jinarajadasa accompanied her on lecture tours. Against the loneliness of broad sea horizons, secure from interruption, he wandered with her through the maze of occult lore which has been handed down by word of mouth and by cipher through the ages. Under the influence of his confident magnetism, Mrs. Besant had frequent visions of the Masters and was carried further across the borderland into supernatural experiences. At her lectures, while she went out to look across the foot-lights into the eyes of thousands of admiring men and women, he sat alone in an ante-room, pouring "prana" into Mrs. Besant—magical reserves of power. This was in the early 'nineties, just when all the world was reading *Trilby*. Annie Besant, if she read the book, which is doubtful, would never have identified herself and Leadbeater as Trilby and Svengali. There was an essential difference. Mrs. Besant had made her reputation as an orator before meeting Leadbeater. As an astral Svengali, however, he guided his Trilby and gave her assurance for her adventures among the astral planes.

Annie Besant had accepted Leadbeater as precipitately as she made all her acts of faith. Within a year after joining the London Lodge she was unreservedly vouching for him. She announced that they were establishing scientific proof of the truth of Theosophy. Their first long collaboration was a study of thought-forms, illustrated with coloured plates and diagrams. It was an elaboration of the theory that a person's thoughts are reflected in a cloudy form which emanates about him like a full-length halo, assuming characteristic shapes and colours. These forms are supposed to be visible to psychic sensitives such as Leadbeater. The reality of these thought-forms was an important point in the first of the succession of scandals which was shortly to shake the Society.

In spite of Leadbeater's revolt and escape, holy orders had left their brand upon him. A prolific contributor to the Theosophical press, his style recalls the sugar-coated moralizing of old-fashioned Sunday school library fiction. His stories which purported to be taken from life concerned young boys who fell from cliffs or were caught in sudden squalls. Compassionate Mahatmas sent angels to exhort them to courage, or to lift them from sinking dories, and set them on dry land.

In 1894, a few weeks after Annie Besant had invited Leadbeater to come to live at Avenue Road, they began their long series of so-called "scientific" investigations. These researches became a dominating influence in Theosophy. In a recent speech (Ommen, 1925) Mrs. Besant has described with vivid simplicity their first experiments in occult chemistry. Her account is illuminating both as to the value of such research and as to the nature of Leadbeater's influence over her. Her words will doubtless seem equally convincing to those who consider their work divinely inspired and to those who see in it only the product of Leadbeater's power of suggestion over Mrs. Besant. Their earliest work was an examination of carbon, hydrogen and nitrogen by clairvoyance. They used no physical objects, not even specimens of the elements in question. Their clairvoyant gaze penetrated past the planes of ordinary vision and read the *ākāshic* records—the memory of nature where everything is found which has occurred in the history of our globe.

Freed of dependence on laboratories and equipment, Leadbeater could at any time begin describing to her the chemical elements which he was examining. Empty handed, there would be no physical evidence of any of the things that he said he saw. Mrs. Besant, who knew a good deal more about chemistry than Leadbeater, found



this tantalizing. In her account of the incident she says :  
“ As he was talking about them and looking at them [the elements] I said in a casual kind of way,

“ ‘ I should like to do that.’

“ ‘ Why don’t you ? ’

“ ‘ Because I don’t know how.’

“ He answered in his characteristic direct way,

“ ‘ Try.’

“ So I said very solemnly—and I thought about having a will—I said,

“ ‘ Well, I am going to try to see.’

“ And in a few moments I saw an interesting bundle like a sort of bale with a cord around the middle and another cord going the other way. And I said to him,

“ ‘ Well, I see something,’ and I gave the description. All he said was,

“ ‘ That is carbon.’

“ I said, ‘ If you say it, I am quite ready to believe it.’ I was not quite prepared to see all the elements looking like a bale intended for travel by a railway train.

“ ‘ Well,’ he said, ‘ that is a fairly easy one to see, but now go on.’ So then, I went on. And I found out how it was quite possible by the use of etheric sight to see just above the limit of our ordinary vision. We examined a large number of chemical elements and drew diagrams with the definite purpose of showing that such a power as clairvoyance existed.”

These modern alchemists have never submitted their clairvoyant faculties to any practical tests, such as attempting to analyse by psychic means the simplest chemical compound. Their evasion of all trials has, however, had no effect on their followers. To the orthodox Theosophist, the hierarchy of occultism is infallible. Taking the work very seriously, Leadbeater insisted on

seclusion to protect them from malevolent thought-forms as well as from interruption. By 1896, they were spending week-ends at a country place in Surrey, attended by two young men secretaries, Jinarajadasa and Bertram Keightley. Sunday morning, after breakfast, followed by the reverent gaze of the household, the quartet would troop off to a secluded corner of the grounds. The young men spread rugs and the two principals stretched themselves full length on their backs, their heads slightly propped by cushions. The two young men sat down on the grass on either side of them, notebooks and pencils poised, ready to take down every word. The two seers were now looking up past events, such as the early stages of human evolution. As clairvoyants, they undertook to read the record of the past as it stands in the memory of the Logos (God).

After he was grown, Jinarajadasa wrote an article describing the occasion and giving his thirty pages of notes from that first Sunday morning in Surrey. It meant to him and to all of them a revolution in the intellectual life of man. They were dealing in large terms. They borrowed the courage and imagination of God Himself as he roamed through the Garden of Eden, inventing Adam and planning what he would do with this world he had created. Their cheerful courage in the presence of omnipotence recalls the naïveté of the American negro. Roark Bradford's stories and the play *Green Pastures* show Noah chatting familiarly with God across the dinner table in much the same simple, not irreverent spirit in which Annie Besant and Leadbeater interpreted God's *ākāshic* records for a benighted world. These "scientific" researches have become standard works for the 40,000 members of the Theosophical Society.

"We found," wrote Mrs. Besant, "that we worked

better together than separately. . . . He said one thing and I another, but generally he began." It is noticeable that Leadbeater always took the initiative and did nearly all the talking. He was careful to stop frequently and ask for corroboration which Mrs. Besant gave in monosyllables. In describing strange biological specimens, he drew on her knowledge of scientific terms. They always saw the same things which was to them proof of their authenticity.

Some years later, they began an elaborate series of investigations, which traced the history of individuals back through centuries of incarnations. Annie Besant was gratified but not surprised to discover that she was a reincarnation of those two great martyrs to freedom of thought and speech, Bruno and Hypatia. They are especially revered by Secularist audiences and she had frequently lectured and written about them in the old days. Leadbeater himself had not been back since the flowering of Greek culture when he was a disciple of Pythagoras.

Mystics of wealth and position were flattered when Leadbeater with his air of the polished scholar placed before them an outline of their doings for the last six hundred thousand years. He even took some of them back to the good old simian days on the moon chain before the magical act of evolution had taken place. Gradually Leadbeater worked out a mystic's blue book ; a mythology of about 280 characters readily identified as the prominent Theosophists. He discovered that this little group had been intimately associated through hundreds of centuries. Each person was identified by a code name. Annie Besant was Herakles. About 600,000 years ago, when the Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and Morya were still undergoing the process of reincarnation, Mrs. Besant

was the daughter of Koot Hoomi and the sister of Morya. Some 500,000 years later, she was the wife of Morya. Since then she had been the son of Leadbeater, his husband and his son-in-law. In 18,875 B.C., she was king of southern India, and later, in 17,455 B.C., she succeeded her father Mahatma Morya as king of northern India in Delhi. Annie Wood, the little girl, had escaped the monotony of childhood by daydreams of riding forth as a knight errant in shining armour. So in these later fantasies, she usually figured as a man, and a man of power. These thousands of years of intimate association with the Mahatmas proved that Herakles and two or three of her associates were Arhats. They had finished their millenniums of reincarnation and were ready for translation across the threshold of divinity. This was pleasant for the elect, but caused heartburnings among many earnest Theosophical workers who found themselves not even mentioned in the astral Almanac de Gotha.

For ten years the Society prospered. The E.S. was sworn to secrecy. No deaths or occasions for scandal intervened. Occultism was the major interest. During the winter, Annie Besant had her Brahmin guru, and for the rest of the year, Leadbeater. The fascinations of this new world were not allowed to interfere with her other activities. Her literary output reached its maximum for her entire career. In 1895, she wrote sixteen books and long pamphlets. She was making up for her pause as a chela. In India, she had her schools, the Central Hindu College and the beginnings of social reform work. Although she considers India her home, excepting for the period when she was marooned during the World War, she has rarely remained there for more than six months at a time. In summer, she lectured and planted new societies all over

the world, with an annual visit to England. Here, she edited *Lucifer* in association with G. R. S. Mead and kept a sensitive finger on the pulse of organization politics. As world head of the E.S., she built up personal contacts and political alignments across the seven seas. In Paris one year, she lectured on Giordano Bruno at the Sorbonne.

She frequently visited the United States. The followers of Mr. Judge had encountered stormy seas. The many subsequent splits and secessions within this American group suggest that something about the emotional type attracted to occultism in that country makes it especially difficult to organize. Judge had seceded with a flourishing organization of 6,000 members. Dying within the year, he was succeeded, after some curious supernatural phenomena, by Katherine Tingley. She moved the headquarters from Boston to Point Loma, California. Until her death in 1929, she headed the organization. Within a year after her election, a group of the most influential members seceded, and numerous splits have occurred since. The United Lodge of Theosophists, the Temple of the People in Rochester, the Theosophical Society of New York and the Blavatsky Association are a few of the offshoots.

In spite of bitter animosity against Mrs. Besant in America for what was considered her betrayal of Judge, she soon organized the few score members loyal to her into a Society far stronger in all respects than any of the seceders. Partly her magnetism, it was even more hard work. During one of her sixty-three day-tours of the United States, she delivered forty-eight public and fifty private lectures. In that same year—it was 1909—she travelled a total of 45,000 miles for her Society. No wonder that she has been able to survive the most appalling handicaps.

It was in the United States that the second hurricane

of Annie Besant's Theosophical career broke loose. Of a more disagreeable nature than the Judge case, it was destined indirectly to involve Annie Besant in a succession of scandals which make the libels of her Bradlaugh days seen mild in comparison. It involved none other than her astral Svengali. During 1904-05, Leadbeater had been lecturing in the United States and, as usual, giving special attention to training the young sons of members. Probably aware that trouble was brewing, he hurried back to India and was with Annie Besant in Benares when the blow fell.

On the cumulative evidence of boys living in different parts of the country, the American Theosophical Society had forwarded to Mrs. Besant charges that : “ (1) Leadbeater was teaching young boys given into his care habits of . . . demoralizing personal practices ; (2) that he did this with deliberate intent and under the guise of occult training, or with the promise of increase of physical manhood ; (3) that he had demanded, at least in one case, promises of utmost secrecy.”

Leadbeater had left his protégé, Jinarajadasa, now a young man, in the United States where the latter carried on an active propaganda in his guru's defence. He insisted that in nineteen years of close intimacy he had seen nothing to justify charges of sexual perversion against Leadbeater. In a defence circular, however, he naïvely admitted that similar insinuations had been current in Ceylon from the time that Leadbeater first settled there in 1885. Annie Besant too had heard the same rumours soon after Leadbeater joined her household on Avenue Road. The men chelas had protested against Leadbeater's custom of having his pupils sleep in his room. Leadbeater was easily able to persuade Mrs. Besant that these new charges were “ lying accusations ” and that he

was a victim of jealousy and persecution. She was susceptible to the plea because of her own proclivities toward martyrdom. That they should both be misunderstood and persecuted made one more bond between them and against the world.

Mrs. Besant at once wrote a strong and reassuring letter to the woman secretary of the E.S. in Chicago who was also one of the mothers bringing the charges. While not endorsing Leadbeater's advice to young boys she said she was convinced that he gave it in good faith. Her confidence rested on their mutual occult experiences : " I know Mr. Leadbeater to be a disciple of Master Koot Hoomi. I have constantly met him out of the body and seen him with the Master, and trusted their work. I know that if he were evil-minded, this could not be. I cannot therefore join in hounding him out of the T.S. in which he has been one of our best workers. Further, I know how much terrible evil exists among young men, and the desperate straits in which many find themselves to deal with these evils and which fall to the lot of many clergymen, parents and teachers, and I cannot bear unlimited condemnation of the attempt to deal with them." She also wrote to the Colonel, warning him against being misled by the hysterical statements of frightened boys.

Too many people were by this time involved. It had become an open scandal and the American section demanded an inquiry. Colonel Olcott appointed a committee which met in London in May. There were unpleasant circumstantial details such as an unprintable cipher letter, alleged to have been written by Leadbeater to a boy in his care. Leadbeater did not deny using cipher to the boys, nor did he repudiate the letter though he said he did not recognize it in its present form. He based his defence on his clairvoyant ability to see astral auras. He

was, he said, keenly sensitive to the thought-forms of his boy companions and to the difficulties which menace them during adolescence. He advocated teaching them a regulated self-abuse before "they become involved in the danger of entanglement with women or bad boys." He insisted that for certain types of occult development it was necessary for a boy to maintain his virginity without a single lapse. In other cases, the boys, when he met them, had already formed bad habits and his advice was in the nature of a prophylactic. Showing an ultra-ascetic horror of women, he wrote : "Both matrimony and prostitution must obviously be worse because in each case they involve action upon another person. . . ." To the charge that doctors advised against his proposed remedy he replied that the average doctor cannot see the horrible thought-forms clustering around children of both sexes and the destructive astral effects of sensual desire.

In his defence before the committee, Leadbeater asserted that the advice first came to him through ecclesiastical channels :

"Leadbeater : You are probably not aware that one at least of the great Church organizations for young men deals with the matter in the same manner.

Mead : Do you deliberately say this ?

Leadbeater : Yes.

Mead and Burnett : What is its name ?

Leadbeater : I am not free to give this. I heard of the matter first through it.

Mead : Mr. Leadbeater states that there is an organization of the Church of England which teaches self-abuse ?

Olcott : Is it a seminary for young priests or a school ?

Leadbeater : It is not in a school but I must not give definite indications.

Olcott : Is it found in the Catholic Church ?



Leadbeater : I expect so.

Olcott : I know that in Italy Garibaldi found many terrible things.

Mead : This last statement of Mr. Leadbeater is one of the most extraordinary things I have ever heard. It is incredible to me that there is an organization of the Church of England which teaches masturbation as a preventive against unchastity. I ask, what is the name of this organization ?

Leadbeater : I certainly should not tell.

Mead : I understand that it is an organization pledged to secrecy and I take it that Mr. Leadbeater received his first information from this organization.

Leadbeater : I suppose it would have been better if I had not mentioned it.

Mead : I absolutely refuse to believe that this is so.

Leadbeater : I decline to prove it in any manner."<sup>1</sup>

The hostility of some of the committee was further increased when, in the course of questioning, Leadbeater in a roundabout way admitted offences which laid him open to prosecution under the criminal laws both of England and of America :

" Mead : . . . The evidence of these boys says nothing about applying to him for help. I want to ask whether this advice was given on appeal or not.

Leadbeater : Sometimes without, sometimes with. I advised it at times as a prophylactic."

Questioned as to whether anything more than advice was involved,

" Leadbeater : I want to call up quite clearly the exact incidents. I scarcely recollect. There was advice but there might have been a certain amount of indicative action. That might be possible."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stenographic report of Meeting called by Colonel Olcott to discuss certain charges against C. W. Leadbeater, London, May 16, 1906. <sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

A hot fight ensued. Half of the committee insisted that Leadbeater be expelled from the Society. The other half won the concession that he be permitted to resign. It is noteworthy that under the severest pressure, Leadbeater never weakened on the ethical desirability of his conduct and advice. He ultimately promised not to continue giving the advice, making the qualification that he did it only as a concession to public opinion and to Annie Besant's wishes. He also admitted that there was room for difference of opinion as to its desirability. Farther than this, he would not go and never has.

Annie Besant's attitude toward Leadbeater during this ordeal was curious and puzzling. He had managed to be with her in Shanti Kunja, Grove of Peace, when the charges arrived so that he could explain everything. The first paragraph of his reply to Fullerton, American Secretary of the Society, even sounded a trifle complacent. "Fortunately," he wrote, "it [the letter from America] arrived while I was staying with Mrs. Besant, and I at once took it to her room and discussed it with her, as my copy came before hers."

Mrs. Besant's first letters, written while Leadbeater was with her, were vibrant with confidence in the man. As the weeks passed, she committed herself less and asked more questions. Although there were women on the London committee, she was not one of them. It is probably the only important committee from which she has held aloof during forty years of Theosophy. She did not even go to London, but remained in Shanti Kunja, going over and over in her own mind what her policy should be. She had written to the American woman secretary: "Doubtless from the worldly point of view I should save trouble by deserting Mr. L., but I do not see that to be my duty."

After Colonel Olcott sailed for England came weary

days of suspense ended by a long cable from Leadbeater. The committee had been exceedingly hostile ; he had been forced to resign ; had she any suggestions as to what he might do now ; did she know of any openings anywhere in the world ? She replied in a long, affectionate letter the same day. The next English mail brought an avalanche of protest and denunciation of Leadbeater. For the first time, she sensed the ruthless intolerance stirred up by the scandal. In her so different tropical world of Shanti Kunja, lulled by the soothing voice of her astral Svengali, she had had no notion of the boiling welter of passion he had roused.

After a week of mulling things over, she wrote to Olcott, in a perceptibly different tone from the cheery confidence of her earlier letter. The English Secretary, G. R. S. Mead, her associate as editor of *Lucifer*, who at Avenue Road had shared with her in closest intimacy with H.P.B., had written warning her that she would be hooted off of every platform in England if she did not dissociate herself from Leadbeater. Her letter gave evidence that she was weakening. The pressure was too severe. She was a bit querulous. Why hadn't she been sent copies of this and that ? How could she make up her mind unless she knew the facts ? She expressed her disapproval of Leadbeater's advice in less guarded phrases. She thought it likely to lead the boys into vicious practices ruinous to their health, *but* she believed he gave it in good faith. On one subject she could let herself go. She was inexpressibly annoyed with the Americans. They had been most indiscreet and had behaved disgracefully. The whole thing could and should have been handled quietly. " Now," she grieved, " God knows what will happen. . . . The loss of Charles—if so it must be—is a terrible blow to the Society."

Every mail added to her suspense and anxiety. Those gentle, affectionate, scholarly men with whom she had worked intimately for so many years, Herbert Burrows, G. R. S. Mead and the rest were carrying on like wild Indians, shrieking for Leadbeater's scalp ; someone had threatened to shoot him on sight. The stenographic report of the London inquiry was the last straw. Out of Leadbeater's own mouth she read admissions which she could not square with his explanations and which seemed to her intolerable. By August she had reversed her position and was writing to an American correspondent :

“ Any proposal to reinstate Mr. Leadbeater in the membership of the T.S. would be ruinous to the Society. It would be indignantly repudiated here and in Europe, and I am sure in Australia and New Zealand, if the facts were known. If such a proposal were carried in America—I do not believe it possible—I should move on the T.S. Council, the supreme authority, that the application of membership should be rejected.”<sup>1</sup>

She reviewed the situation in a letter to the E.S. with characteristic finality. Referring to the London inquiry, she wrote that Mr. Leadbeater “ denied none of the charges, but in answers to questions very much strengthened them, for he alleged that he had actually handled the boys himself, and that he had thus dealt with boys *before puberty* ‘ as a prophylactic.’ So that the advice supposed to be given to rescue a boy, as a last resort, in the grip of sexual passions, becomes advice putting foul ideas into the minds of boys innocent of all sex impulses, and the long intervals, the rare relief, became twenty-four hours in length, a daily habit. . . . Such advice as was given, in fact, such dealing with boys before sex passion had awakened, could only be given with pure intent if the

<sup>1</sup> *The Theosophic Voice*, May, 1908, p. 15.

giver were on this point insane. Such local insanity, such perversion of the sex-instinct too forcibly restrained is not unknown to members of the medical profession. The records of a celibate priesthood and of unwise asceticism are only too full of such cases, and their victims, on all other points good, are, on the sex question practically insane. Let me here place on record my opinion that such teaching as this given to men, let alone to innocent boys, is worthy of the sternest reprobation. . . . Worst of all that it should be taught under the name of Divine Wisdom, being essentially 'earthly, sensual, devilish.' " <sup>1</sup>

So far, Mrs. Besant's reactions have been consistent with what has gone before. Just as under the enchantment of H.P.B., she contemptuously brushed aside the S.P.R. report, so under the spell of her astral Svengali, and his story of persecution, she could ignore these graver charges and agree to defend him. Gradually as the dead weight of public intolerance was borne in upon her, she was forced to realize that his alibi of good intentions was not adequate. Her written statements prove her appreciation of the gravity of the charges and evidence a normally severe reaction on her part. In the face of this uncompromising repudiation of Leadbeater, five months later, in January, 1907, she was writing him a letter of reconciliation and soon afterward publicly resumed his defence and justification, which she has never since abandoned. Her friends warned and protested in vain.

After an intimacy of thirteen years, she and her Brahmin guru came to a parting of the ways. Chakravarti, who had steered a skilful course through the perilous days of the Judge scandal had long appreciated the menace of Leadbeater. It had been a thrilling contest, East against West. Both were men of scholarship and culture ; both

<sup>1</sup> *The Theosophic Voice*, May, 1908, p. 15.

had the curious subtlety of mind which finds expression in mysticism ; both asserted that they received messages directly from the Mahatmas ; both aspired to an exclusive position behind the throne. It was bound to end in a duel. This time the East, for all its mystery and suavity, was no match for the West. Mr. Leadbeater believes that this is his first incarnation since he was a student of Pythagoras. Perhaps his heredity as a wily Greek stood him in good stead. Leadbeater was to maintain a dominant influence over the wilful, impulsive Annie Besant for thirty years. Only two of his predecessors had lasted out a decade. Chakravarti had been confident that this shocking catastrophe would finish off his rival. He was mistaken. In the end Annie Besant came to believe that it was Chakravarti who was the victim of glamour and of the Lords of the Dark Face.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE QUEEN CAN DO NO WRONG

1906-1908

SEVEN years later in a trial involving further scandalous charges against Leadbeater, the prosecution presented as exhibits a series of long, intimate letters which Leadbeater wrote to Annie Besant at the time of the London inquiry in 1906, and some of her replies.<sup>1</sup> The letters thus became public documents. They are also very human documents and they provide a clue to the secret of this strange relationship.

Following the inquiry, Leadbeater who had been staying in the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge was warned that "jealous enemies" were plotting legal action against him. While he personally would have preferred not to, he wrote that in order to spare the Society further notoriety he was slipping away to the Riviera. Basking beside the sapphire blue of the Mediterranean, accompanied by two Cambridge youths, he dashed off page after page to Annie. He wrote or cabled her every week, sometimes every three days, even every day. With the trustfulness of a child this subtle occultist laid his troubles before her and asked for advice. He did not know what to do for a living. He had no income. America and England were closed to him. Did she know of any openings—perhaps in Japan or Australia—or preferably in Benares? He wanted freedom and leisure to do some

<sup>1</sup> In the High Court of Judicature at Madras, 15 April, 1913, Case of G Narayaniah *vs.* Mrs Besant.

important writing. For the present Basil and Fritz would remain with him and continue to act as his secretaries.

He responded gratefully to Mrs. Besant's annoyance with the Americans, who had made all the trouble. He complained—it seems a bit disingenuously—of “a certain unscrupulousness and want of honour in the American character which may be a troublesome factor in the new sub-race, and it seems to need only a little stress to bring it to the surface, even in the better class of Americans.” Tirelessly he reiterated his devotion to the Society and more especially to their joint work. While his forced resignation technically excluded him from the E.S. as well as from the Theosophical Society, there was nothing to prevent his meeting with them informally, as a friend, and if they asked questions, “I know of no reason why, in that unofficial capacity, I should not reply.”

Artfully, letter after letter reverted to the supreme importance of their relationship. His membership in the Society, his position in the world, his other friendships were as nothing by comparison. With a sure instinct, he sounded the note to which she was most susceptible, “I need not remind you of the hundreds of times that we have met out of the body and even in the presence of our Masters, and of the Lord Himself.”

Leadbeater used flowery blandishments with skill, but his especial art lay in making suggestions and influencing policies while protesting that any interference was farthest from his thoughts. “As to the E.S., that is your province and I dare not even attempt to advise, but . . .” and he outlined a shrewd programme. He gives an edifying glimpse of an astral steamroller at work. The E.S. was to be pared down to a super-esoteric Inner Group. He advised against circularizing the membership. There were such nuisances in the Society ; better for no one to



know of this inner group's existence, except those whom she selected for it.

Mrs. Besant's early answers sounded the sinister note of martyrdom. In reply to his cable, she had written, "It is right to save the Society at our own sacrifice. I wish I might resign also as a protest, but have no right to leave it. I propose to exclude from E.S. all who have taken an active part in this insane action, and cancel my American visit. And now, dear Charles, what is to be done? Shall you go and live at Cambridge until Basil is through his university work? Can I do anything in any way to help? . . . If the door is closed to public work, it is because Master had other and more important work for you to do. They are so indifferent to the silly world's opinion." The letter was signed "with steadfast love and trust, yours affectionately."

A few weeks later the confidential tone had disappeared. Her letters were friendly but casual; general news, a regretful reference to the wreck of the E.S. in America, everything has been suspended for the present; shall she send him the Central Hindu College magazine? One reference was significant. She had been trying, she said, to reconcile herself to his point of view on the ground that "the old Greek view of these matters perhaps largely dominates you, coming as you do from old Greece without intermediate touches with this world. The view taken then was so very different from the present."

Released from the spell of his influence, Annie Besant had begun to suspect that her transcendental experiences had been due to glamour, a Theosophical phrase covering every sort of illusion from hypnotism to the black magic of the spirits of darkness. Leadbeater, instantly aware of the change in tone, commented on it with just enough concern and not too much. Even when he received

indirectly a copy of her E.S. circular letter (quoted on pages 253-4), he did not lose his head. The letter went on to express her disappointment that Leadbeater should fall from the Path as Judge had fallen before him. It was a bitter rebuff, but Leadbeater showed the skill of a diplomat. "So many people seem to have had their faith in the existence of the Masters shaken by your circular, and I am trying to reassure them, but it is difficult to do so without seeming to oppose myself to you, which I will not do. I am obliged to put it somewhat in this way : that Mrs. Besant now supposes herself to have been for many years and on many occasions deceived, and so to that extent withdraws or contradicts her previous evidence, but that I myself have seen no reason for a similar change of opinion, and so I take the side of Mrs. Besant's years of experience as against her present conviction with regard to those years."

Appealing to their hundreds of supernatural experiences with the Masters, he skilfully made her claim to psychic experiences dependent on the integrity of their relationship. "We have a record behind us and you know me well ; was I ever an impure person ? I have not changed in the least, yet you say now that I have ' fallen ' from the path of occultism, or rather, I suppose, that I never was really on it at all. Yet recollect how many experiences we shared. . . . Have you any evidence of this ' fall ' beyond your own conviction that because I held certain opinions, it must be so ? If not, will you in justice to me look at the probabilities of the case and consider whether it is more likely that both you and I should have lived a whole life of glamour for many years, or that you should now for this once be misinterpreting something. Your theory implies that I have never seen the Masters, and that it has been an evil illusion that has sustained me

by its glory and its beauty through the work and the hard struggles of twenty-three years ; yet surely that illusion had led me to do work which could scarcely be supposed to be pleasing to any evil powers."

Only by indirection did he question her wisdom. His humility was superlative. " Well, the thing is done now, and with all the might of your world-wide authority, I am branded as a fallen person. Even if upon reflection you do not feel quite so sure that you were right at that moment and wrong during all the previous years, there is no undoing such an action as that. I would not for a moment ask it, because to withdraw would, as it were, stultify you and convict you of acting hastily, which would not be good for your people. Yet, if you can modify it in any way, or can contradict for me those things which are definitely untrue, it might perhaps be well—I don't know . . ." In support of his conviction that their relations were imperishable, he quoted his boy companion, who had caught the infection of his panegyric style. Jina-rajadasa had written to an American woman member of the E.S., " Remember the Queen can do no wrong ; our hearts may ache now for awhile, but everything will be righted soon. Our Queen is the essence of bravery and she will right the wrong when she sees it." And Leadbeater added, " I wish there were more of that spirit. . . . Like the psalmist, ' though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ' re-echoes so exactly what I have felt myself."

Delicately, affectionately he taunted her with playing into the hands of their mutual enemies, the Americans, who would openly boast of having forced her to take sides against him. They could not be expected to understand " that you do not always remember—and so they think that we are both acting with full knowledge." It was as near as he ever came to reminding her of her psychic

inferiority and dependence on him. Going to the other extreme, he could innocently assure her that he had held nothing back in their talks at Benares. What would be the use when "you are perfectly able to see all for yourself, so I could not conceal anything from you even if I would."

During the autumn she struggled desperately against suspicions that it was all glamour. If she became convinced of the unreality of their experiences, she wrote him that she would give up public life. He answered magniloquently : "That would be for the world a calamity so great that it were surely better you should not discover the mistake (if there be one) until this physical life is over. . . . Please do not do rashly something which not only you, but the whole world would have reason to regret for centuries." One suspects that Mr. Leadbeater's audacity created such a glamour that Annie Besant could not be normally critical of the rest of his performance.

Like flashes of lightning, Leadbeater's letters illumine the chiaroscuro of this mystical relationship. Even mystics are susceptible to flattery. Written under the stress of emotion, with everything at stake, the letters give an intimate glimpse of the two writers. Annie Besant revealed her qualms and scruples with a forthrightness in pleasant contrast to Leadbeater's process of innuendo. Insidiously he fostered distrust of her associates; Chakravarti was playing a double game; the Colonel was autocratic and a tool of spite. He had left trusted lads at strategic points in the United States, and he passed on their whispers to Mrs. Besant, underscoring anything which would fan her annoyance with the Americans. His statements of fact were distorted; his defence against concrete charges inadequate and evasive. As a last resort there were always occult promises which prevented his saying more.

The correspondence almost as much as the charges leaves one groping for an explanation of Annie Besant's stooping to defend this man. On receipt of the letters from America and under Leadbeater's immediate influence, she had sprung to his aid. With the arrival of the Inquiry Report a few weeks later, she lost faith and vigorously denounced him. Within six months she had again reversed herself and gone to his support. Her own explanations are neither convincing, nor clear. She had so much to lose. With Judge out of the way and Olcott visibly failing, the presidency of the Society was almost within her grasp. Why should she have endangered that coveted position ?

The answer is to be found in the relationship existing between the two. The nature of the charges against Leadbeater makes conventional romance improbable. Leadbeater never married and has the reputation of being indifferent to women. As a substitute for romance the fascinations of occultism supplied a powerful bond. This mystical union was so satisfying that at sixty years of age romantic interest became superfluous. Annie Besant's capacity for gruelling hours of work has been due to the fact that she was sublimating the vitality which other women gave to their homes, their children, society. She had trained herself to work as an escape from the thwarting circumstances of her life—her childhood without parents and home, her girlhood without sweethearts, her marriage without love, her motherhood without her children. Even then, life had not stopped teasing her, for when she made her great gesture of rebellion and escaped, she was not to find freedom to love. She and Bradlaugh could not marry, Aveling turned out a scoundrel, Burrows was too gentle ; one after another, she lost interest in them all.

Now that the dangerous age was passed, the effect of these successive rebuffs was to intensify a romantic attitude toward asceticism. Disillusioned by the inadequacy of human love, she returned to the ascetic ideals of her girlhood, and found a masochistic pleasure in dreams of martyrdom ; but even here, there must be a man. Leadbeater was peculiarly suited to this rôle. With Annie Besant's aggressive nature, she had demanded that men adapt themselves to her, rather than expecting her to make the adjustment. It is a quality not even dimly conceivable to most men. Herein lay one of the reasons for her failure to find happiness with any man, for she could not content herself with the doormat type whom some women accept as a compromise. Leadbeater was no doormat. But he had a genius more characteristic of women than of men for adapting himself to difficult situations and a Machiavellian gift of flattery.

Theirs was a chartless and compassless relationship, transcending the imagination of ordinary mortals. A few months later, with the death of Colonel Olcott, it reached a spectacular crescendo. Most of the Colonel's critics agree that, whatever his faults, he was an honest man. The tantrums of H.P.B., the S.P.R. report, the Judge fiasco he had endured patiently, confident that they were but passing clouds. This last scandal came as a mortal blow. He had no tolerance for Leadbeater and had lost confidence in Mrs. Besant. Receiving reports of Jinarajadasa's continued activity in the United States, he imperiously cancelled his membership. In the late winter, eighty-six years old, tired and discouraged, the Colonel died. Strange phenomena attended the death of the old man. Only Mrs. Besant and her chela, Mrs. Russak, were allowed in his sick room. Shortly before the end, the Colonel dictated a letter of apology to Charles Leadbeater.

The Mahatmas appearing repeatedly in their physical bodies had asked him to set right the dispute between Charles and Annie concerning the glamour question. They had assured him that Annie was not a victim of glamour, and he was glad to know it because he had always felt that Annie was mistaken on that point.

Referring to Leadbeater's resignation from the Society, following the inquiry at which Olcott had presided, the Colonel's letter continued: "Because I have always cherished for you a sincere affection, I wish to beg your pardon, and to tell you before I die that I am sorry any fault of judgment on my part should have caused you such deep sorrow and mortification, for I should have certainly tried to keep the matter quiet, had I not thought that it would have reflected on the Society if I did so." He implored Leadbeater to bow to the will of the Mahatmas who had told both Annie and himself "that your teaching young boys to . . . is wrong. I do implore you from my deathbed to bow to their judgment in the matter, and make a public statement that you will give them and us your solemn promise to cease giving out such teachings." He held out the hope that if Leadbeater would compromise on this issue, the Masters would open a path of reconciliation to the Society.

The letter reflects Mrs. Besant's state of mind far more accurately than the Colonel's. One wonders at the dying Olcott's apology to a man for whom he had no respect. The glamour question was uppermost with Mrs. Besant. She was at that very time writing to Leadbeater that she was ready to abandon such an idea. She had found the prospect of going on without him impossible. The rest of the Colonel's letter served as a device for imploring Leadbeater with all the authority of Mahatmas and deathbed publicity to repudiate his former teachings.

In the choking confusion of death, the Colonel gasped out a final message. The Masters had named Annie to succeed him. The Society was duly notified that Colonel Olcott had appointed Mrs. Besant as his successor. Mutterings arose that occultism was again being exploited by interested individuals. The attack centred on the use of the word appoint. The constitution of the Society gave the Colonel a right to nominate a successor to be ratified by vote of the Society, but no power to appoint. Adyar sent out a second message, correcting the verb and explaining that its use had obviously been a slip !

The opposition did not let go so easily, however. The election fight really centred on Leadbeater. It was apparent that Mrs. Besant's election would mean his reinstatement. During the campaign, in answer to inquiries, Mrs. Besant defined her position, making it hinge on Leadbeater's publicly repudiating his teachings. In that case, on the request of a large majority of the Society, and after an interval of two years, she would agree to his reinstatement. This was a long way from her statement of less than a year earlier that "any proposal to reinstate Mr. Leadbeater would be ruinous to the Society." She was to go much further.

In July, 1907, after a hurly-burly of whispering and wirepulling, Annie Besant was elected president of the Theosophical Society. She had reached the top of the ladder. From the vantage point of this lofty eminence, endowed with supernatural altitudes, she could roam this world in her physical body and the universe on the astral planes. She enjoyed the importance of her position. She was confident of her ability to override the opposition to dear Charles. Sixty years of age, she faced life with undiminished ambition in spite of the prophecies of astrologers. Twenty years earlier, as a chela, Annie



Besant's horoscope had been cast. It was written in the stars that she would die in March, 1907. Despite her faith in astrology, she must have been relieved to find, as March rolled by, that even the stars could be mistaken.

One of her first acts as President was to reinstate Jinajadasa. Leadbeater too was shown special consideration. The campaign for his immediate reinstatement came into the open. The American section, as the cause of all the trouble, again became the storm centre. After a campaign of unexampled bitterness—according to *The Theosophist*—the American Secretary, Alexander Fullerton, who had led the attack on Leadbeater, was dropped. He was succeeded by a Chicago physician, Dr. Weller van Hook.

A curious *divertissement* now ensued. It begins like the house that Jack built. The spirit of H.P.B. suggested to a Mahatma who told Annie Besant who notified the Chicago doctor who wrote a series of Open Letters which, printed as a pamphlet, had a wide circulation. In many pages of esoteric dialectic, they presented a defence of Leadbeater's conduct and advice. The Doctor admitted that these letters had been dictated to him by a Mahatma. They roused another storm of protest. The most quoted sentence from the letters ran, "No mistake was made by Mr. Leadbeater in the nature of the advice he gave his boys. No mistake was made in the way he gave it." And yet, and yet, these same Mahatmas in the presence of death itself, had told Olcott, "we do, however, affirm that these teachings are wrong." Mrs. Besant attempted the feat of reconciling such divergent statements. She went into pathological details of intervals and conditions which did not really affect the main contention. It was an old device of fastening on minor issues and ignoring the real questions at stake. It is typical of the idiosyncrasies of mysticism that in 1927, after a period of twenty years,

Doctor van Hook should have repudiated these letters.

Just a year after the Colonel's death, the Society was notified of a resolution asking Mrs. Besant to invite Leadbeater to rejoin the Society although he had not and never has repudiated his "advice." Herbert Burrows who for many years had idealized Annie Besant led the opposition. Showing great emotion as he rose to speak, he said that it was one of the most painful responsibilities of his life. In a caustic criticism of the new American secretary's letters from the Mahatmas, he pointed out that Leadbeater's teaching thereby became an official Theosophical doctrine. Still loyal to Annie Besant, he made a pathetic effort to dissociate her from responsibility for the effort to reinstate Leadbeater.

Burrows had never been a match for Annie Besant. Even now, seconded by the scholarly Mead, supported by all the intensity of prejudice on this subject, he did not have a chance. She carried her resolution reaffirming the liberty of thought of every member of the Society in all matters philosophical, religious and ethical, and his right to follow his conscience in such matters. In other words, a member's morals became as much his own affair as his manners. By contrast with the snooping of government censorship and the prying of prohibition enforcement officials, there is something to be said for the tolerance of this platform. Mrs. Besant's critics taunt her with a sinister maxim, uttered in the heat of combat. She bitterly resents its being wrested from its context, and yet, it does not misrepresent the philosophy of this resolution. She used the phrase, "The Theosophical Society has no moral code."

She had reinstated Leadbeater, but in England alone he cost her 700 members, among them Herbert Burrows and three former Secretaries of national sections, all the men

who had known H.P.B. best. The American section took Leadbeater's triumph as a personal affront. France, Germany, Scandinavia and the rest of the Theosophical world muttered uneasily.

Annie Besant's election was the final link in the chain which bound her to Leadbeater's side. In the few months' interval between his resignation and the Colonel's death, she had had time to discover the drab monotony of life without the stimulus of Leadbeater's imagination and appreciation. Without admitting it too specifically, she was vaguely aware of her dependence on his suggestion for the continuance of her highly-prized psychic experiences; visits from the Mahatmas and return visits to their mysterious Thibetan *ashramas*, messages, cosmogonies—all the phantasmagoria which had transfigured life for the last decade. She had used every possible device—personal entreaty, Mahatma letters, deathbed messages to coerce Leadbeater into admitting that his advice was wrong. What concessions she could gain so much the better. But have him she must. She could still try to follow truth by convincing herself of his good faith.

The three principal goals of the ambitious are money, power, love. Money had never interested Annie Besant. Love had eluded her grasp. With the years she had given herself more resolutely to the pursuit of power. As president, she aspired to lead the Society to Himalayan heights. With Leadbeater to supply suggestions, and with her own ability to put them into effect, the world should indeed be their oyster. Magic and the supernatural have always exerted a seductive influence over man. They form the only compromise that he can effect between the humiliating limitations of mortal flesh and the omnipotent sweep of his mind. They marvellously supplement his sense of power. From primitive days, he has found release in

stories of genii, magic carpets, wishing caps, fabulous rings. Through the strange circumstances of their intimacy, Leadbeater had succeeded in investing himself with all the magic of carpets and caps and rings for Annie Besant. He was her key to fairyland.

Leadbeater was unable to attend the convention. It was not advisable for him to set foot in England. He had Mrs. Besant to represent him which was infinitely better. In an emotional speech, she depicted him as a martyr, suffering in silence rather than reproach the Society. His trial had been a travesty, his judges were prejudiced. She too had wronged him and "both he and I have suffered for my blunder, for which I have apologized to him to an extent to which our unmerciful critics little imagine."

Majestic and beautiful in her flowing robes, invested with the mysterious glamour of intimacy with the Mahatmas, she held the convention under a spell of silence while she solemnly pledged her word that never again should a shadow come between her and her beloved brother Initiate. Her ecstasy communicated itself to her listeners and, for a transcendent moment, they shared with her a glow almost sensual in its super-spirituality : memories of those hundreds of nights when she and he had met, out of their physical bodies, winging their way aslant the ether, across constellations and astral planes, higher, higher to pinnacles of purest ecstasy, into the presence of the sublime Master of the Universe.

## CHAPTER XXII

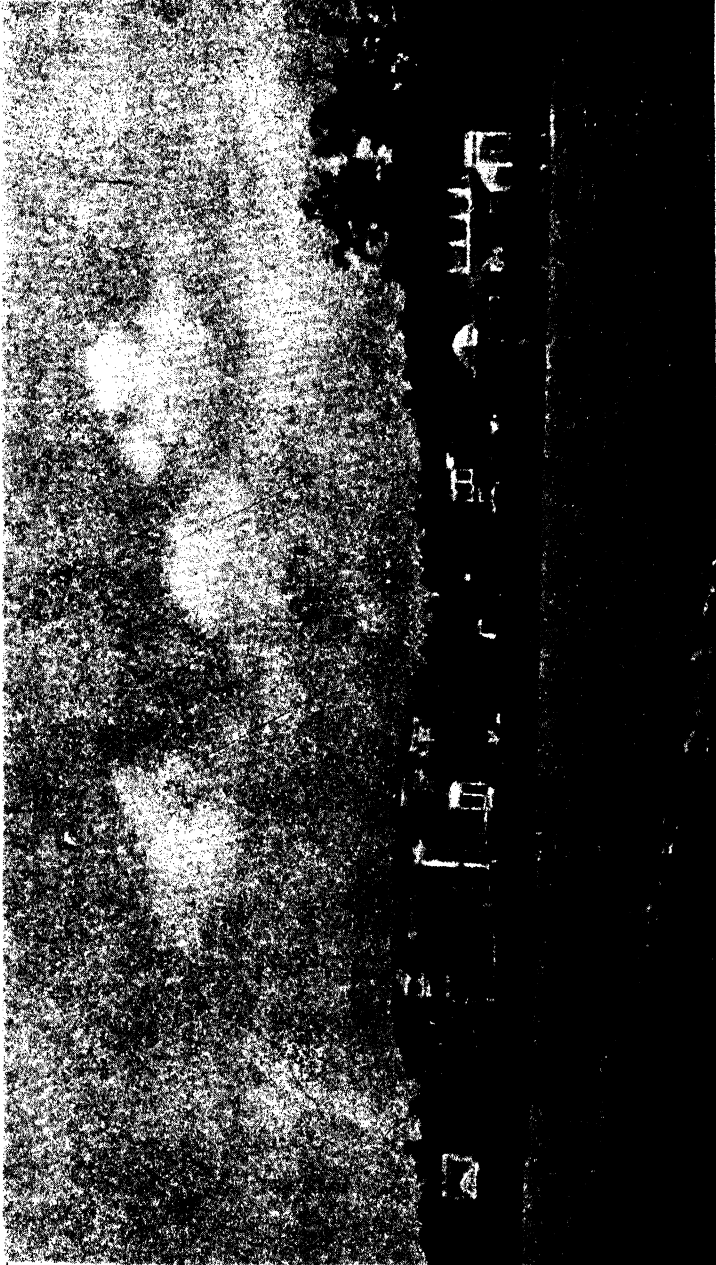
### MESSIAHS MADE TO ORDER

1909-1913

As though the Mahatmas had given her a magic wishing-cap, Adyar bloomed and prospered under Annie Besant's touch. Besant Gardens, Leadbeater Chambers, a herd of cows and a dairy, temples of all religions, an electric power house, new printing presses were among the additions. Every year she planned improvements, raised the money and put them into effect. During her first five years as president, she increased the Adyar estate from 27 to 253 acres. In the same period, she almost doubled the membership of the Society.

Adyar sheltered about one hundred residents, half of them Indians, the rest Europeans—in India all white people are termed Europeans. The Europeans, mystics attracted by Annie Besant, came from all over the world. Most of them had means. People of this sort always have and always will finance cults and minority movements. There was beside a fringe of earnest souls, empty-handed, but eager to offer a lifetime of devotion. They were useful, but naturally they had to work harder than the mystics who paid their way.

Attracted by the charm of Annie Besant and by the novelty of these western mystics eager to study the philosophy of the East, a succession of Indian pundits came and went. The college at Benares discovered clever young Hindus to help with the editorial and educational work. Indian employees printed and mailed the magazines and



INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,  
ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA



CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER



ANNIE BESANT

BOTH ARE WEARING STAR BADGES SYMBOLIZING THEIR FAITH IN THEIR  
NEW MESSIAH. MRS. BESANT'S HAND IS POSED TO SHOW THE CABBALISTIC

books. The domestic staff included innumerable housemen, watchmen, tailors, gardeners, coachmen, laundrymen, messengers ; an Indian compound is as self-sustaining as an old-fashioned plantation. Barefooted servants in long white coats and bright turbans salaamed gravely and ran back and forth under the trees.

Presiding over it all, reunited, Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater settled back happily in their luxurious bungalows and resumed their "scientific" investigations of past and future millenniums. Chelas, Hindu and European, were ever at hand to take down their words. With respectful awe, devotees watched their every mannerism. As fellow Initiates, they were set apart from the rest of the world. They built up and supported this isolation by exchanging golden opinions.

"On the Watch-Tower," Mrs. Besant's department of personal chat in *The Theosophist*, assured her readers that her revered colleague had climbed the mystic path though many incarnations of hard work. On plane after plane he had perfected each faculty "until he stands, perhaps the most trusted of his Master's disciples, on the threshold of divinity." Thus endorsed, Leadbeater's panegyrics became the more impressive. Somehow it happened that he always contrived to weave himself into the picture with Annie. Her colossal intellect, her unflinching wisdom, unrivalled eloquence, utter forgetfulness of self—all these were minor qualities he told the Society in comparison with her secret powers revealed in the rites of initiation. "Remember that because of her position as an Initiate, she knows far more than you do ; and precisely because her knowledge is occult, given under the seal of Initiation, she cannot share it with you. Therefore her actions must constantly be governed by considerations of which you have no conception. There will be times when you cannot



understand her motives, for she is taking into account many things which you cannot see, and of which she must not tell you. But whether you understand or not, you will be wise to follow her implicitly, just because she knows. This is no mere supposition on my part, no flight of the imagination ; I have stood beside your President in the presence of the Supreme Dictator of Evolution on this globe, and I know whereof I speak. Let the wise hear my words and act accordingly."

Leadbeater's emphasis on the impossibility of understanding Mrs. Besant's occult motives was part of a clever manoeuvre to reinforce their authority and to increase their power. Members of the E.S. had promised to obey H.P.B. "so far as my pledge to my Higher Self and my conscience sanction." Dropping the qualifying clause, Mrs. Besant made the pledge much more binding. E.S. members must promise to obey her "without cavil or delay."

Leadbeater was buttressing their position with all possible power and authority in preparation for a dazzling dénouement. The savage opposition which he had barely survived had put him on his mettle to justify his own clairvoyance and Annie's loyalty by some inconceivable coup d'état. Madame Blavatsky's tragic experience with phenomena had forewarned them against further public efforts in that direction. Yet spectacular proof of their pre-eminence in the supernatural hierarchy must be forthcoming.

They made one or two false starts. On an American tour, Annie Besant announced the reincarnation of H.P.B. Five years earlier, the very year following her death, she had entered the body of a fourteen-year-old Hindu boy, her spirit slipping into the empty body at the moment when the boy's spirit had passed out in death. Mrs.

Besant gave the American newspaper reporters circumstantial details. The lad had previously known only Hindi and Sanskrit. He now spoke Russian, French, German and Hebrew. She had been notified of the reincarnation before it was consummated, but for the present that was all she could say. For some reason, this idea was dropped. Perhaps the languages presented a practical difficulty. The lad was disposed of by sending him to Thibet to study with the Mahatmas !

Strangely enough, Leadbeater's next inspiration also revolved about a young boy. Though by no means an original idea, it was more ambitious and had better publicity value. Speaking through Mrs. Besant, he announced the imminent reincarnation of a Messiah or World Teacher. Down the ages in every land innumerable Messiahs have followed upon each other's heels. Usually they announce themselves and work up their own following. The unique feature of this Messiah was that Leadbeater should select an adolescent lad who gave no indication of future promise beyond a certain immature beauty. Leadbeater was taking a gambler's chance.

In January, 1909, a Brahmin, Narayaniah, and his four sons moved into one of the huts in the employees' village at Adyar. He had been a member of the Society since 1882 and Mrs. Besant gave him the responsible position of assistant secretary of the E.S. Before long, strolling through the gardens in the cool of the evening, Leadbeater noticed Narayaniah's two youngest sons bathing in the river. He told their father to bring them to his bungalow. Leading Krishnamurti, a boy of fourteen, to a sofa, Leadbeater sat down beside him. His hand resting on Krishnamurti's head, in a tone of exaltation he described the boy's achievements in previous incarnations. He told

Mrs. Besant that the aura of Krishnamurti was startling, unique !

In England that summer, Mrs. Besant announced the imminent coming of a Messiah—a reincarnation of the great prophets and holy men of the past. The fifth sub-race of mankind, she explained, is nearing its end, and a sixth sub-race is due. At the beginning of each sub-race of the Theosophic cosmogony a great World Teacher has appeared, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mahomet, Christ. The real purpose of the Mahatmas in authorizing H.P.B. to organize the Theosophical Society had been to prepare a following for this next World Teacher who would assist him in the redemption of the new sub-race. An effective John the Baptist, Annie Besant amazed and fascinated her audiences.

On her return to India, she found Leadbeater deeply exercised over Krishnamurti's unfavourable environment. It was intolerable that the future Saviour of the world should be subjected to the primitive indignities of a humble Brahmin's hut. When he learned that Krishnamurti, who was not very bright at his lessons, had been caned at the Indian school in a neighbouring village, it was too much. The slightest physical violence, even roughness, would destroy the boy's marvellous astral body and jeopardize his future. Leadbeater proposed that the boys leave their father and live at headquarters. He would teach them himself. Narayaniah, who had never liked Leadbeater, was by this time jealous of the adulation lavished on his two sons. He refused to give them up. Leadbeater was more than a match for a mere Indian clerk. Messages from the Mahatmas gave peremptory orders that the boys should not be allowed to enter their father's house again. Mrs. Besant promised Narayaniah that she would educate the boys at Oxford and give them

advantages far beyond his means if he would let her assume their legal guardianship. As an orthodox Brahmin, Narayaniah hesitated. As a father, he saw the material advantages for his boys. Finally consenting, the papers were signed. For the next two years, Krishnamurti was almost buried under rites, portents, phenomena. Leadbeater put the boy through an initiation. For two days and nights the boy's body lay unconscious while his spirit joined the astral bodies of Mrs. Besant and Leadbeater on some "threshold of divinity." In the astral blue book, he received the mystic name of Alcyone. Leadbeater prepared a two-volume record of his last forty-nine incarnations, running back 70,000 years. It is incredibly dull reading.

Suddenly translated from a primitive hut to a luxurious home and inconceivable adulation, the little Hindu boy must have wondered if he were not dreaming and moved softly lest he waken. His room was always filled with flowers. The entire routine of Adyar was adjusted to suit his convenience. These grown-up white people watching his every step and listening respectfully when he spoke, made him more inarticulate than ever. They even knelt down and did *puja* to him, as before an idol.

Although the boy was Leadbeater's discovery and protégé, Annie Besant gave to the Krishnamurti publicity campaign all the prestige and authority of her position. The Order of the Rising Sun of India, dedicated solely to spreading the message of the world teacher, made an ambitious beginning. George Arundale, one of Mrs. Besant's most devoted disciples, and the principal of her college at Benares, founded the Order. Within the college, he proselytized with such fervour that the trustees protested to Mrs. Besant against the unwholesome influence of the gushing language and the person-worship

encouraged. Making a pretence of disbanding the Order, it was immediately succeeded by the Order of the Star in the East. The Adyar compound, surcharged in the tropical heat, seemed like a hothouse with symbolisms and rituals and secret rites until the pressure grew too heavy and the whole thing exploded in a terrific thunderstorm.

Members of the Order of the Rising Sun wore badges elaborately graded to signify their propinquity to the young boy. Abandoning western clothes, they wore the Hindu *dhoti* and *kirta* with a white monk's cord around the waist and a medallion hanging from the neck, showing a sun peeping through a circle. Advancing in rank, the colour of the monk's cord changed, the medallion grew larger and larger ! Originally only men were admitted. With the exception of Mrs. Besant, Krishnamurti was kept away from women. Women exerted a baleful influence—even old women. At Leadbeater's request an elderly woman teacher who slept in the same bungalow as Krishnamurti was removed to another house. Leadbeater explained that the thought-forms and emanations of a woman, even during sleep, had an unfavourable effect. The faithful referred to Krishnamurti in phrases which implied everything but did not commit them too definitely. In the East, he was destined to become a reincarnation of the Lord Maitreya ; in the West it was understood that he would be the Christ.

The summer of 1911, Annie Besant and Leadbeater took the two boys to Europe, Leadbeater waiting in Italy while Mrs. Besant gave them their first glimpse of England. They witnessed the Coronation procession from reserved seats and on the day of the Royal Progress were guests of the First Lord of the Admiralty. Motoring out to Oxford, Mrs. Besant endeavoured to enter their names

at the University, but, after talking to the boys, the authorities diplomatically put her off. Thwarted in this direction, she sent them every day to Sandow's gymnasium. They learned English sports, rode horseback in the park, and ordered their clothes from a Bond Street tailor.

Returning to India, Arundale and his college boys met them on the Bombay mole with garlands and prostrations. They came ashore encircled by devotees to protect them from injurious thought-forms of British army officers, I.C.S. and tourists. At the 1911 convention in Benares the following December, Krishnamurti was pushed forward into a very bright spotlight. After inspirational speeches by Mrs. Besant and Arundale, the members were instructed to file past Krishnamurti who would hand each one a certificate of membership. He did not have to say a word. What actually happened is a matter of controversy. Mrs. Besant described it as a miraculous moment, a second Pentecost. A great coronet of brilliant shimmering blue appeared above the young head ; bright streams of blue light descending from this touched the dark hair and entered, flooding the head (!). This was supposed to symbolize the Lord Maitreya. Within the blue coronet gleamed the crimson symbol of the Master Jesus, the Rosy Cross, and high above blazed down a dazzling, flashing star. A bodyguard of green *devas* (angels) encircled the walls coruscating light and colour.

On the other hand, Bhagavan Das, who had until recently been Mrs. Besant's most trusted pundit, reported that most of those present, including a Parsi clairvoyant, noticed nothing out of the ordinary. They saw a painfully embarrassed boy of sixteen handing out slips of paper. Leadbeater, anticipating the possibility of such anti-climax, wrote a description of the event in extravagant terms. He

presumed that there might have been some present so unreceptive that they were not even aware of what was happening, and he could only pity them. The incident paraphrased the fairy-tale of the tailor who made for his Emperor a magical suit which only honest people could see. And when next day the Emperor made a royal progress stark naked, his intimidated subjects cheered him to the echo.

The pleasant afterglow of Krishnamurti's consecration was rudely interrupted. On the eve of taking the boys to the hills for three months of seclusion and a super-Initiation by Leadbeater, Annie Besant received a letter from Narayaniah, the boys' father, making serious charges against her associate. He forbade her taking the boys away from Adyar. Under threat of annulling her guardianship, he demanded that they be completely separated from Leadbeater. Overnight, Leadbeater disappeared. The following day, Mrs. Besant explained that he had received sudden orders from the Masters to take up work in Italy. A few days later, Annie Besant and the two boys who had been back only four months again sailed for Europe. Joining Leadbeater in Taormina, they spent the summer in Italy. Asserting that Mrs. Besant would not keep his boys away from Leadbeater, a year later Narayaniah brought suit for their recovery. This suit, like most of her other troubles, was attributed by Mrs. Besant to the Jesuits and the Tingley faction of the American Theosophists.

On the stand, under oath, Leadbeater denied the specific acts charged. He affirmed that he had seen the Logos (God), and that he and Mrs. Besant had stood before the Lord of Evolution. The opposing counsel made the comment that either he had a diseased imagination or he was not speaking the truth. Annie Besant, pleading her case,

did not come off as well as in the old days. Not only did she lose the case, but she had to listen to uncomplimentary opinions of both herself and Leadbeater from His Lordship. The Court found that the charges against Leadbeater had not been established and that Narayaniah had weakened his case by attempting to strengthen it with lies. He had tried to prove too much. In summing up, the Court said, " Mr. Leadbeater admitted in his evidence that he has held and even now holds opinions which I need only describe as certainly immoral, and such as to unfit him to be the tutor of boys, and taken in conjunction with his professed power to detect the approach of impure thoughts, render him a highly dangerous associate for children. . . ." The Court directed Mrs. Besant to restore the boys to their father but indicated its poor opinion of the father by ruling that he should pay the full costs. Mrs. Besant at once filed an appeal before the High Court of Madras.

It was a serious setback. In the six years since Annie Besant had become President of the Theosophical Society, she and Leadbeater had built up a complete fantasy universe. For a simple Indian clerk to check the orderly progress of their universe by making scandalous charges and taking their Messiah away from them would be too ironic. As a last resort, disaster could always be interpreted as persecution. But explaining is weary work. Too much of it is fatal.

The following months showered catastrophes upon Annie Besant like brickbats. Sixty-five years old, she strode ahead undaunted. In February she lost her entire German following, 2,400 members under the leadership of Rudolf Steiner in protest against this cult of Krishnamurti. In March she went into court to argue her case against Narayaniah. In April her fifteen



years of work at the Central Hindu College was wiped out.

George Arundale, principal of the college, undeterred by his previous setback with the Order of the Rising Sun and the disapproval of his trustees had been pushing the Order of the Star in the East. He proclaimed in his lectures that the college had been founded only to prepare for the advent of the World Teacher. The legitimate work of the college was neglected in favour of making converts to the new Theosophical trinity, Annie Besant, Leadbeater and Krishnamurti. An inner secret order, The Group, was pledged to instant obedience to Annie Besant. One of Arundale's circular letters to The Group, was published in the *Allahabad Leader* for April 13, 1913. It was a twice unlucky date !

The letter was an ardent declaration of faith in Annie Besant. It was not for them, it said, to discuss whether Mrs. Besant ever made a mistake. They owed her adoration and instant obedience. They knew that she was destined to become "one of the greatest rulers of the world," and they asked for no life which was not a part of hers. Fifteen hundred words long, it was as intense as a love letter. The discovery that it was not a typed or multigraphed letter provided a final embarrassment. It had been printed at Mrs. Besant's own Vasanta press in Adyar. Her critics argued that this gave it her endorsement, tacit if not actual. The wealthy, orthodox Hindus who supported the college were intolerably annoyed. They had given several warnings. They would not be made fools of before all India. Not even Annie Besant could save this situation. Mr. Arundale and twenty members of his staff were forced to resign. The college was shortly afterward merged with a Hindu university. Mrs. Besant retained an honorary position on the Board

of Trustees, the only non-Hindu on the Board, but her influence was nominal. The college, an honourable monument to her first twenty years' work in India, was swept out of existence as far as she was concerned. It was another instalment on the price she must pay for Leadbeater's guidance.

A good fighter, she met this defeat aggressively. She at once announced the formation of a Theosophical Educational Trust. She had been concentrating, she said, on one spot. Now, however, India was ready for more widely distributed efforts, and she proposed to scatter over the country a number of small schools of all grades and types. Only a month later, the middle of May, she calmly set sail for Europe, ostensibly to attend a congress in Stockholm. It was a six weeks' trip and she was in Europe for one week. She brought back with her Major David Graham-Pole, an English barrister and prominent Theosophist, since then elected to Parliament. She would plead her own case for the custody of her young Messiah, before the High Court, but the situation was so critical that she felt the need of expert advice. She reached India with the Major in July. She had been gone seven weeks. One month later, she appeared in court.

It was three months before judgment was pronounced, an interval of profound anxiety during which she redoubled her activities. Inwardly she was suffering ; her seven weeks' trip had been an evidence of her agitation. Outwardly, she gave no sign. At the height of her suspense she nonchalantly wrote in " The Watch Tower " that the trial was now out of her way (the actual pleading of the case) and she was at last free to resume her public work so interrupted and hampered by persecution. She founded an Order of Brothers of Service, a social reform organization. She built an extension on her Theosophical

publishing house. She launched a series of lectures on social reform subjects, branching off now and again to political reform, and securing eminent Indians and Englishmen to serve as chairmen.

The judgment on her appeal was handed down during her lectures. It was a more drastic defeat than the first trial. Not only must Mrs. Besant restore the boys to their father, but this time she must pay her own share of the costs. Two nights later, Mrs. Besant appeared on her lecture platform and delivered an eloquent speech on Indian industries as related to self-government. In an adroit "Watch Tower" leader she made it sound as though the verdict were in her favour. But she had already filed a petition for a final appeal before the Privy Council of England. Major Graham-Pole was a great help. She called him "Sunshine" because he was always cheerful. The name came echoing down from her childhood, fraught with pleasant associations.

It was a relief to escape with him to England, away from the snobbery of Anglo-India and the rumours of the bazaars. In England the case of *G. Narayaniah v. Mrs. Annie Besant* was not a cause célèbre, but only an item in the vast detail of the London law courts. A natural presumption favoured Annie Besant, handsome, white-haired, poised, one of their own kind, as against an unknown Indian who had "attempted to strengthen his case with lies." It is another evidence of Mrs. Besant's compelling charm that in spite of the disagreeable nature of her case her followers among the aristocracy rallied about her, forming a reassuring background. Among them were the Viscountess Churchill; the Lady Emily Lutyens, daughter of a Viceroy of India, sister of a secretary of state, wife of England's most celebrated architect; and the Countess Muriel de la Warr. Their Lordships of the Privy Council,

the Supreme Imperial Court of Justice gave Annie Besant a suave and courteous hearing. They found several flaws in the procedure of the previous trial. On a technicality of jurisdiction, the indictment was quashed and all costs assessed against the plaintiff, G. Narayaniah.

Annie Besant had won her case, but she had still to finish paying for it. It put an end to her social campaign in Madras. With the years, Mrs. Besant had lost her young defiance of polite society. After many seasons of belligerent democracy, she was slipping back to the cultured accents and reserves of her own kind. Under H.P.B. and the Colonel, the Theosophical Society had never had a chance with the colonial Englishman. Annie Besant, however, was better born than much of modern Anglo-India. She never mastered the small talk and amenities of the accomplished hostess, but she had a distinguished presence. The Theosophical Society was at best a difficult morsel for Anglo-India with its "going native," dressing in *saris* and *dhotis*, walking about in bare feet, squatting on the ground instead of sitting on civilized chairs, to say nothing of its weird beliefs and its too peculiar boy-Jesus. Before the trial, Mrs. Besant had been making social headway. She was invited to the less exclusive Government House garden parties and had even spoken at the annual meeting of that correct Madras charity, the S.P.C.C., with the Governor of Madras, Lord Pentland, presiding, accompanied by Lady Pentland. The Narayaniah suit put an end to all that. The missionaries, who had never forgotten H.P.B.'s Christian-baiting epigrams, helped to stir things up. The Lord Bishop of Madras bestowed a semi-episcopal endorsement upon a carefully written and damaging pamphlet, *The Theosophy of Mrs. Besant*. Sold at two annas (three-pence), everybody read it.

Every few months Annie Besant steeled herself for another savage attack. She read them all carefully. Bradlaugh had taught her never to ignore what the opposition had to say. For years the onslaught of books and pamphlets by ex-chelas continued. Revealing E.S. pledges and solemn secrets, one or two were almost hysterical in their disillusionment. A thoughtful indictment by French Theosophists, *Mrs. Besant and the Present Crisis in the Theosophical Society*, was translated into English. Bhagavan Das, Mrs. Besant's right-hand man for many years, wrote, *The Central Hindu College and Mrs. Besant, The Rise of the Alcyone Cult*. A detailed narrative of the Narayaniah suit, *Mrs. Besant and the Alcyone Case*, was published by a committee of prominent Hindus. It gave as much of the charges against Leadbeater as was printable, and the full correspondence between him and Mrs. Besant (briefly quoted in Chapter XXI). Dr. T. M. Nair's *Evolution of Mrs. Besant* reviewed the printable details of the original Leadbeater Inquiry in London. F. T. Brooks, a former member of the E.S., wrote *The Theosophical Society and its Esoteric Bogeydom* and other books. From the Tingley group in America came a series of pamphlets, *Mrs. Annie Besant and the Moral Code*, *Mrs. Annie Besant and the Leadbeater Advice*, etc. Nearly all of them put Mrs. Besant into their titles, but they revolved about scarifying attacks on Leadbeater. Few human beings have ever had to resist such terrific and long continued opposition as Annie Besant has countered in defence of Leadbeater.

When she brought two suits against the Madras press for printing obscene pleasantries about him, the Judges threw her cases out of court. When she challenged the Lord Bishop of Madras to debate, he ignored her. She discovered that she could no longer rent a hall for lectures.

Dauntless, she fell back on the written word and established another journal, the weekly *Commonweal*.

More serious than the public ostracism was the revolt within the Society. Protests against Leadbeater and Krishnamurti poured in from all over the world. Following the lead of the 2,400 ex-members of the German section they pointed out that boy-Messiahs were no part of H.P.B.'s Theosophy and that the stress on clairvoyance was leading them very far from the spirit of Theosophy as originally outlined. Mrs. Besant was uncomfortably aware that the Theosophical elections held every seven years would occur the following spring. She had succeeded Olcott on his death in 1907. This was the first election since. There was no important opposition candidate, no one who could rival her intimate E.S. contacts all over the world. And yet she could not shake off an ominous feeling. The persecution of Leadbeater, as she phrased it, even to herself, had roused such primitive and violent emotion. Nor could she ignore the formidable opposition to Krishnamurti, the World Teacher.

In the aggregate, there was a good deal of discontent in Theosophical ranks, but so scattered as to be ineffective. No one group was sufficiently interested or wealthy to organize a world-wide campaign for a candidate to run against Mrs. Besant. Isolation of the national sections on distant continents, further separated by language barriers simplified matters for the political machine. The E.S. and its pledge of obedience without cavil or delay held firm. Mrs. Besant was re-elected president by a comfortable majority. Such was her genius that she could defy the most violent prejudices of modern society without jeopardizing her supremacy over her followers. She did not come off scot-free however. She was forced to surrender that precious thing to which she had sacrificed

everything else in her life, her companionship with Leadbeater.

While the outcome of the Narayaniah suit was still in suspense, he decided to leave India. Feeling against him ran high ; the future, even to his clairvoyant gaze, looked sinister. Mrs. Besant announced that in response to long-standing invitations from Australia, Mr. Leadbeater would make a lecture tour to last a year. That was in 1914 and Mr. Leadbeater has lived there ever since in spite of an explosion of fresh scandal and violent efforts to get rid of him in the early 1920's.

It was costing her dearly but Mrs. Besant never wavered in his defence. She printed repeated declarations of loyalty. She had, she said, disagreed in the first place with the advice given to some boys by Mr. Leadbeater. At that time he had promised not to continue giving the advice—a promise which she was convinced he had honourably observed. She honoured Leadbeater for the singular purity of his life and valued him for his immense services to the Society. Ignoring his refusal to repudiate his advice as wrong, she reiterated that nothing would induce her to change her attitude toward him under the present undeserved attacks, which were the persecution of *dugpas*—evil spirits. Believing all this sincerely, she could impose her conviction on thousands of earnest, moral, conscientious followers throughout the world. Theosophists do not like to rattle their mouldy skeletons. But, when questioned, they show no embarrassment. They are genuinely convinced that the whole disagreeable mess was largely a matter of black magic and the Lords of the Dark Face. For the rest, it was an ordeal to test the fitness of these two Initiates before they were privileged to take their final step across the threshold of divinity.

Mrs. Besant dramatized her loyalty to Leadbeater with touching fidelity. The anniversary of Colonel Olcott's death, February 17th, happened also to be Leadbeater's birthday and the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bruno, who was one of Mrs. Besant's earlier incarnations. After Leadbeater's exile in Australia, Mrs. Besant always celebrated the day, paying special homage to Leadbeater and cabling him birthday greetings. In the cool of early morning as the day dawned, the residents of Adyar formed in procession, Annie Besant at the head, guests, pundits, executives, clerks, everyone, even the "untouchable" sweeper women, bringing up the rear. In a long line, they filed past the alcove where stands a more than life-size plaster effigy of bearded Colonel Olcott, one hand resting on the shoulder of H.P.B. who is seated beside him. Strewing some of their flowers and garlands before the statue of the Founders, they heaped the rest of them below a picture of Leadbeater. Each year, standing beside the picture, Annie Besant paid glowing tribute to "this great servant of the Masters."

Successive scandals in one land after another, America, England, India, had brought him not exile in disgrace, but apotheosis in the heart of a woman, and by reflection, in the hearts of thousands of her followers. After an intimacy of twenty years in which for the only time in her life, she had surrendered her will and individuality, Annie Besant suddenly found herself alone. The strange little parody of the holy family was broken up and scattered, never again to be restored. Krishnamurti had been left in Europe out of his father's reach. It was apparent by this time that he was too indolent to enter Oxford. Mrs. Besant turned him over to her coterie of high-born ladies with one request, "Make a gentleman of him." The ladies kept him and groomed him for nine long years.



He was a man of twenty-six when he returned to India and Mrs. Besant.

It is paradoxical that as Annie Besant delved deeper into psychism, her influence steadily became more materialistic. Her appeals to the spirituality of the Indian people were discarded with her former transcendental mood. Beginning with pictures of thought-forms tinted in water colours, she took up astral versions of chemistry, biology, physics. She reached a climax in her effort to materialize that ideal toward which man pitifully struggles, a Teacher, a Saviour, someone to explain to him the Unknowable. Her boy-Messiah marked a pinnacle of materialistic fantasy. He was the ideal made real, Ectoplasm Incarnate !

CHAPTER XXIII  
WAKE UP, INDIA !

1913-1919

ANNIE BESANT has a gift for evading defeat. Like the sorcerer who holds a forked willow twig loosely between his palms to find precious metals, she develops in emergencies a psychic willow twig for finding potential popular causes.

The scandal of the Narayaniah lawsuits had been a serious setback. Annie Besant met the situation with inspired resourcefulness. In spite of herself, she was freed from the sinister influence of her astral Svengali. It was for only a little over two years, but it gave her time to reassert her old magical self and to achieve her most brilliant exploit since becoming a Theosophist. It was a feat so spectacular that alone it would entitle her to a place in the pages of history. Rarely has anyone, man or woman, lived to witness such far-reaching results of his life work as she sees to-day in every corner of India. It is generally recognized by Indians that their present ferment of nationalistic revolt owes much of its inspiration to the encouragement and guidance of Annie Besant. She set the hands of Indian political consciousness ahead one—two—perhaps three generations.

With all her many-sided abilities, Annie Besant's real genius is for politics and oratory. Born a generation later, she would have been elected to Parliament and have become a power in the political life of Great Britain. Instead, she has occupied herself with a confusing variety

of interests. But she could never quite let politics alone. In spite of the tactless defiance of her early career, she had won her way as far as the School Board when she left London. She was peculiarly handicapped in coming to India. She inherited from the founders of the Society a strict prohibition against politics. Originally, there had been good reason for this policy. Both the founders were aliens, H.P.B., a Russian, a word that in those days made every Anglo-Indian jump. He expected to see the Russian bear amble down over the passes of Afghanistan at any moment, and suspected every Russian of being a spy. The Founders fell under suspicion soon after landing in India. Their only defence was to convince everyone that the Theosophical Society had no interest in politics, then, or for ever and ever. They both wrote repeated warnings, and Olcott issued an official order that he would expel or suspend any member, or an entire branch if necessary, which, by offending in this way, imperilled the society.

In spite of all tabus, Annie Besant's whole career in India was a consistent preparation for openly assuming the leadership of the Nationalist movement. On her arrival in the 'nineties, she found Indian pride and self-respect at low ebb, cowed by British arrogance and the prestige of the new, scientific civilization of the West. She applied all the magic of her eloquence to restoring their self-confidence and self-respect.

As early as 1910 she was lecturing on India as one nation, imploring her audience to drop petty animosities of Madrasi against Punjabi and to learn to say, "I am an Indian."

"That one India, when she comes, will have her head crowned with the Himalayas and her feet will be bathed in the waters that wash the shores of Tutticorin ; she will

stretch out her right hand to Burma and Assam, and her left hand to Kathiawar and Baluchistan. . . . Never yet was a nation born that did not begin in the spirit, pass to the heart and the mind and then take an outer form in the world of men. That India, the sound of her feet is on the mountains, and soon the rising eastern sun shall glow upon her forehead. Already she is born in the minds of men." ❧

Her series of lectures, "Wake Up, India," delivered during the wracking suspense over the Narayaniah suit in 1913, had been an inspired reaching out and groping for an issue. She was holding the forked willow twig loosely in her hands, and turning it round and round. The scope of the lectures went much further than social reform which she treated as an essential preliminary to India's rise in the scale of nations and her advance in powers of self-government. She presented in eloquent sequence her vision of the future India, a mighty, self-governing community. As of old, she appealed to her hearers' pride, basing her argument on the old Hindu system of *panchayats* or village councils which she adduced as proof of India's genius for self-government.

The moment Mrs. Besant won her final appeal before the Privy Council in the Narayaniah case, she started an energetic political propaganda on behalf of India in England. She lectured in Queen's Hall and in the provinces, gave interviews, engaged in newspaper controversies. Inevitably, she claimed supernatural sanction for this departure. Ordered by an agent of the "Lord of Our World" to deliver the lectures "Wake Up, India," she was to continue the work and proclaim India's place among the nations. Her followers who accept her every word as divinely inspired, making no allowance for the influence of unconscious motives, accept this explanation exactly as it stands. More critical observers consider it,

whether or not consciously planned, a masterly device for diverting attention from recent disasters and giving everyone a new and controversial subject for discussion.

Mrs. Besant's entry into Indian politics not only defied all Theosophical precedents, it also promised to become an embarrassing hurdle for the English membership. It made one more unpopular position for them to defend if their Society should become identified with a nationalist India which was at that moment on the verge of bloodshed. To the rest of the world, it seemed a gallant and courageous adventure for an elderly English woman to champion the dark-skinned people of her adopted country against her motherland. Interest in her campaign filled the hiatus left by the departure of Leadbeater and Krishnamurti.

Annie Besant interpreted her re-election to the presidency as an endorsement of her political campaign. Returning to India in triumph, she plunged in energetically. Her weekly *Commonweal* was not enough. She bought an old Madras daily paper, renamed it *New India* and devoted it to Nationalist propaganda.

This was in July, 1914. Suddenly, without one word of warning from the Masters in Thibet, nor even from Mr. Leadbeater in Australia, the whole world was brought up short by the declaration of war between England and Germany. The Theosophical Society then numbered 30,000 members, of whom about one-third lived in countries allied to Germany. As president of an international society, Mrs. Besant did not hesitate to enter upon a wholehearted propaganda for the Allies. She and Leadbeater interpreted even this supreme catastrophe in terms of their own cosmogony. This world war was inevitable, a final clearing of the ground in preparation for the Coming of their World Teacher and the New Civilization,

that sixth root race which Mr. Leadbeater was studying in Australia. The recent Steiner disaffection became part of the insidious German campaign of aggression. The supernatural powers of evil had realized that if, working through Steiner and the Germans, they could get control of the Theosophical Society, they would have a tremendous strategic advantage in the conduct of the war. In short, Great Britain and the Allies, embodying the ideals of freedom were the servants of the Masters of Wisdom. The German autocracy founded on force was under control of black magic and the Lords of the Dark Face. Early in 1915 Annie Besant began a campaign to involve the United States in the war on the side of the Allies, working through the American section of the Society.

Her aggressive loyalty to the Empire becomes the more interesting in contrast to her next step. During the war, India had occupied a strategic position. Great Britain had reduced her army of occupation in India to a skeleton. If India had responded to the invitations of hostile forces, she could have made it embarrassing for the Empire. India not only refrained, but responded generously to appeals for aid. England has never permitted the arming of any considerable number of Indian troops since 1857 and the Mutiny. When she refused India's offer of more volunteers to fight in France, India meekly gave money instead and raised taxes and turned out war supplies.

India's Nationalist politicians had declared a truce. But they listened with interest to Allied oratory. They noted Lloyd George's declaration that the principle of self-determination must be applied in tropical countries. When Asquith declared that the very thought of a foreign-German-yoke was an intolerable degradation to any Briton, they felt a bitter sympathy. It was, strangely enough, Annie Besant who broke the truce. She too had

believed the Allied oratory and echoed it forth with passionate conviction. She and Leadbeater had readily accepted the war as a strand in the complex web of a universe of their own weaving. And yet, it had happened at a most inconvenient time. Here she was with a weekly journal six months old and a daily paper a few days old, all set to force the British Empire to do the right thing by India, and just at that moment, the Empire gets itself involved in a world war !

Aside from the impasse in her own organization, there seems to have been no emergency which occasioned Mrs. Besant's entry into Indian politics in 1914. There was in fact, rather a lull following the violence of the revolt against the partition of Bengal, and the Government's compromise measure of the Morley-Minto reforms in 1910. Once in, however, Mrs. Besant converted even the war to a weapon shaped for her own use.

Early in 1915, the Indian statesman Gokhale, leader of the Moderates, friend of both Englishmen and Indians, died. The Moderates who constituted the majority of the Congress group felt deeply bereft. Annie Besant seized upon that leaderless moment and with her usual forehandedness she had something ready. Aided by devoted Hindu pundits, she had drawn up a scheme of Home Rule for India. It was an elaborated synthesis of the lectures on the social, economic and political needs of India that she had been delivering year after year. The bound volumes of her Indian lectures show how adequately she had prepared herself for the mission on which she was now engaged. At the same time that she was engaged in her fantastic clairvoyant researches, she had covered the field of Indian affairs with a versatility and thoroughness that commands respect.

At the National Congress of December, 1915, Mrs.

Besant laid her Home Rule scheme before the Indian leaders. They were cautious. A committee was appointed. She waited about for this committee to act until September, 1916, when she established her own Home Rule League in Madras. She entered into an active alliance with Tilak, the Extremist leader recently released from jail, who established branches of a similar league on the Bombay side. For the next two years, Annie Besant devoted herself to Home Rule with all the intensity of enthusiasm she had ever known. She imported cartoonists and writers to make her journals a success. She lectured, wrote letters and editorials far into the night, raised money, attended conferences, ranged back and forth and up and down India. Home Rule leagues blossomed in her footsteps until India stirred with an unwonted activity. Gandhi, returning from his long mission in South Africa, said that "she had made Home Rule a *mantram* [precept] in every cottage."

Bombay and other provinces forbade her to cross their borders ; she was disloyal and stirring up trouble. The Government watched her success with growing concern. Disappointed in Britain's failure to show appreciation of India's loyalty, she launched into bitter attack. Editorials on "The Great Betrayal" made unpleasant allusions to the Mutiny, and sympathetic references to the student revolutionaries of Partition days. Terming India the wage slave of the Empire, she attacked economic discrimination against her at the Imperial War Conference. She described the intolerable conditions under which Indians lived—it was a phrase giving great offence to British statesmen—and she made veiled threats of what might happen.

The Government retaliated by reviving a press act which required publishers to put up cash securities as



surety against their printing anything objectionable. Under this act Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, levied several thousand rupees against Mrs. Besant and confiscated some of her presses. She was not intimidated. Her editorials became perhaps more extreme. Suddenly, in June, 1916, she and her two chief assistants were interned. Given the choice of several hill stations, she chose Ootacamund where she had a comfortable bungalow. Mrs. Besant's two fellow exiles were George Arundale, ex-principal of the Central Hindu College, and an Indian pundit, B. P. Wadia. They were completely cut off from the world. The bookstores might not even sell their Theosophical writings.

On the eve of internment Annie Besant took leave of her public in a stirring farewell address. The real crime, she said, for which she was being dropped into this modern equivalent of a mediaeval oubliette was her having wakened the self-respect of the Indian people, which was asleep ; of having roused them to a realization that it was a dishonour to be a subject race. Life, she said, did not consist in money and clothes, in motor-cars and invitations to Government House, but rather in liberty, self-respect, honour, patriotism, noble living. She taunted England for posing as the champion of liberty in Europe while revealing herself in India an autocracy naked and unashamed. She pointed out economic skeletons in the Imperial closet : Indian labour was wanted for foreign firms ; Indian capital was being drained away for the war loan ; Indian taxation on that war loan would be crushing ; India was becoming a nation of coolies for the enrichment of others. " I write plainly, for this is my last word. I go into enforced silence and imprisonment because I love India and have striven to arouse her before it was too late. It is better to suffer than to consent to

wrong. It is better to lose liberty than to lose honour. I am old, but I believe that I shall see India win Home Rule before I die. If I have helped ever so little to the realization of that glorious hope I am more than satisfied.

VANDE MATARAM.            GOD SAVE INDIA."

The internment of Annie Besant created a most extraordinary sensation. This was largely an expression of appreciation of this English gentlewoman who had championed India's cause. It is also true that members of the E.S. served as an effective claque. In London, Theosophists kept her on the question paper of the House of Commons and caused the Government embarrassing moments. Even the august House of Lords paid her inadvertent tribute in an almost emotional debate. Lord Sydenham indignantly quoted her violent utterances, such as accusing the British army of disregard of morality where coloured women were concerned. The Marquis of Lansdowne sadly agreed that while she was a lady of great ability and immense industry, she had spent her whole life in the career of an agitator—social, religious or political, and was always a dangerous focus of agitation. Some high official is supposed to have said to another, "Who would have thought they would make such a fuss over an old woman ?"

All summer Mrs. Besant and her two aides rusticated. In August the Secretary of State for India, Mr. E. S. Montagu, raised India's hopes by the memorable statement that Britain's goal in India was the development of self-governing institutions with a view to responsible government. Mr. Montagu was to visit India during the approaching cold weather. The Viceroy would arrange to have him meet deputations representing every shade of political opinion with the object of recommending constitutional reforms to Parliament. Indian Nationalists

were gratified and hopeful. While the move was made ostensibly in appreciation of India's loyalty during the war, there is no doubt that Mrs. Besant's Home Rule agitation had hastened it by many years. Empires are no more grateful than circumstances demand. Anxious to secure a harmonious atmosphere for the Viceregal conferences, the Government and Mrs. Besant reached a compromise and the three prisoners were released after three months.

Their return to Madras was a triumphal progress. Mrs. Besant's railway carriage was a fragrant bower. Even the locomotive was blanketed with flowers. Puffing down the winding mountain-side, it stopped at every crossroads for the presentation of garlands, wreaths and sandalwood by the assembled peasants. The townspeople erected triumphal arches and presented inscribed addresses in jewelled caskets. Brahmins brought her holy water from their temples. The entire city of Madras was at the station to meet her. The streets were gay with flags, bunting, flowers, her picture everywhere. The crowds were such that no one could stir. It was more than an hour before her car was able to nose its way through the multitude, under the vista of triumphal arches, and speed with her along the sea wall, back to Adyar and her ecstatic disciples.

It was pleasant to bask in the rosy glow of national idolatry. That winter, she was elected president of the National Congress. It was a startling and unprecedented honour in this Oriental land. Eastern tradition has kept wives and daughters shut up in a zenana. A woman of the middle class never leaves her home from the day she enters it as a bride until she dies. The man of means considers himself liberal if he permits his women to go for a ride heavily veiled in a limousine with curtains hanging at

the windows. While individual women in increasing numbers are taking their freedom, it was 10,000 men brought up under Eastern traditions who acclaimed Annie Besant as their president—the highest office in the gift of the Indian people.

The Indian National Congress meets annually in December. The Congress has no official status under the British government. It is an indigenous organization dating back to 1885. Under the guidance of leading Indian statesmen, and as their most representative body, it commands in India a high degree of prestige and influence.

On a December morning in 1917, Annie Besant was escorted to the Congress grounds in Calcutta as the honoured president-elect. Sir Valentine Chirol, the English journalist, wrote home that she was acclaimed like an incarnation of the deity. The delegates were assembled in a vast canvas *pandal* or tent. There were no chairs. They sat cross-legged on the ground which was covered with matting, divided into wedge-shaped sections by low strips of canvas. At one end of the tent rose a high white dais covered with rugs and cushions. Here sat the half hundred leaders of the Indian Nationalist movement, Hindu and Muslim, Brahmin and low caste ; Tilak the rugged Mahratta fighter, C. R. Das the handsome Bengali, Gandhi a small, inconspicuous figure known as yet only for his work in South Africa.

Annie Besant climbing the ladder-like steps of the rostrum to deliver her presidential address was profoundly stirred. The glare of the tropical sun was softened by the canvas overhead into a sifting yellow haze. The white shirts and *dhotis* of the delegates made a dazzling background against which the brilliant scarlet and emerald green and orange of turbans and shawls stood out like patches of flowers against a field of shining snow.

Annie Besant was a stately figure, white-haired, white-skinned, barefooted, draped in a white *sari* fringed with gold, wearing crystal beads and H.P.B.'s magical ring. From a gold chain about her neck hung a locket of the Order of the Star in the East. She had recently passed her seventieth birthday. Her figure had thickened with the years, the lines in her face had deepened. There was a pucker between her brows, and the stoop of her shoulders was more noticeable. But her bearing, alert and self-assured, her handsome, well-cared-for presence, her firm, round neck supporting a finely-shaped head gave her the look of a woman in the early fifties. Her white hair rippled back from her low forehead. Her brown eyes looked out at the world with a gentler light of suffering and human sympathy.

Alone on the high rostrum, framed in the yellow glow of India's sacred marigolds, she paused and looked about her with the ease of the accustomed speaker. Standing very still, scarcely making a gesture, looking down with the radiance of a woman whose love has been appreciated, her mellow voice swelled through the sunshine of the great tent and her audience slipped as always under the enchantment of her spell.

Annie Besant's memory will long be held in grateful reverence by the people of India. But her moment of popular idolatry was brief. Relations between England and India had become distressing overnight. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms after Parliamentary tailoring proved a bitter disappointment to India. Mohammedan irritation over Allied peace terms with Turkey was one of several other causes contributing to a general disaffection. England met the rising discontent with repressive measures.

The Rowlatt Act gave the Government power to seize and imprison without trial anyone suspected of sedition, India, anticipating demonstrations of Imperial gratitude,

was already disappointed over the Reforms. With the passage of the Rowlatt Act in January, 1919, smouldering suspicion flared into a wild counter-propaganda. In April came the tragedy of Amritsar. General Dyer undertook to check discontent in the Punjab with an iron hand. He proclaimed martial law and prohibited meetings. When the people, unarmed, with their women and children gathered in a public garden, he ordered his soldiers to fire on them, and there were many casualties. It is more than a decade since Jallianwallah Bagh, but the wound is still unhealed, an aching sore. At the time India experienced an anguish possible only to an unarmed people who feel themselves intolerably outraged.

Just what happened to Annie Besant at this juncture is not clear. She had not hesitated to stir up discontent in India at a time when the British Empire was fighting for its life. Yet now, with the war over, and India plunged into nation-wide anguish and mourning, she drew back. For a time she became an apologist for the British Government, mildly defending the Rowlatt Act and maintaining a non-committal attitude on General Dyer and Amritsar. Revulsion against her was swift and intense. In spite of her fine words she had proven herself an outsider and a foreigner. In proportion to the height of their earlier veneration the Indian people now abused her.

Leadbeater may have been partially responsible for her sudden political eclipse. By 1918, reaching out from distant Australia, he managed to draw her into another tangle of Theosophical politics and scandal which was to demand her first attention and drain her vitality for several years. Her brief respite was over. She was back under the spell of her astral Svengali.

An incalculable influence on the political destiny of

Annie Besant was the meteoric rise of Gandhi as a national idol. The popular imagination swung away from her overnight to offer homage to the new leader. Mrs. Besant had shown herself antagonistic to Gandhi's ideals and methods from the outset. He was, she said, a dangerous, well-meaning man who preached law-breaking campaigns. She came out in active opposition when he launched his policy of passive resistance, following the passage of the Rowlatt Act. She warned Gandhi and his followers that he would be unable to control the forces he was letting loose ; that this so-called passive resistance to the British Government could only end in violence against an unarmed people.

There was not room for both Annie Besant and Mahatma Gandhi. As an opponent, she stood little chance against him. "I flung away my popularity to oppose him," she wrote. She explained her disapproval in Theosophical terms : non-co-operation was " a great disruptive movement engineered by the Lords of Darkness against the union of Britain and India as the day of their partnership was rapidly approaching." She saw the future in terms of a world Commonwealth ; an Indo-British Commonwealth was dawning on the horizon which promised world peace and the spiritualizing of humanity. Passive resistance—opposition to the British Government—delayed its consummation.

Gandhi listened to her protests unmoved. He had found passive resistance the only possible weapon and an effective one in South Africa. He smiled gently and went his way. And before that smile, while the people of India thronged about him, Annie Besant stepped down into the great company of national leaders whose day has passed.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

A LONGING to sacrifice herself to something greater than herself has been, Annie Besant says, the keynote of her life. Her dominant nature failing to find this something greater in human relationships, she turned back to the supernatural. High church ritualism, secret societies, symbolism all rest on a psychological appeal to which she was particularly susceptible. Despite the confidence and poise of her manner, she has always needed reassurance.

Theosophy with its Mahatmas and *devas* and *duggas* satisfied both her craving for magic and her need of a sheltering supernatural power. Shortly after becoming a Theosophist, she had found expression for her love of ceremonial in a curious mimicry of the forms of Masonry. About 1890, Mrs. Besant and another Theosophist, Miss Arundale, were initiated into a French lodge, *Le Droit Humain*, which had appropriated the rites and secrets of Masonry and admitted women as members. Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but the Masonic Order resent Co-Masonry as a plagiarism and have never recognized it. To Mrs. Besant, however, the prestige of the ritual was unimpaired by its lack of credentials. She found its performance soothing and reassuring. It helped, as she has said, to fill the blank in her life left by turning away from Christianity. Taking the mystic path to the thirty-third degree in her usual rapid stride, the full list of her titles is imposing :

The Very Illustrious Vice-President, Grand Master  
S ∴ Annie Besant, 33, P.M., Hon. R. W. M. No. 6



(London), Member of the Supreme Council, G<sup>r</sup> . . .  
Ins . . . Gen . . . for Britain and the British Dependencies.

She soon became vice-president of the *Suprême Conseil*. As delegate to Great Britain, she introduced Co-Masonry into England, founding "Human Duty," the first lodge in 1902. The Grand Roll of Co-Masonry now numbers 442 lodges, another evidence of her ability as an organizer. She also introduced Co-Masonry in India.

Shortly before the war, during the English suffragette demonstrations, Mrs. Besant marched through the streets of London in one of their processions at the head of the English Co-Masons in full regalia. It was a gratifying experience. She took a childlike pleasure in parading in gorgeous satins and gold lace before the assembled populace. How the men Masons stared ! She also found satisfaction in being identified with the advance guard of her own sex who, only a few years earlier, had acquiesced in her ostracism.

This imitation of Masonry appealed to Annie Besant not only because of its mystery and ritualism, but for its defiance of man-made conventions. As a baby, Annie Wood had been jealous of her brother's superior privileges. All her life, she has unconsciously carried this envy in her heart. The reckless brilliance of her career has been in part an expression of this jealousy of men in general. Co-Masonry challenged the sex solidarity of men ; it plundered their secrets ; it thwarted their efforts to escape ; it broke into one more of their arrogances.

With Annie Besant as president, it was inevitable that the Theosophical Society should lean heavily toward ritualism. A long array of subsidiary societies and rituals have blossomed over night, bloomed feverishly for six months, a year, sometimes longer, and withered away. The launching of Krishnamurti produced an epidemic



1925

THE VERY ILLUSTRIOUS VICE-PRESIDENT, GRAND MASTER  
S. ANNIE BESANT, 33°, P.M., HON. R.W.M. NO. 6 (LONDON),  
MEMBER OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL, GR. . . . INS. . . . GEN  
. . . . FOR BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH DEPENDENCIES OF THE  
CO-MASONIC ORDER WHICH SHE ORGANIZED IN ENGLAND  
AND INDIA.



1891

PROMINENT ENGLISH AND AMERICAN THEOSOPHISTS

of new organizations for every age, sex, taste, and aspiration ; Inner Groups and E.S. Groups ; Orders of S.E., and S.I., and D.I., lodges, temples, badges, sashes, regalia, jewels, pink and blue and yellow scarves, ribbons magnetized by Krishnamurti, medallions, pins, brooches, buttons—it was like looking into a kaleidoscope.

Mrs. Besant's sense of the dramatic also expressed itself in an increasing pomp. She and other Arhats, Leadbeater, Jinarajadasa and Arundale, as well as visiting Maharajahs and celebrities, were escorted to and from sessions of the annual convention by a bodyguard of cadets from the Cawnpore Theosophical College. With their salutes and salaams, their white uniforms and sashes and turbans of bright-blue and yellow, they made a spot of pageantry.

The Order of Brothers of Service is one of the most important of Theosophical organizations. Members are of three grades : probationers, novices and brothers. An invitation order, only men of marked ability are eligible. Candidates possessed of private means make over all their property to the Head of the Order, receiving a mere subsistence allowance. Some of them are assigned to work in Adyar. Others are sent out all over the world, usually to do propaganda work for the Society. They take austere vows of obedience, renunciation and service. They have an *ashram* or community house at Adyar. It resembles a monastery, and the organization follows the lines of the mediæval monastic orders.

The ceremonies attending the building of this *ashram* were characteristic of the spirit of ritualism pervading Adyar. On the full moon of Vaisak—which saw the birth of the Lord Buddha—they laid the cornerstone of *Suryashrama* (House of the Sun). Astrologers having

consulted the stars, announced that 5.47 A.M. was the auspicious moment for the ceremony. In the stillness of early morning, the Co-Masons gathered at their temple to emerge in procession, wearing the gorgeous robes of their regalia. By the light of the moon, for it was barely dawn, they marched in single file under the feathery casuarina trees. They followed a path marked by blue and white pennants to a clearing where lay a great slab of white marble. Softly they chanted an ancient psalm to a plain-song melody. Clouds of smoke issuing into the early twilight marked the head of the column where the leader swung a brazier of incense by its long brass chains. The Orator followed, bearing the sacred fire. Circling the marble slab three times, they grouped themselves in hierarchical order : in the centre, the Brother Server, the Director and Deputy Director of Ceremonies, flanked on either side by the "S.W." and "J.W." An account of the ceremony in *The Theosophist* reported that the rite of censing the stone was "beautifully performed." The stone was also sprinkled with offerings of corn, grape juice, oil and salt to the accompaniment of a ritual solemnly intoned. At exactly 5.47, Mrs. Besant, Chief Celebrant, tapped the stone with her trowel and touched it with her drawn sword, raising the hilt to her forehead. From the east the golden beams of the rising sun gave promise for the future. In the west the setting moon issued forth her silvery benediction. The marble slab gleamed white through the tree trunks as the procession wound silently out of sight, each one pausing to salute the stone with profound reverence.

Leadbeater has been a provocative influence in the ritualizing of Theosophy. An exponent of authority and hierarchies, he emphasized the ranks and grades of the pilgrim's progress along the mystic path. There was much

talk of Arhats, Rishis, Adepts, Initiates, terms more or less synonymous and meaning one who by consistent effort through many lives has achieved initiation into the mysteries of occultism and treads the high path of holiness. *The Theosophist* has printed frequent rose-coloured articles about Leadbeater's life in Australia ; his study high on a hill overlooking velvet lawns and green tree tops to the sapphire blue of Sydney harbour in its setting of encircling hills ; his ceaseless activity ; his walls lined with filing cases of names and addresses ; trays with bundles of letters waiting to be answered ; bookshelves of ledgers containing notes of his lectures. These lectures were reported to be in great demand and were attended with due circumstance, his every word being taken down verbatim by stenographers. Mrs. Besant arranged that copies of the lectures should be circulated all over the world.

English tea planters in lonely plantations, civil servants alone in the jungle are supposed to maintain their morale by dressing for dinner every night. Leadbeater followed the tradition. He arrived at evening receptions "with royal punctuality" (according to the publicity article), a distinguished figure in immaculate evening dress, wearing across the glistening whiteness of his dress shirt the broad blue satin ribbon of the Order of the Star in the East, and on the lapel of his coat its glittering insignia.

Leadbeater's exile had been a bitter blow. But Mrs. Besant had immediately been absorbed in Indian politics. No such seasonable activities awaited Leadbeater. Englishman and Oxonian, he did not find the Australian bush a congenial setting. He discovered unique ethnological features in the young Australians, showing that they were the progenitors of the new sixth sub-race.

While giving Australia a certain needed prestige, this did not offer a field for practical activity. In spite of filing cases and bundles of unanswered letters, Leadbeater was at a loose end. As usual he was devoting his attention to the sons of Theosophists. He founded numerous boys' clubs such as:—In the King's Service, and The Order of the Round Table. His title was Chief Knight, Founder of the Order, Knight Lancelot. Among the members of this little club in the antipodes he identified reincarnations of Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux and other celebrities. *The Theosophist* faithfully reported their activities ; packing boxes with toys and suits of boys' clothes for orphan asylums ; sending sick boys to the country ; distributing Krishnamurti's slender booklet. After ten years in the charmed circle with which Annie Besant always surrounded herself, Leadbeater found this pretty flat. Left to his own devices, the indelible stamp of the parson reappeared like the persistence of recessive characteristics in the law of Mendelian inheritance.

In the early days of Theosophy, Mahatma Koot Hoomi had reiterated that "Theosophy is not a religion but a philosophy." H.P.B., who hated priests and priestcraft, established a precedent of extreme austerity for Theosophical gatherings. They read minutes and followed Roberts' Rules of Order. Leadbeater metamorphosed his meetings into religious services. He introduced congregational singing and began with a hymn. The audience remained standing to chant "the beautiful invocation composed by our Protector" (this was Mrs. Besant). Selected readings followed ; an address, the collection, and Leadbeater closed the meeting by intoning the benediction in orthodox high church fashion, the audience joining in the final amen.

Articles in the Theosophical press, like straws, soon indicated a high wind from a new quarter. Jinarajadasa, always an echo of his guru, bore witness to the ritual unity of Roman Catholicism and Hinduism. Leadbeater had turned his clairvoyant faculties upon the esoteric significance of the Mass. The mysteries of Catholic ritual, such as the elevation of the host and chalice, led back he discovered to a universal symbolism which underlies and gives meaning to all man's spiritual aspirations. Sequestered in Australia, Leadbeater had reverted to the ritualistic tendencies of his youth. His clairvoyant investigation of orthodox religion produced astonishing results. Attending mass, he could actually see celestial thought-forms emanating from the altar in a slender, lambent vesicle, becoming suffused with rosy colour as the service advanced, swelling out to fill the chancel, the entire church, floating through the roof and walls to descend like a dew of benediction over the entire neighbourhood. An alienist might interpret this as a significant symbolic fantasy.

Leadbeater immediately linked up this new field of exploitation with his dearest preoccupation, the career of Krishnamurti. What more appropriate than to provide his protégé with an official religious organization all in proper running order, awaiting the moment when the spirit of the Lord Christ should descend into Krishnamurti's body and begin his mission on this earth. With all the world, and all the ages of religious thought from which to choose, Leadbeater's fancies, like a homing pigeon, flew back to the associations of his childhood.

Although indifferent to most women, Leadbeater had proved as susceptible to the hypnotic power of Madame Blavatsky's blue eyes as Annie Besant, who did not like women either. In 1884, under Madame's strange spell,



Leadbeater sailed off to India with her. The very day they landed in Ceylon, he let her hustle him into Buddhism to annoy some Christian missionaries. "I was revenged," wrote Madame triumphantly. Nominally, he had clung to his Buddhism ever since. He came, however, of that conventional English stock which has made the British Empire the great power it is by virtue of the conviction that England and her *mores* set the standard for all the rest of the world. The determination now possessed him to capture the apostolic succession of some already established Christian sect, instead of, as he might so readily have done, establishing his own Theosophical religion by a Mahatma-via-Leadbeater fiat. The stumbling-block was the apostolic succession. As a young man, he had looked up to the hierarchy of bishops as direct intermediaries between himself and God. Now, an old man of seventy, he had assumed as a Theosophical Initiate and Arhat a far more pretentious position than a mere English bishop. But he could not shake off his reverence for the apostolic succession.

He secured the co-operation of J. I. Wedgwood, former head of the English section. Wedgwood had been a friend and admirer of Leadbeater's for years and was of a sympathetic type. Casting about for a church with ancient traditions, they espied the Old Catholics, one of a number of small sects which have split off from the Roman Catholic church. Its bishops claim the true apostolic succession and its world membership numbers about 20,000. Wedgwood induced an Englishman named Willoughby to consecrate him as bishop. He promptly sailed for Australia and laid hands on Leadbeater.

Leadbeater assumed the title of bishop in July, 1916. The October number of Mrs. Besant's *Theosophist* carried

her endorsement of the movement which suggests how promptly Leadbeater was able to get what he wanted. With the weight of her semi-divine authority, Mrs. Besant recommended three fields of activity to her followers : Theosophical educational work ; Co-Masonry and—"the little-known movement called the Old Catholic, with the ancient ritual, with unchallenged Orders, yet holding itself aloof from the Papal obedience. This is a living Christian church which will grow and multiply as the years go on, and which has a great future before it. It is likely to become the future Church of Christendom 'when He comes' . . . fortunate are those who, in the days of their weakness are intuitional enough to seize their significance [i.e. of these three movements] and to strengthen them with their adhesion. A dozen years hence, readers who remember these words will realize their truth."

It was an odd time for such an article. The western world was stripped for conflict. Men Theosophists were joining armies, Red Crosses, Y.M.C.A. corps ; women Theosophists were rolling bandages and making pyjamas for the wounded. Annie Besant herself was absorbed in Indian politics. It would not have occurred to her to write this article. She wrote it at Leadbeater's dictation. The Theosophical press teemed with high church phraseology : Leadbeater defending the immaculate conception, Wedgwood and Jinarajadasa on transubstantiation and the absolution of sins. Describing the literal transformation of bread and wine during consecration Leadbeater insisted that only priests tracing a direct descent from the apostolic succession could make it happen. His book, *The Science of the Sacraments*, illustrated with coloured diagrams, minutely explains this mélange of clairvoyance, Rosicrucianism, occultism and Christian ritualism.

Religion's most transcendental moments are reduced to sizes, shapes and colours like a line of merchandise.

In spite of world-wide ambitions for the spread of his adapted religion, Leadbeater discreetly remained in Australia. He sent Wedgwood on tours of the western world. J. I. Wedgwood is a member of the distinguished English family famous, among other things, for its blue and white pottery. With his big frame he is a powerful-looking man. He has thickened up with middle-age, but has an imposing presence.

Most English and American Theosophists are recruited from Protestant rather than Catholic families. Universal brotherhood constituting the first of their three objects, many of them have learned to tolerate everything except the Church of Rome which remains for them the Scarlet Woman. Annie Besant has a touch of this bias. Every time that a new scandal burst over their heads, both she and H.P.B. before her have always insisted that it was Jesuit persecution.

The anti-papist element protested violently against the new religion. Theosophy was a protest against the deadening influence of church forms and ecclesiastical authority. H.P.B. hating priestcraft, had warned them against this very danger when she wrote that every attempt similar to Theosophy had failed because it degenerated into a sect, set up hard and fast dogmas and lost the vitality of living truth.

Not only the anti-papists, but Theosophists accepting the writings of H.P.B. as inspired were antagonized by the new cult. With prophetic foresight, Madame had written in *Isis Unveiled* "The present volumes have been written to small purpose if they have not shown that . . . the apostolic succession is a gross and palpable fraud." Leadbeater's theory that priests and bishops had the power

to grant absolution of sin proved another exasperation. In a clairvoyant study of sin, he observed that the sinner made a twist in the ether, tied a knot in his aura. The properly consecrated priest controlled a current of divine power which Leadbeater could see flowing down his arms. In pronouncing absolution, the priest directed this stream on the sinner's twist, flattening it out as neatly as a magnet picks up iron filings. But, asked the Theosophists, how reconcile this with the basic Theosophical doctrine of *Karma*—that every ego must work out his own salvation on his own responsibility? As H.P.B. phrased it, "Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself, the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment." Her words have a simplicity and power which modern Theosophical writings lack and which command respect for the strange, tempestuous old woman.

By 1918, the murmur of protest was swelling to an angry chorus all over the Theosophical world. In the United States, Dr. H. N. Stokes, an outspoken Theosophist with a gift for pungent phrases, opened the attack in his bi-weekly *The O.E. Library Critic* in October, 1917. Circumstances played into the opposition's hands. That summer, a year after Leadbeater's assumption of the title of bishop, the Archbishop of the Old Catholics in Great Britain publicly repudiated Wedgwood. It developed that he was not even a member of the old Catholic Church, and that his supposed consecration had been performed by a man who had previously been unfrocked for sex perversion by both the Church of England and the Old Catholic Church. The succeeding Lambeth Conference denied the credentials of the entire English branch of the Old Catholic Church, thus making Wedgwood's consecration triply invalid. Leadbeater's critics

recalled his insistence that in performing Mass, only a priest with a flawless family tree back to the apostolic succession could make the host luminous. For bastard dissenters nothing happened. And yet Leadbeater's clairvoyance had failed to detect the bastardy of Wedgwood's claims to the succession. If Leadbeater was embarrassed, he gave no sign. Six months after their repudiation, *The Theosophist* announced that the Theosophical group of Old Catholics had adopted the name, The Liberal Catholic Church. With amazing complacency, Annie Besant met the Society's agonized protest with renewed endorsements of the cult.

It should be borne in mind that Annie Besant has spent the latter years of her career in an isolation and an atmosphere of exotic reverence which would imperil the sanest perspective. At Adyar all the residents of the compound call her Mother, love her idolatrously and obey her every command like children. For most of the men working under her, she is the source of all inspiration, the personification of the ideal. Through the years, all the stronger personalities have been eliminated. No one in her entourage approaches her intellectually. Her associates' humility is such that most of them do not even sit in her presence. They bring her their problems, ask her advice, receive their orders standing.

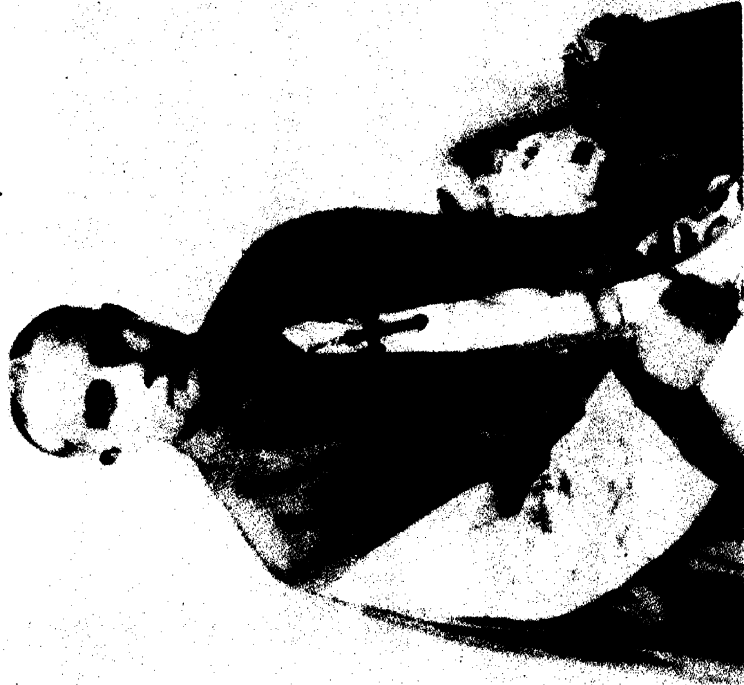
The result has been to intensify her natural autocracy. It has exaggerated the effects of all her qualities, both for good and for evil. One of her most attractive traits has been an impulsive generosity. She has always responded quietly but lavishly to calls for help. Accepting everything at face value, she insists on believing that everyone tells her the truth. The result has been typical of old-fashioned charity. No remonstrance can change her determination to help a person, nor does she admit



J. I. WEDGWOOD IN FULL CANONICALS OF  
"BISHOP-COMMISSARY ON THE CONTINENT  
OF EUROPE" OF THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC



C. JINARAJADASA, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE  
THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN LIBERAL CATHO-  
LIC VESTMENTS AND HIS ENGLISH WIFE



GEORGE S. ARUNDALE, N.A., LL.B., D.LIT.,  
IN LIBERAL CATHOLIC VESTMENTS



RUKMINI ARUNDALE,  
THE "WORLD MOTHER"

afterwards that she was deceived. With the years, she loses interest and gradually cuts adrift, but in her own good time. One of her most uncritical and oldest admirers told of a young Indian student in London whom she had befriended. Everyone else knew that he was a scoundrel, but Annie Besant continued to respond to his appeals with twenty pounds for this and thirty pounds for that. "She is more interested in her letters from that worthless scamp than in anything else she receives," commented her old friend bitterly.

Her impetuous energy has always handicapped Annie Besant as an executive. Growing older, she has indulged her aversion to delegating authority. In spite of her cosmopolitan life and its broad demands, she has never outgrown provincialisms more appropriate to the wife of the Vicar of Sibsey. Travelling constantly, she has never availed herself of a personal maid. Year after year, she still insists on packing and unpacking her own luggage. Even at Adyar, she depends on two men as her personal servants, probably because of her preference for having men about her in whatever capacity.

She supervises details of her meetings as closely as when she was an unknown young speaker in the 'seventies. Theosophical officials receive her long letters of directions: for the meeting of September — at — Hall, they should have 500 copies of pamphlet A, 1,000 each of B and C, plenty of photographs and the current literature. If it is an all-day conference, with intervals for luncheon and tea, she takes up the details of catering.

She works incredible hours, but she does not know how to save herself. Rising at five, she has her devotions out of the way and is at her desk at seven in the morning. She has never yielded to the general practice of sleeping through the heat of the Indian day, but works straight



along until her nine o'clock dinner, and after that, late into the night. The manual labour of writing her books and articles fills many hours. At the time of her Jubilee in 1924, a bibliography of her fifty years of literary work was published. It contained 372 titles of books and pamphlets. This does not include her extensive editorial work on magazines, weeklies and dailies.

In addition to the drudgery of such an output, she has further chained herself down with the burden of answering all her correspondence. In spite of her great volume of writing, she does not use a typewriter, but writes letters, articles, books, speeches in her firm, unhurried hand. She does not even have a competent secretary. When she is in England, lady Theosophists answer her telephone and serve as a prickly hedge between her and the thousands who would suffocate her with attention. Hour after hour she sits, long after midnight, a solitary figure, bending over her desk in the silent flat, writing letters in her bold, clear hand to her worshipful followers all over the world. It is not that she resists change. She goes out to meet modern inventions with youthful eagerness. Owner of one of the first automobiles in India, she learned to drive when she was over sixty and for years was her own chauffeur. In 1927, her eightieth summer, she made an aeroplane tour of Europe, visiting thirteen countries and delivering fifty-six lectures in twenty-one days.

Her isolation combined with her conviction of her high rank as a Theosophical Arhat has also exaggerated Annie Besant's natural tendency to an intellectual arrogance. She is a genius, towering head and shoulders above her associates. But that does not mean that she has no peers. They tell many stories that show her loss of a sense of proportion. A few years ago, happening to meet Radhakrishnan in a railway carriage, they travelled together for

several hours. Radhakrishnan, the most celebrated philosopher of modern India, recently was honoured with the appointment to deliver a series of lectures at Oxford University. With the utmost assurance Mrs. Besant expounded Hindu philosophy to him and defined Yoga.

The most pathetic result of her isolation is that it puts her at the mercy of the unscrupulous wirepullers in her organization. As so often happens, the more conscientious of her associates are outdistanced by the shrewder politicians who are willing to trade upon her susceptibility to flattery. When, as has frequently occurred, this has involved her in inconsistencies and sudden reversals of policy, she can always fall back on messages from the Masters ; she had misunderstood them, what they really meant was so and so. Her ability to persuade herself of the truth of anything she wants to think has been a treacherous gift.

It would be kinder to believe that during the incubation period of the Liberal Catholic Church, Mrs. Besant was engrossed by her Indian politics and failed to realize what was happening to her Society. Separated by all the miles of ocean that lie between Australia and India, Leadbeater was able to penetrate her isolation and maintain his authority over Annie Besant. It is one of the mysteries which make an outsider wonder if, after all, there is something in occultism. Leadbeater's achievement is the more spectacular because he was forcing on Mrs. Besant in her old age something against which she had stood out all her life. No woman may assist in the holy mysteries of Leadbeater's cult. Bishops, priests, deacons, choristers, thurifers, acolytes, all are men or boys. It is as exclusively male as Masonry. For his own purposes, Leadbeater has maintained an extraordinary intimacy with one woman, Annie Besant. Other women he has ignored. It is said

that he used to wear gloves so that women seeking to shake hands with him, or brushing past him might not deplete his psychic reserves. In recent years he has slept in a copper-sheathed room to protect his aura from unfavourable thought-waves.

Annie Besant had dedicated the first speech of her career to the equal rights of women ; she had organized Co-Masonry in England and India ; she had attacked the discriminations against Indian women ; at sixty-five, as the first woman elected president of the Indian National Congress, she had focused the attention of the world upon herself. And yet she could turn from presiding over that Congress to accept Leadbeater's fiat that the particular type of force disseminated during the Holy Eucharist is not adapted to work through the female organism !

To this defiance of her cherished principles Annie Besant sweetly turned the other cheek. Wherever she goes, she has accepted invitations to speak in Liberal Catholic churches, thereby bestowing upon them the invaluable boon of her approval, an endorsement worth hundreds of members and thousands of pounds per year.

Although she had no position or title in the Church, she was even permitted to join the sacerdotal processions. Speaking at St. Mary's in London, she marched solemnly through the vestry door and down the aisle in all the pomp of ecclesiastical pageantry. She was preceded by boy acolytes bearing lighted candles and thurifers spilling clouds of incense. Six priests in birettas and cassocks and socks of purple silk supported her. Bejewelled bishops followed her, terrific in their towering mitres and episcopal amethysts. Annie Besant conformed to all the elaboration of high church ritual. She crossed herself with holy water, bowed and genuflected and received the Sacrament. She was surrendering to the identical signs

and symbols whose rejection, half a century before, she had made the cornerstone of her career. Forty years earlier, when she became a Theosophist, her friend Stead wrote, "She will die in the odour of sanctity within the pale of the Catholic Church."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE THRESHOLD OF DIVINITY

1919-1922

GARLANDED in jasmine and marigold by her Indian devotees, Annie Besant set sail for England in May, 1919. It was the first time she had been back since she won her fight before the Privy Council to retain the guardianship of Krishnamurti. She had stayed in India throughout the war because she feared that if she left, the Government would not let her return.

Her homecoming after six years was not a happy one. In India she had been thrilled and absorbed by the exigencies of politics. Beyond writing occasional endorsements, she had not paid much attention to the Liberal Catholic Church. In India the Theosophists were not pushing it. The non-Christians had at once become suspicious that the entire Theosophical movement was only another camouflage for Christianity.

On her arrival in England, Annie Besant found everything at sixes and sevens. It was not only the agonized Scotch Presbyterians and Ulster Protestants whom she had to placate. She was confronted with more menacing scandal than ever before, a deeper, more revolting mire than the Leadbeater charges. Of the six Liberal Catholic priests in London, four were in difficulty with the police on charges of sexual perversion. They had been mixed up in a raid on a notorious Piccadilly restaurant. One of them had made a confession not only involving the other three priests but also "Bishop" Wedgwood who was at

the time with Leadbeater in Australia. Loyal Theosophical parishioners had smuggled some of the priests out of England. Gauntlett, one of the two priests not involved, was about to resign. In a long talk with him, Mrs. Besant showed herself very sympathetic. She told him that Wedgwood had behaved so badly on his last visit to Adyar that she would never have him there again. Gauntlett allowed himself to be persuaded not to resign. Mrs. Besant said that she would need him to help her, if and when in the future it became possible to clean the Church of such abuses. After waiting for several years until he was convinced that nothing would be done, he made a sworn statement giving details of this interview and of the scandalous conditions in the priesthood.

Attempting to smooth things over, Mrs. Besant gave a confidential Sunday afternoon talk to E.S. members only on "Black Magic and Sex Perversion," explaining away reflections on the Liberal Catholic Church. She excoriated those tools of the black magicians responsible for this scandal. Wedgwood had compromised himself so indiscreetly that she resolved that he must resign. The inner circle were concerned lest he fall into the police net should he suddenly return to England. Warning him by letter or cable would be compounding a felony, and if discovered, would make them liable as participators in his crime.

Fortunately T. H. Martyn, head of the Australian section, was in London and on his way home. An active Theosophist of thirty years standing, he was organizer and leader of the largest single lodge in the Society. Leadbeater had lived with him and his wife in Sydney for four years. He was a quiet, responsible man, unquestionably convinced of the divine authority of Annie Besant and of Leadbeater. Mrs. Besant commissioned him to notify Jinarajadasa to secure Wedgwood's

resignations from the Theosophical Society, from the E.S., and from Co-Masonry.

Martyn delivered his message. Jinarajadasa protested that it was impossible to put Wedgwood out of the Society—he was an Initiate. Martyn assured him that he was mistaken. Mrs. Besant had just told him that the man was not an Initiate ; he could not be, for Mrs. Besant had also said that she had confirmed the facts of his gross immorality. Initiation is perhaps the most secret phase of the Theosophist's web of mystery. It is so secret that not even E.S. members know just who are Initiates, but any confusion in the minds of either Annie Besant or Leadbeater was inconceivable. Martyn and Jinarajadasa looked at each other horror-stricken. The issue of immorality paled into insignificance before the menace of this discrepancy. Leadbeater had not only said that Wedgwood was an Initiate, but he had distinctly said that Annie was present at the initiation.

For thirty years these two men had accepted the infallibility of these Theosophical Arhats. Jinarajadasa, who had grown up under Leadbeater's influence, accepted their divine inspiration as a primary law of the universe. Beyond the pain of personal disillusionment he recognized the disastrous effect on the membership of raising such a question. A few hours later, Annie Besant received the following cable : " Sydney, Dec. 17, 1919, to Besant, Adyar. Martyn reports you said Wedgwood not Initiate. Leadbeater asserts you were present at initiation. Am most anxious members' sake there should be no fundamental divergence between you and him on such important occult matter. . . . Do you mean that since you have no recollection you cannot assert Wedgwood Initiate, but do not wish to be quoted as saying that he is positively uninitiated."

For once, Annie Besant dropped her ceaseless activity. Shutting herself in her room, she sat for long, lonely hours over this message. She faced one of the most painful dilemmas of her life. One of the two, she or Leadbeater, must admit that they were mistaken, they had forgotten, misunderstood—something. She as the president of the Society stood in the more conspicuous position. Yet she knew that there was no use in appealing to Leadbeater. He was with Jinarajadasa in Australia. It was really his cable. That insidious sentence beginning “Do you mean . . .” was his answer. She knew what she had to do and she did it. She cabled Jinarajadasa, “Brother’s [Leadbeater’s] statement enough, accept fact, cancel message sent.”

In spite of Wedgwood’s vindication as an Initiate, it was deemed advisable that he should resign until the storm blew over. The press in both Australia and London were making a sensation of the case. Wedgwood kept away from England. On a beautiful estate in Holland, given him by a Dutch widow, he established European headquarters of the Liberal Catholic Church, surrounding himself with young priests and curates. His first act was to build a church, expensively equipped for ultra-ritualism. Scarcely was the place completed when, struck by lightning, it burned to the ground. The disaster served as a reminder that Leadbeater’s church in Australia had been struck by lightning three times. Luckily, it was of stone so that it could not be entirely destroyed. In view of the privileged position of Liberal Catholic priests as conductors of divine currents, it seems peculiar that they should be singled out for such unsparing violence by the gods of lightning and thunderbolt. After an interval of two years, Wedgwood was quietly eased back into his old connections. To-day, in England and on the continent,



he is a powerful force in Theosophical politics. Leadbeater, sixteen years earlier, had been exiled from the Society for twenty-eight months. Wedgwood was out for twenty-seven months.

Whether or not Mrs. Besant resented Leadbeater's lack of chivalry, she continued to load him with honours, appointing him Head of the E.S. in Australia to succeed Martyn. The latter had been in disfavour ever since he carried her ill-omened message about Wedgwood to Jinarajadasa. Full-page pictures of Leadbeater permeated *The Theosophist*, sometimes three or four in one number. He appeared in full bishop's regalia, mitre, crozier, watered silk vestments, gold chains, jewelled crosses, episcopal rings. Annie Besant wrote one eulogy after another. He was, she told her readers, attached to her by a special occult tie, unbreakable in this or in any future life. Delegating to him her powers as Outer Head of the E.S., she signed a blank check in his favour when she wrote, "That which he says and does, I endorse."

Once again, her loyalty was to be severely tested. Leadbeater, in spite of his advanced years, was sitting on the lid of another barrel of dynamite which exploded within a twelvemonth. Martyn had been mulling over discrepancies ever since his return to Australia. His E.S. pledge of unquestioning obedience had shielded him for many years from such a day of reckoning. He could no longer escape his doubts. Annie Besant's cable to cancel her message did not alter his memory of what she had said. On May 20, 1921, he wrote a long letter, laying his perplexities before her. Leadbeater and some of his boy pupils had lived with the Martyns from his arrival in 1914 until an outbreak of scarlet fever forced them temporarily to move. Once out, Mrs. Martyn would not allow Leadbeater to return.

With a simple trustfulness, impressive in a man of Martyn's calibre, he expressed his devotion to Annie Besant ; for thirty years he had regarded her as his spiritual leader, his soul's friend. Because she recommended Leadbeater to him, he had forced himself to overlook the most compromising appearances. His wife had not sympathized with his reverence for Leadbeater. She had reluctantly told him why she would not permit Leadbeater to return to their house. He had been obliged to concur in the exclusion because of scandalous conditions which he briefly summarized. But even yet he was groping for some explanation, some miracle that would restore his precious faith of many years. " Will you tell me where I have gone wrong ? " he pleaded, " do not be so unjust as to believe I want to make trouble . . . I leave it to you in your wisdom to show me the way out of the tangle. It is not easy to go back on the grooves formed by thirty years of thinking and working."

Martyn was destined to bitter disappointment. In a circular to the Society, Mrs. Besant referred to Martyn's letter, which had been made public, as containing " infamous accusations, none of which I believe, against a number of persons whom I know to be incapable of the conduct charged. I do not discuss them ; no decent person would mention them. . . ."

This blanket denial was the only specific answer made to these charges. For the rest, Mrs. Besant and the Liberal Catholic dignitaries have maintained silence, except to say that as martyrs they have been directed by the Mahatmas not to defend themselves against the prurient minded. The fact is that Mrs. Besant and some of her associates brought several libel suits in the early days of this sequence of scandals, all of which were lost or

withdrawn. They realize that they have nothing to hope from the courts. Only silence is left.

The Australian situation was turning very ugly. Martyn, a prosperous business man, commanded the respect of his community. The Sydney Lodge of 800 members, restless over gossip about Leadbeater and outraged by the treatment of Martyn, threatened revolt. Confident of her power to pour oil on troubled waters as she had done so many times in the past, Mrs. Besant in the spring of 1922 attended the Australian convention. Her efforts were not successful. Toward the end of May, the scandal culminated in a police investigation of Leadbeater and his associates. The opposition found themselves in a difficult situation. Taking the boys involved into court as witnesses against Leadbeater would leave a stigma upon them for life. The police did not find evidence to warrant taking criminal action against Leadbeater. The Inspector-General, however, stated that sufficient had been disclosed to justify Leadbeater's being kept under observation, and the Head of the Criminal Investigation Department, who was chairman of the Inquiry, reported, ". . . I am of the opinion, however, that there are good grounds for believing him to be a sex pervert."

Aggressively, Mrs. Besant turned on the Sydney Lodge. Cancelling their charter, she caused a suit to be brought to force them to surrender their property, valued at about £12,000, to the Theosophical Society. The suit was later compromised for a nominal sum. In spite of all efforts, the situation was getting out of hand. The publicity had been merciless, with front page articles in the leading papers for days. The English press was picking up the story. In London the weekly paper *Truth* published several scathing articles. Years ago, Bradlaugh's colleague in Parliament, Henry Labouchere, had

been editor of this paper. The present leader writer did not mince words. Describing Leadbeater as "a sexual pervert of the most abandoned type" and "a horrible old beast," he said that Theosophists were asking themselves whether they had not better drop overboard the "bunch of bastard bishops" imposed on them by Mrs. Besant.

In the Antipodes, reading the clippings of these attacks, Annie Besant paused when she saw the title of the paper—*Truth*. Did her memory carry her back forty-two years to the night of that gay little supper party in the George at Northampton when she and Aveling had helped the editor and her dear friend Bradlaugh to celebrate their election to Parliament? All three of the men were long since dead. She alone was left. What a long way she had come since then!

## CHAPTER XXVI

### RISHIS, ROMANISM AND REBELLION

1922-1931

It was a case of Rishis, Romanism and Rebellion. An opposition movement called the Theosophical Loyalty League spread rapidly through Australia, Canada, the United States and England, followed by a Back-to-Blavatsky movement. Once again the United States was the active centre of revolt. The two chief rival organizations in that country, the Point Loma Theosophical Society and the United Lodge of Theosophists, which had never been able to compete with Mrs. Besant, absorbed many disaffected members.

Meeting the situation in the United States with unprecedented severity, Mrs. Besant suspended all activities of the E.S. for one year. This apparently proving an effective measure, a few years later she temporarily suspended the organization all over the world. To the E.S. devotee whose emotional life is bound up in idealization of Annie Besant such a step is drastic punishment. Giving no other evidence of concern, and in the face of a hailstorm of resignations, Mrs. Besant imperturbably turned her attention to ambitious projects in every corner of the globe.

For some years, the United States had been singled out for special anthropological distinction. The California sunshine which produces such excellent tennis players was also, it appeared, outstripping the rest of the world in its effects on the evolution of the new sixth sub-race.

## RISHIS, ROMANISM AND REBELLION 329

Statements of Dr. Hrdlicka, anthropologist at the Smithsonian, were quoted, although the Doctor may scarcely have been prepared for the interpretation given to his words. Psychological tests of children in the California schools were reported to show a startling proportion of child prodigies. Theosophists all over the world turned their eyes toward California.

With all her travelling, Mrs. Besant had not visited the United States since 1909. But now she must see the cradle of the new sub-race. En route to California, she spoke again in the large cities, her managers charging £200 per lecture. At eighty, she still commanded the prices asked by royalty and other headliners. Reaching the Pacific Coast, Mrs. Besant too succumbed to the California sunshine. Cancelling her engagements across the rest of the world, she tarried for some months. Perhaps the high-speed California realtor deserves some of the credit, but before she left, acting on "the orders of her Master," she had bought 465 acres in the Ojai Valley, near Santa Barbara. Planning a centre for training the children of this new sub-race, she issued appeals for the Happy Valley Foundation Fund.

In Australia, the Order of the Star was building an amphitheatre. On the scale of a stadium, it was a measure of preparation for the vast audiences anticipated as gathering in the near future to hear the World Teacher. In India, Mrs. Besant turned her attention back to politics. After an autumn in Simla, lobbying the Indian legislature, she was elected secretary of a convention appointed to draw up a constitution for India. To meet the English criticism that the Indians had never submitted a concrete proposal of what they wanted, she had proposed this constitution. It was an excellent idea. Unfortunately, having lost her former intimate contacts with the years, Mrs.

Besant was unable to secure politically important Indians on her committee. Her three years of intensive work in drafting a constitution were not wasted. Once again, she was serving as a pioneer. Following her lead, the Indians promptly drew up a constitution on their own account, under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Nehru Constitution has been an important factor in the recent political situation in India. Even though indirectly, Mrs. Besant had made another contribution to India's political destiny. In 1925 Annie Besant bore her constitution off to London. As the Commonwealth of India Bill, her henchmen introduced it before the House of Commons, after which, it slid gently into a Parliamentary Nirvana.

By way of one more world movement, she inaugurated the Young Theosophists, an effort to make contacts with the youth movements sweeping post-war Europe. While apparently giving all her attention to these varied and ambitious projects, she was attempting to make a tandem out of those two rearing colts, the Order of the Star and the Liberal Catholic Church.

Fortunately the year 1925 was the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Theosophical Society, an opportunity to divert attention by a general beating of drums. For months the Theosophical press resounded with preparations for Adyar's Jubilee Convention. Thousands of delegates assembled from all over the world. The stage setting was perfect—southern India in December, golden sunshine, turquoise blue skies, avenues of mahogany trees, a feathery canopy of casuarinas, the mysterious gloom of spreading banyans. Mrs. Besant presided, a stately presence against this exotic setting. With the self-abnegation of a mother, she gave the star part to her handsome young protégé, the promised vehicle of the

Lord Maitreya. Krishnamurti was now thirty years old. He had developed into a quiet, unassuming young man ; nice manners, fastidious in his dress, an excellent profile. But he was painfully shy, lacked stage presence and showed an aversion to crowds and hero worship.

In her accounts of the Jubilee for the Theosophical press, Annie Besant announced that the Lord Maitreya—the Christ—had chosen that occasion to mark his acceptance of his chosen vehicle, and taking possession of the body of Krishnamurti, had spoken through his lips. It transcended the Benares visitation of sixteen years earlier. Pulsing with waves of exquisite rose colour, a pillar of golden mist veiled his body. Overhead shone great globes of light, too dazzling to look upon. As on the earlier occasion, until they heard the excited gossip, many of those present were unaware that anything extraordinary had happened.

They all agreed that Krishnamurti had stood on a dais under the great banyan tree. His audience of 3,000 delegates sat on the ground at his feet. Middle-aged men and women, chiefly women, they found compensation for the frustrations of life in an emotional relationship to this young divinity with the brown eyes and beautiful straight nose. Krishnamurti was telling them about the World Teacher. "We are all expecting Him," he said. "He will be with us soon. He is with us now. He comes to those who want, who desire, who long." Hesitating for an instant in response to the mute adoration and hope of the thousands at his feet, he continued, "I come to those who want sympathy, who want happiness, who are longing to be released. I come to reform and not to tear down ; not to destroy, but to build." The change of pronoun from the third to the first person was the significant event. Describing this moment, Mrs. Besant wrote,

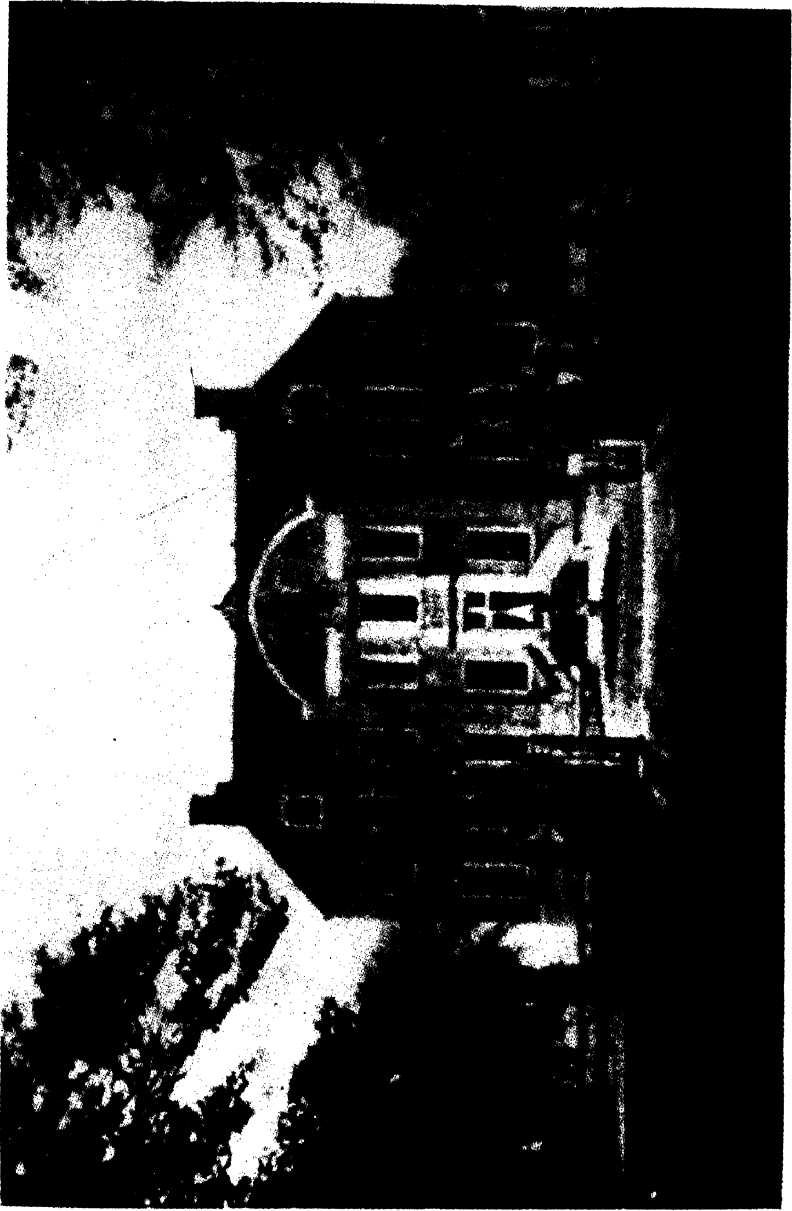


“The speaker started, stopped a moment, and then another voice rang out through his lips, a voice not heard on earth for 2,000 years. . . . Some only saw a great light, some saw the Christ Himself, all heard the Voice.”

There were more material tokens of divine beneficence. A young Dutchman, the Baron van Pallandt, was moved to present to the World Teacher his magnificent ancestral estate in Holland ; Castle Eerde, 6,000 acres of wooded parks, and at its heart a stone castle two centuries old surrounded by double moats where goldfish as big as carp swam lazily in the sun. Mrs. Besant built a tent city accommodating 3,000 campers on a corner of the estate. Every year the Order of the Star in the East would gather in this camp during the first week of August to sit at the feet of their Messiah.

The following summer the campers were thrilled when Annie Besant told them that she had been ordered by the Head of the Occult Hierarchy to announce that the coming of the World Teacher was at hand ; and she proceeded to describe the scene at Adyar the previous winter. The event, she said, marked the final consecration and acceptance of the body chosen long before. Her audience who had been looking forward to this event for years sat in tense ecstasy. One woman becoming hysterical had to be led away. On the wave of emotion thus released, Annie Besant announced the launching of three World Movements ; a World Religion, a World University and a World Revival of the ancient mysteries. Under these more ambitious titles may be recognized the three movements which she had recommended to her followers nine years earlier as the Old Catholic Church, Theosophical educational work and Co-Masonry.

To her puzzled disappointment, Krishnamurti was not responding to the fond preparations made for him by



CASILE FERDE, GIVEN TO KRISHNAMURTI BY A DEVOTEE, THE BARON VAN PALLANDT.



1929

ANNIE BESANT AND HER PROTÉGÉ, KRISHNAMURTI, AT  
THEIR ANNUAL CAMP MEETING IN HOLLAND.

*By courtesy of the Star Publishing Trust, Ommen, Holland*



AMERICAN HEADQUARTERS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS. BUILDING ERECTED IN 1928.

Leadbeater and herself. He would have nothing to do with the Liberal Catholic Church and showed no interest in Co-Masonry. He did not like regalia and ritual and said so. His reluctance to play his part in the perpetual pageantry she at first attributed to an adolescent shyness. But at thirty, he was as retiring and difficult as ever. Annie Besant swept confidently ahead on the principle that, by committing him to a maze of detail, his ultimate surrender became inevitable. It all seemed to her so marvellously planned, so elaborate and yet so simple in its consummation. Krishnamurti, the physical vehicle of the Christ, had only to assume his rightful position as supreme pontiff of the Liberal Catholic Church. In a few years, he, the World Teacher, working through his World Religion would build up a spiritual World Empire more stupendous than anything ever conceived by the human mind.

For two more summers Krishnamurti, slender and timid, watched her from the back of the platform. Pulsating vitality and confident ambition, Annie Besant held the camp congresses enthralled. She was empowered to announce, "at the definite command of the King whom I serve" that the World Teacher would have Twelve Apostles. The time was now ripe to make public the names of seven. The first two were, of course, herself and Leadbeater. The next three were Jinarajadasa, Arundale and one of Leadbeater's Australian pupils. The sixth a Hindu girl still in her teens, Rukmini Devi, had become the wife of George Arundale about the time that he was made Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church. The last of the seven apostles Mrs. Besant announced with special impressiveness; he was one very dear to all of them, for he had borne his crucifixion before the seal of Arhatship was set upon him, Bishop J. I. Wedgwood. The five men

of this group were all bishops or priests in the Liberal Catholic Church. It was a forceful effort to bring the two cults into sympathy.

Each year, with Krishnamurti beside her, a personable but mute Messiah, Mrs. Besant presided over the camp and their followers increased in numbers and ecstasy. Four hundred campers in 1924, had increased to 2,500 in 1927. If Mrs. Besant ever regretted that Krishnamurti was inarticulate, she gave no sign. It had certain advantages. His beautiful profile, his fastidious dress, his excellent photographs—the faithful bought them by thousands—his impeccable manners, instilled by the British aristocracy, this was a sufficient contribution. She and the other six apostles were proud and happy to do the rest.

Suddenly, irremediably this intoxicating bubble burst, punctured by none other than Krishnamurti himself. For several years she had been forced to realize that her protégé's refusal to lend himself to the pomp and ritual which she loved was not all shyness. With the glittering circumstance of her Adyar court and Leadbeater's episcopacy behind her, it seemed incredible that she who had managed so many men, should be unable to dominate a gentle young Hindu who owed her everything. The story goes that he asked her not to come to the camp at Ommen in 1927 ; it embarrassed him to speak in her presence, he could manage better alone. She dismissed his protests. She would not miss Ommen for anything. But she felt an uneasy premonition.

Standing beside the evening campfire, a slim, romantic figure with that look of sadness in his eyes so irresistible to his thousands of women followers, Krishnamurti for the first time spoke to his disciples from his heart. As soon as he began to think for himself, he said, he had

found himself in revolt. It was his purpose to spread that spirit of revolt which led him to the Truth. For sixteen years they had been worshipping a picture which had not spoken ; now that the picture was coming to life, perhaps they would not like it as well as before. He warned them that they must get rid of all their jargons and systems and philosophies if they hoped to find happiness and liberation. He insisted on the futility of rituals and forms. They must free themselves of badges, ceremonies, dogmas, orders, regulations, before their souls could find the peace which passeth understanding. In revolt against all ecclesiastical authority, he even dissolved the Order of the Star of which he was Head and which after Mrs. Besant's patient building for sixteen years numbered 30,000 dues-paying members.

"A belief is purely an individual matter," he told them, "and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallized. No organization can lead man to spirituality. It becomes a crutch, a weakness, a bondage and must cripple the individual and prevent him from growing, from establishing his uniqueness which lies in the discovery for himself of that absolute, unconditioned Truth."<sup>1</sup>

It was a dramatic gesture to prove his sincerity, throwing away 30,000 annual dues. But such is his followers' devotion that many of them will undoubtedly continue their contributions with increased fervour. Beside which, he can afford to be somewhat reckless in money matters. Annie Besant's genius for publicity has laid in this young man's lap nearly £200,000 worth of property with which to begin his career. He has established five trusts to take financial charge of his estates in Holland, India,

<sup>1</sup> "The Dissolution of The Order of the Star," a statement by J. Krishnamurti, published by The Star Publishing Trust, Ommen, Holland.

Australia and California. He will continue to deliver his find-your-own-truth message, and to hold annual camps, May in California, August in Holland, December in India. With organizations, hierarchies, ritual he has nothing to do.

It was a staggering blow. Serenely Annie Besant rose to the occasion. When, at the close of the congress, the press men crowded about her for an interview, she met them imperturbably. She had been proclaiming the coming of the World Teacher for many years. She now changed her message to "He has come." He was her Superior; as such it was not for her to question his methods, but to accept them as coming from a greater wisdom. She had preserved appearances. More than that was involved, however.

Returning to India for the winter, the following spring she set sail for England to take up her usual crowded schedule. As August approached, for once her courage failed. The previous year nothing could prevent her going to Ommen. This year of 1928 she took refuge in illness as a means of escape. Catching a heavy cold, she cancelled all engagements and sailed back to India looking weak and spent. Since that illness, she has never been the same. She came out of it quite definitely an old lady. Only two other events in her life caused her comparable suffering; her revulsion from her marriage and her disillusionment by Dr. Aveling. Krishnamurti's disaffection seemed even harder to bear for she realized that it was made in good faith and under the same compulsion that had driven her to leave home, husband, children—a necessity to be true to the inner self.

Krishnamurti's revolt had put Mrs. Besant and Leadbeater in a most embarrassing position. She had announced the World Teacher's apostles, his wishes and future policies "by direct command" of the supernatural

powers. By their authority, she had endorsed the Liberal Catholic Church and announced that it would "be the very heart of the teaching that the Christ will give." And his first words were to spurn the apostles, repudiate the church and utter solemn warnings against ritualism and authority. Because she and Leadbeater loved ritual and pomp, they had never stopped to think that this young boy might turn out to be a different sort of person. Not that there had been any conscious charlatanism in Annie Besant's propaganda for the World Teacher. She believed every word she said. Whatever compromises she may have had to make with former standards during such early exigencies as the Judge case, the scars had long ago healed and been forgotten. At eighty as at fifty, the dispassionate critic may concur with Gladstone in allowing Mrs. Besant's sincerity, even though at the expense of some of her other pretensions.

■ In the quarter century that Annie Besant has been its president, the Theosophical Society has reflected like a mirror the shifting not of her own but of Leadbeater's interests ; first clairvoyant research ; then his boy-Messiah ; lastly ritualism. It is interesting that Krishnamurti who looks no more than a pleasant, well-meaning young man, should at the outset turn upon Leadbeater and defy him as Annie Besant has never done. Krishnamurti's repudiation of the instruments provided by divine command reflected on the accuracy of those commands. It did more than jeopardize Leadbeater's pretensions as a clairvoyant. It sharply defined the issue between the teachings of Leadbeater and of Krishnamurti. Only the most fatuous mentality could reconcile the two. It is an interesting commentary, however, that there are Theosophists who attempt even this.

It is not surprising that, having defined the issue,



Krishnamurti should have rather the best of it. In spite of all the glamour that Annie Besant has managed to spread about him, Leadbeater is an old man. His ritualism is also old. It has not even the novelty and prestige of the Oxford movement which swept England with a brief passion for ritualism when he and Annie Besant were children. His rival Krishnamurti is young and attractive. He has that delicate romantic appeal so much more provocative to the modern woman than the old cave man virility, as has been evidenced by the popularity of Valentino and the Prince of Wales.

Krishnamurti's message is new too, not original ; but it follows the trend of the times, away from authority and toward individualism. Instead of the flowing ecclesiastical periods of the Leadbeater style, Krishnamurti uses crisp phrases : " Ceremonies are useless ; throw them away." Leadbeater and Mrs. Besant committed themselves to the World Teacher so irrevocably that it is a delicate matter picking flaws. But Leadbeater cannot resist whittling at the edges. He now says that the Lord Maitreya has occupied Krishnamurti's body once or twice for he himself saw it ; he implies that most of the time Krishnamurti is just a very ordinary young Hindu and woefully mistaken in his advice about throwing away ceremonials. He says that Krishnamurti is talking not to the sophisticated Theosophical audience, but carried away by ideas of popular appeal he is trying to get a response from the pachydermatous public !

Annie Besant maintains an admirable equilibrium between the two. Like the typical mother, her heart yearns over both the old man and the young in their inevitable rivalry. She is always trying to reconcile them and make them see that they both mean exactly the same thing and that it is only a matter of using different words. One

remembers her similar efforts to patch matters up between Bradlaugh and the Socialists.

Krishnamurti's followers accept his words with idolatrous fervour. Since he does not approve of organizations and dissolved the Order of the Star, they also resign from the Theosophical Society as the obvious next step. The Liberal Catholic Church which seems to inherit with its ritualism an instinct for playing politics makes the most of this disruptive tendency and exhorts its followers to uphold their great Arhats, Annie Besant and "Bishop" Leadbeater. The result has been to split the Society in two. It was in no condition to stand such a strain. Revulsion against Catholicism seems to have roused more widespread revolt than the long succession of scandals. The latter could always be interpreted as persecution.

Between these three disruptive influences, scandals, anti-papist revolt and splitting into two factions, the Society has fared badly in the last decade. It has lost, among other leaders, B. P. Wadia, the well-known Parsi who had shared internment with Mrs. Besant in 1916. Most of the seceders took with them a considerable following. Numerous lodges have cancelled their charters. An entire national section, the Czecho-Slovak, with over 1,000 members withdrew.

While Annie Besant has alienated many of her strongest followers, she maintains a firm hold on the Society through the E.S., with its pledge of unquestioning obedience. To administer this machine, she has surrounded herself in Adyar with executives of the spell-binder type. They heap upon her and upon each other an incredible extravagance of adulation. Arundale's famous letter to the Inner Group which precipitated them out of the Central Hindu College was only a mild beginning. Arundale is probably the favourite in speculations

concerning Mrs. Besant's successor, with Jinarajadasa as next choice. Both men are ex-pupils of Leadbeater's and both are leading Liberal Catholics. Arundale has the added advantage of a girl-wife who is the World Mother and the personal representative of the Virgin Mary, beside being one of the few women Arhats in the world.

The curious episode in connection with this young lady illustrates the never-never land atmosphere of Adyar. Leadbeater had assumed that the priests of his new cult would remain celibates. Suddenly Arundale, a bachelor nearing fifty, married a beautiful young Hindu girl of sixteen. This was about the time of Krishnamurti's repudiation of the seven apostles and the Liberal Catholic Church. Annie Besant immediately announced the existence of a World Mother who would have especial charge over womankind. She was none other than this young Hindu girl, Rukmini Arundale. The Theosophical press, which had been treating the female sex rather shabbily, blossomed with pictures of Virgins and Madonnas and articles on the blessed privilege of child-bearing.

The exotic atmosphere at headquarters filters down through the membership. Adyar's toleration of the continuous onslaughts of abuse in press, pamphlets and books is embarrassing to explain. One successful libel suit would silence such attacks. Mrs. Besant's contention that she ignores these assaults by order of the Masters is not consistent with the record of unsuccessful lawsuits.

The subtle demoralization of the Society has affected not only its morale but its growth. Year after year the Secretary reports five to seven thousand new members. And year after year the total figures remain about the same. The average duration of individual membership is less than seven years. In 1921, at the beginning of the

last revolt, the total world membership was 40,000. In 1929, it was 43,000. In those nine years, they had secured over 50,000 new members, but their total gain in membership was only 3,000.

The finances of the Society are correspondingly precarious. So many of the English members had defaulted their dues that in 1929 the section was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Australian section was forced to assess its members to pay off debts. Most of the important gifts of recent years have been made to the two subsidiary organizations which are becoming so lusty that they may annihilate the parent Society.

In pleasant contrast to so much of conflict and strife in Theosophical affairs, Mrs. Besant in these latter years received an honour which gave her great pleasure. Her old Central Hindu College, when it was taken out of Theosophical control, had been merged with the Hindu University of Benares. This University conferred its first two doctor's degrees upon the Prince of Wales and Annie Besant. It was a distinction which appealed to her love of forms and titles. On all occasions, she uses the letters D.L. after her name, and it is customary in Theosophical circles to address her as Dr. Besant.

Although she still ranges far afield, the programme of her year has settled into a routine. She spends her winters in the tropical warmth and adulation of Adyar. Every summer she sails away to England to follow much the same round : a series of Sunday evening lectures at Queen's Hall ; a series of conferences on behalf of Home Rule for India in Caxton Hall ; some exclusive vegetarian dinners at the homes of the more distinguished Theosophists ; one or two appearances before the rank and file ; a birthday party at the Friend's Meeting House on Euston Road ; a garden party in St. John's Wood—

familiar ground, this quiet, old-fashioned suburb of London. It was in St. John's Wood that she was born. It was to her imposing home on Avenue Road that she brought H.P.B. and her colony of chelas.

Now and again, with the zest of her eternal youth, she breaks through all restraints and is off on another spectacular adventure, such as her aeroplane tour of Europe, or the summer of 1929 when she lectured in Queen's Hall every Sunday night in June, crossed the Atlantic in July for a week's convention in Chicago and was back in Holland for the opening of Krishnamurti's camp on the first of August.

Queen's Hall is always well filled for her Sunday night lectures with an audience of 2,500 of whom at least two thirds are women. The platform, banked with flowers, is conspicuously bare, no chair, no table, no presiding officer. She never uses notes. She has no need of a glass of water or a place to sit. A chairman would be superfluous for Annie Besant. Her meetings begin on the minute. Punctuality is still her hobby, in spite of many years in India where everybody is always late.

As Annie Besant comes through the arched doorway to the platform, she pauses and pressing the palms of her hands together on a level with her chest, Indian fashion, she repeatedly salaams the audience. She is still a remarkable orator, amazing for a woman of her years. But, since that poignant illness of 1928, she has never regained her old magic. She speaks deliberately, fluently, her voice pitched in a conversational tone which carries clearly. Making no gestures, she stands on the edge of the platform, her hands resting lightly on a brass railing. Her figure has thickened and her shoulders are stooped with many years of bending over her desk. She wears a white sari, several gold chains and a string of crystal beads. Her

spectacles give her a kindly, benignant look, and she carries no suggestion of the ascetic or fanatic. Under the electric lights, her short curly white hair has a luminous quality, like white clouds in a sunny sky. Her face is remarkably free from wrinkles, her colour is good, her eyes have the fire of a woman in her prime. The only signs of age are the sagging muscles of her neck and chin, a drawn look across her mouth and the claw-like thinness of her hands. She always wears her wedding ring and, on a forefinger, H.P.B.'s magical intaglio.

At the close of her speech, again salaaming her audience she walks off the platform, a lone, impressive figure. Through it all she has an air suggestive of clinging fervidly to this lecture platform round which the fire and passion of her life have centred. Perhaps she feels that so long as she holds her audiences with her oratory she may ignore the years. The contemporaries of her early career are dead. She has outlived them all. Her husband died in 1917. He never left the village of 800 people where long ago she had secured a living for him. A recluse, shut up in his study, he spent his life poring over ancient parish records and mathematical problems. One morning his old housekeeper found his room empty, his bed untouched. She knocked on the door of his study, and hearing no answer, timidly looked in. His dead body was lying across the hearth where he had fallen during the night. When the Vicarage was put in order for his successor, everything was found neglected, the garden overgrown with weeds, gates and doors off their hinges ; on the walls the same gloomy Victorian wallpaper that had been put there fifty years earlier to welcome the young Vicar and his wife.

All that is far in the past. Annie Besant lives in the present. Her son and daughter are both in London and

attend all her lectures. The daughter resembles her mother and at sixty has something of her vitality. The son, an eminent accountant, looks like an old-fashioned squire out of a Dickens story. He wears his grey hair a bit long, and curling up about the edges. His cheeks are plump and his eyes twinkle kindly through the glasses which he wears tilted far forward on his nose. During conventions, Annie Besant is on the platform all day long. Her children and grandchildren are proud of her and conspicuously attentive. They are the centre of reverent but intense interest as they gather round her on the raised platform during recess and have luncheon or tea together. It makes an effective family tableau. From the back of the hall Annie Besant's worshippers watch them as they might study an Italian primitive depicting the Holy Family.

Late in the evening, after the last word has been spoken, a lane is made through the ranks of Annie Besant's humble, adoring followers. Down the long aisle she walks, with firm tread, leaning lightly on her son's arm, followed by her daughter, her pretty young granddaughters and their husbands. Her motor carries her swiftly through the quiet London streets to her Kensington flat, across the square from Brompton Oratory. Back in her room, seated at her desk, she writes hour after hour, late into the night, answering the myriad letters for ever fluttering in upon her like great white snowflakes, threatening to bury her under their insistent multitude.

CHAPTER XXVII  
INDIAN SUMMER

CONFLICT is the salt of life. It is the theme of most stories and plays. It was conflict that made Annie Besant's life dramatic.

She was, first of all, a remarkably capable person. In whatever by-paths her interests led, she at once became a leader. She burdened herself with too much detail to be a brilliant executive, but she had a genius for promotion and publicity and the gift of tongues. She roused the interest of the multitude and secured their money and support for first one cause and then another, proving that it was her magic charm and not the cause which mattered. Her beauty was a help. Annie Besant had much more than beauty—talent, generosity, amazing capacity for hard work. But her beauty helped. A beautiful woman obtains an initial hearing from individuals and from crowds that her plainer sister rarely achieves.

These were all outward-turning qualities which made her contacts with the world. At cross purposes with these was her strange, inward-turning self, her vein of mysticism. She had the typical symptoms of the mystic. Lives of the famous devotees, from fifteenth-century saints to Mary Baker Eddy and Aimee McPherson are differing versions of a similar theme. As little girls, they all had hallucinations and heard voices. There was something queer about their marriage ; usually, they were forced into a loveless match by ambitious parents. As they entered the period of religious consecration, they ruthlessly cut themselves loose from all previous obligations,



abandoning husband and children. Their prayers and expressions of devotion, often strongly erotic, suggest that they sought to satisfy a normal need of love and emotion by substituting religious ecstasy. Annie Besant fulfilled all these conditions. She married of her free will, but it was a loveless match, entered into, she has explained as a device for drawing closer to the holy church.

Even more serious in its effects was the conflict between the natural integrity of Annie Besant and the compromises demanded of her by occultism. Over forty when she met H.P.B., she was a more than middle-aged woman, with fifteen years of public life behind her, of making decisions and standing in the limelight. It might reasonably be supposed that her character was formed and her compasses securely set for the ethical direction which she proposed to follow. There was an unmistakable ring of confidence in her farewell speech to the Secularists in 1891 ; " You have known me in this hall for sixteen and a half years. You have never known me to lie to you. My worst public enemy through the whole of my life never cast a slur upon my integrity." Three years later, when she came to write her *Autobiography*, one misses the honest fearlessness of that declaration in her humble suggestion of the epitaph " She *tried* to follow Truth."

Temptation had presented itself in a peculiarly insidious form. Disappointed in her first groping effort to find an emotional haven within the church as a Vicar's wife, she had swung to the opposite extreme of materialism. Thwarted again, she had swung blindly back into an ultimate extreme of mysticism. Her emotions were for ever outwitting her excellent mental equipment and leading her astray. Infatuated by Madame Blavatsky, she dropped her guards and let herself be carried along insidiously, making herself believe each step was true, into a land of

such utter make-believe that she lost all bearings of is and is-not. A sense of humour might have helped. H.P.B. laughed and joked and used subterfuges, but she did it with her tongue in her cheek. Perhaps it was because she knew what she was doing that H.P.B. could stoop to her absurd and often blundering devices and yet maintain her equilibrium.

Annie Besant has never been able to laugh at herself or to ease over situations with timely levity. In her controversy with Martyn of Australia, she made much of his having in a public speech referred to the Mahatmas in terms so coarse that she hesitated to quote them as they would soil her pages. He had called the Mahatmas male mermaids. A Theosophist with a better memory pointed out that Mr. Martyn was merely quoting H.P.B. !

"My child, you are proud as Lucifer," was H.P.B.'s shrewd comment on Annie Besant's besetting weakness. It was that pride with its Victorian background which necessitated her always being in the right, always justifying herself in a tone of high morality and Tennysonian idealism. As each crisis loomed before her, she had first to convince herself that her motives were purely altruistic. Gradually, the contagion of this devious practice spread until, in all sincerity, she could make herself believe anything.

The results of this process have given Leadbeater his amazing influence over her. Annie Besant has paid a heavy price for her companionship with Leadbeater. The extravagance of the price proves its sinister power. Her defence of Leadbeater has alienated a majority of the more thoughtful and representative members of the Society and must have frightened away many more. Although she had never even as a young girl tolerated criticism from anyone, she has permitted Leadbeater to

turn her into a mere figurehead. He has literally been her evil genius. In the thirty-six years of their intimate association, she has achieved only one of the brilliant feats which studded her earlier career like diamonds. It is significant that this event, her election as president of the Indian National Congress, took place under the one period in those years when she was temporarily freed from his sinister influence.

In spite of all the tumult and conflict of Annie Besant's life, her impetuous mistakes, her blind pride that made it impossible to admit and profit by them, the first half of her life and her brief resurgence in Indian politics represent positive contributions to the civilization of our day. Happily, amid the frustrations of her adventures in occultism, she was recently honoured by the conventional world with a dazzling tribute in recognition of her enduring achievements as a nineteenth-century pioneer. It was during the summer of 1924, the fiftieth anniversary of her meeting Bradlaugh and joining the staff of *The National Reformer*, the anniversary also of her maiden speech, dedicated a bit tremblingly to the emancipation of her sex, that long ago speech on "The Political Status of Women."

Some of her old friends took Queen's Hall for the occasion, an auditorium on Regent Street in the heart of London where, for four decades, she has held her audiences spellbound. The hall was crowded on this night with admirers. In the front rows sat delegates from 500 organizations, representing almost every branch of progressive work in the world. She had been personally associated with more than 100 of these organizations. Gathered to do homage to this woman whose career had begun half a century earlier were leaders of the most advanced groups of our own day.

Glowing messages and congratulations, letters, telegrams, cables were read from Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister ; Viscount Willingdon (who succeeded Lord Irwin as Viceroy of India) ; Viscount Haldane, Lord High Chancellor ; Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer ; Sir Robert Baden-Powell ; the leaders of the Indian Nationalist movement, both Hindu and Muslim and many others. There was a distinguished list of speakers. George Lansbury, later Home Member of the British cabinet, described their early acquaintance in Mrs. Besant's School Board days, and paid tribute to her indomitable courage and hopefulness. Margaret Bondfield, the first woman member of the British cabinet, recalled Mrs. Besant's leadership of the match strike. Calling her the stormy petrel of the 70's and 80's, Miss Bondfield added, " I want to say particularly how wonderfully she has been a forerunner of many things that we take now in our national life as a natural course." Earl de la Warr said that for as many years as he could remember, he had looked up to Mrs. Besant as a source of inspiration. Several other Members of Parliament and eminent Indians, distinguished in social and civic work, added their praise.

After the speech-making, a long procession of men and women passed before the guest of honour, each one laying at her feet their baskets and bouquets of flowers, tokens from their many organizations. Rukmini Arundale, on behalf of the Federation of Young Theosophists, garlanded her with roses. She came forward to the edge of the platform to reply, a stately figure with white hair, white robes, the single spot of colour the crimson roses of her young Theosophists. In spite of her fifty years on lecture platforms, she was so deeply moved that there was

a hushed pause of several minutes before she could speak. Her reply was brief, simple, sincere. In that moment of high emotion, her first words testified to the reality—for her—of Theosophic visions. She looked down happily into the smiling faces. In a voice that trembled for an instant, she told them that for her, the hall had been more thronged with invisible than with visible friends—spirit figures who had come to give a word of cheer to an old comrade whom they had left behind.

Annie Besant has spent her whole life fighting, “a focus of agitation.” These pæans of applause from a world which she had defied but never ceased to value overwhelmed her. She responded with her unfailing grace and charm. As she turned to leave the platform, the audience sprang to their feet to clap and cheer. Her face was white with emotion. Her lips trembled. Leaning on the arm of a friend, she whispered, “It would have been much easier for me if it had been a hostile crowd.”

T H E E N D

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

A BIBLIOGRAPHY of Mrs. Besant's writings up to 1924, published by the London Theosophical Society contains 390 titles, classified as follows :

- 326 Works by Annie Besant.
- 25 Collaborations.
- 21 Edited or introduced by Annie Besant.
- 12 Periodicals edited by Annie Besant.
- 6 Translations.

In the following list, only her more notable works, and those referred to in the text are given. To indicate the rate at which she was turning out work at different periods, the figure in parenthesis following each title gives its serial number in an approximately complete bibliography.

Because of the large number of books consulted in preparing this biography, it seemed impracticable to give the complete list. In selecting the following titles, no attempt is made to cover the field, but only to indicate some of the high spots.

In many cases, especially of controversial pamphlets, no publisher's name is given. They are all to be found in the British Museum.

For convenience of the reader, I have arranged the titles of reference works under the following headings :

- By Annie Besant.
- Periodicals Edited by Annie Besant.
- Other Periodicals.

Biographical

Attacks on Annie Besant.

Early Years.

Charles Bradlaugh.

Family Limitation.

Edward B. Aveling.

Socialism.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Theosophy.

India.

BY ANNIE BESANT

- 1873 ON THE DEITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH. (1) An enquiry into the Nature of Jesus by an Examination of the Synoptic Gospels. By the Wife of a Beneficed Clergyman. Edited and Prefaced by Rev. Charles Voysey.  
London : Thomas Scott.
- 1873 "ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN." (2) On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth. Part II. A Comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Three Synoptics. By the Wife of a Beneficed Clergyman. Edited and Prefaced by Rev. Charles Voysey.  
London : Thomas Scott.
- With the exception of some trivial short stories for *The Family Herald*, these two pamphlets mark Annie Besant's literary début. Written on her return to Sibsey, after meeting Mr. Scott in London, their publication caused a domestic crisis.
- 1875 ON THE NATURE AND EXISTENCE OF GOD. (11).  
London : Thomas Scott.
- It was the manuscript of this pamphlet which Annie Besant carried with her when she called on Charles Bradlaugh, immediately after their first meeting at the Hall of Science in August, 1874.
- 1875 ESSAYS BY MRS. BESANT. (12).  
London : C. Watts, 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street. This modest, paper-covered volume was Mrs. Besant's first book. It contained her maiden speech, "The Political Status of Women," her second speech, "The True Basis of Morality," and several of her serial articles in *The National Reformer*.
- 1877 GIORDANO BRUNO. (19).  
London : C. Watts.
- Appearing in *The National Reformer* in 1876, this



was the earliest edition of Annie Besant's numerous accounts of the famous martyr. After becoming a Theosophist, she completed her identification with him on the theory that she herself was Bruno in an earlier incarnation.

1877 **MY PATH TO ATHEISM.** (23)

London : Freethought Publishing Company.

Fifteen pamphlets written for Thomas Scott, the Theist, by Annie Besant who, long before they were finished, had become an Atheist.

1877 **THE LAW OF POPULATION : ITS CONSEQUENCES AND ITS BEARING UPON HUMAN CONDUCT AND MORALS.** (24)

London : Freethought Publishing Company.

A 48 page pamphlet, which began to appear serially in *The National Reformer* within a few weeks of the close of the Knowlton pamphlet trial. Mrs. Besant wrote it as a more modern and acceptable substitute for the earlier pamphlet. An American edition (Asa K. Butts, publisher) appeared in 1878. It was translated into German, Italian, French, Swedish and Dutch. At least 175,000 copies were sold in England alone before 1891 when Mrs. Besant, having become a Theosophist, withdrew it from circulation.

1878 **IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE.** (25) Queen's Bench Division, June 18, 1877. *The Queen v. Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant.*

London : Freethought Publishing Company.

Verbatim report of the trial for publishing the Knowlton pamphlet. Annie Besant's brilliant speech of 40,000 words takes up the greater part of the book.

1879 **MARRIAGE : AS IT WAS, AS IT IS, AND AS IT SHOULD BE.** (29) With a sketch of the life of Mrs. Besant, edited by Asa K. Butts.

New York : Asa K. Butts, 19 Dey Street.

Published in response to the general interest aroused in the United States by the Knowlton pamphlet trial and Mrs. Besant's **LAW OF POPULATION.**

- 1879 **THE STORY OF AFGHANISTAN; OR, WHY THE TORY GOVERNMENT GAGS THE INDIAN PRESS.** (30) A Plea for the Weak against the Strong.  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
The first title relating to India.
- 1881 **LIGHT, HEAT, AND SOUND.** (38) A Hall of Science Manual.  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
The first of a series of 12 books and manuals on scientific subjects. The series ended abruptly in 1882.
- 1883 **THE CHRISTIAN CREED ; OR, WHAT IT IS BLASPHEMY TO DENY.** (55)  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
"End of Part I," appeared on the last page, but Mrs. Besant never finished the series.
- 1883 **HISTORY OF THE GREAT FRENCH REVOLUTION.** (56)  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.
- 1885 **AUGUSTE COMTE : HIS PHILOSOPHY, HIS RELIGION AND HIS SOCIOLOGY.** (60)  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
Written during the early months of Mrs. Besant's association with Bradlaugh, this biography had appeared serially in *The National Reformer* in 1875.
- 1885 **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.** (61) With portrait.  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.
- 1885 **LEGENDS AND TALES.** (65) Young Folks' Library.  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
Mythological legends retold for young people. The two tales were the stories of the martyrs, Bruno and Hypatia, reprinted from Mrs. Besant's magazine, *Our Corner*.
- 1886 **WHY I AM A SOCIALIST.** (85)  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.  
Mrs. Besant had joined the Fabian Society in the Spring of 1885.
- 1887 **WHY I DO NOT BELIEVE IN GOD.** (90)  
London : Freethought Publishing Company.

1888

— — — — —  
 The only year from 1873 to the present time when Mrs. Besant published nothing.

1889

WHY I BECAME A THEOSOPHIST. (91)

London : Freethought Publishing Company.

The sequence of the last three titles, beginning alike, ending so far apart and bridging that unique year of silence is significant.

1891

1875 to 1891. A FRAGMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY. (97)

London : Theosophical Publishing Society.

Annie Besant's farewell speech from the Freethought platform, August 30, 1891, when she affirmed the authenticity of the Mahatma messages received since the death of Madame Blavatsky.

1891

THEOSOPHY AND THE LAW OF POPULATION. (100)

London : Theosophical Publishing Society.

Mrs. Besant's LAW OF POPULATION having been withdrawn, this pamphlet recommended continence and the ascetic way of life. Appearing two months after the death of Madame Blavatsky, it suggests a final funeral oblation to the memory of the dead.

1981

A SHORT GLOSSARY OF THEOSOPHICAL TERMS. (101)

Compiled by Annie Besant and Herbert Burrows.

London : Theosophical Publishing Society.

1891

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND H.P.B. (102)

London : Theosophical Publishing Society.

An impassioned defence of Madame Blavatsky and the authenticity of her phenomena.

1893

ANNIE BESANT. (112) An autobiography.

London : T. Fisher Unwin.

1893

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND H. P. BLAVATSKY. (115)

Surat : Victoria Press.

Two essays in defence of H.P.B. by Mrs. Besant and William Q. Judge, the latter's entitled, "The Esoteric She."

- 1895 **THE CASE AGAINST W. Q. JUDGE.** (124)  
No publisher.
- 1895 **EASTERN CASTES AND WESTERN CLASSES.** (125)  
Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
One of Mrs. Besant's earliest publications in India ;  
a tactful approach to the subject of social reform.
- 1895 **THE MEANS OF INDIA'S REGENERATION.** (131)  
Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1895 **THE PLACE OF POLITICS IN THE LIFE OF A NATION.**  
(137)  
Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1895 **IN THE OUTER COURT.** (138)  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
Five lectures delivered in London in August, 1895.  
This is one of Mrs. Besant's standard works.
- 1897 **THE ANCIENT WISDOM : AN OUTLINE OF THEOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS.** (144)  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
Probably the most widely read of Mrs. Besant's Theosophical writings.
- 1898 **ESOTERIC CHRISTIANITY.** (156)  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1899 **THE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR.** (160) Some Lessons  
from the Mahabharata for the Use of the Hindu Students  
in the Schools of India.  
Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1899 **THE DOCTRINE OF THE HEART.** (161) No. 4 of the  
Lotus Leaf Series.  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
A compilation from the letters of her guru, G. N.  
Chakravarti.
- 1904 **SANATANA DHARMA.** (178) An Advanced Text Book  
of Hindu Religion and Ethics.  
Benares : Board of Trustees, Central Hindu College.
- 1904 **THEOSOPHY AND THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY.** (188)  
London and Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.

- 1905 OCCULT CHEMISTRY. (192)  
Benares and London : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
Reprinted from *Lucifer*, November, 1895. A 13 page pamphlet giving the results of Mrs. Besant's early efforts in clairvoyant science under C. W. Leadbeater's direction.
- 1905 THOUGHT-FORMS. (195) By Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater. With many plates and diagrams.  
London and Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
The first of several collaborations.
- 1906 INDIA'S AWAKENING. (198)  
Benares and London : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1907 LAST DAYS OF THE PRESIDENT-FOUNDER [Colonel Olcott] AND MRS. BESANT'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS. (201) With portraits of H. S. Olcott and Annie Besant.  
Adyar : The Theosophist Office.  
Mrs. Besant's first publication from Adyar as president of the T.S.
- 1907 LONDON LECTURES OF 1907. (202)  
London and Benares : Theosophical Publishing Society.  
One of the best known of her collections of lectures.
- 1907 H. P. BLAVATSKY AND THE MASTERS OF WISDOM. (203)  
London, Benares and Adyar : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1908 AN INTRODUCTION TO YOGA. (207)  
Benares and London : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1909 OCCULT CHEMISTRY. (208) A series of Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements. By Annie Besant, P.T.S., and Charles W. Leadbeater.  
Adyar : Theosophist Office.
- 1910 L'ETERE DELLO SPAZIO. (212) By A. Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.  
Genova : A. Ciminago.
- 1911 THE EMERGENCE OF A WORLD RELIGION. (215)  
Adyar : Theosophist Office.  
Part of the early propaganda for the World Teacher.

- 1913 **MAN : WHENCE, HOW AND WHERE.** (241) A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation. By Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.  
Adyar and Benares : Theosophical Publishing House.  
An account of the previous incarnations of a number of prominent Theosophists, carrying them back, far beyond the period of the fourth root race, 600,000 B.C. to early days of the Moon Chain.
- 1913 **GIORDANO BRUNO : THEOSOPHY'S APOSTLE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.** (244)  
Adyar : Theosophist Office.  
This was the subject chosen by Mrs. Besant for her lecture at the Sorbonne, June 15, 1911.
- 1913 **MAN'S LIFE IN THIS AND OTHER WORLDS.** (248)  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1913 **WAKE UP, INDIA.** (254)  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.  
Lectures delivered in Madras, Oct. Nov., 1913, which marked Mrs. Besant's entrance into Indian politics.
- 1914 **INDIA AND THE EMPIRE.** (256)  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society.
- 1915 **HOW INDIA WROUGHT FOR FREEDOM.** (265) The Story of the National Congress.  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1915 **INDIA : A NATION.** (266) A plea for Indian Self-Government. With a foreword by C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar.  
London : T. C. and E. Jack.  
Circulation of this book in India was forbidden by the British Government.
- 1915 **SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR INDIA.** (269)  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1916 **HOME RULE.** (274) Articles from *New India*.  
Adyar : Commonweal Office.
- 1916 **THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDIA ACT.** (281)  
Adyar : Commonweal Office.
- 1917 **THE BIRTH OF NEW INDIA.** (284)  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.

- 1917 **MRS. BESANT'S FAREWELL MESSAGE, TO MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN INDIA.** (292)  
Bombay : S. G. Banker.  
Written on the eve of Annie Besant's internment.
1918. **THE CASE FOR INDIA.** (296)  
London : The Herald.  
Mrs. Besant's Presidential address at the Indian National Congress of 1917.
- 1918 **MEMORIES OF PAST LIVES.** (299)  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1918 **CRITICISMS OF THE MONTAGU-CHELMSFORD PROPOSALS OF REFORM.** (307) Three papers by Annie Besant and C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar.  
Adyar : Commonweal Office.
- 1920 **GANDHIAN NON-CO-OPERATION, OR, SHALL INDIA COMMIT SUICIDE ?** (331) A Vade-Mecum against Non-Co-operation for all Indian Patriots.  
Madras : New India Office.
- 1921 **BRITAIN'S PLACE IN THE GREAT PLAN.** (332)  
London : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1922 **THE FUTURE OF INDIAN POLITICS.** (343) By Annie Besant, D.L., Fellow of Benares University and Life-Member of the University Court, Fellow of the National University.  
Adyar and Benares : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1925 **LIVES OF ALCYONE.** By Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1926 **INDIA BOND OR FREE.**  
London : G. P. Putnam.
- 1926 **WORLD PROBLEMS OF TO-DAY.**  
London : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1927 **THE NEW CIVILIZATION.**  
London : Theosophical Publishing House.
-

## PERIODICALS EDITED BY ANNIE BESANT

THE dates given are for the years when she was associate or sole editor of the journals named :

1881-1887 *The National Reformer*, a weekly journal, London.

1878-1889 *The National Secular Society's Almanack*, an annual. London.

1883-1888 *Our Corner*, a monthly magazine. London.

1888 *The Link*, a weekly journal. London.

1889-1907 *Lucifer*, a Theosophical monthly. London.

In 1897 its name was changed to *The Theosophical Review*.

1907 to date *The Theosophist*, a Theosophical monthly. Adyar.

1908 to date *The Adyar Bulletin*, a Theosophical monthly. Adyar.

1919 to date *New India*, a daily newspaper, later changed to a weekly. Adyar.

and a miscellany of weeklies and monthlies which have lasted from one to five years, including : *The Commonweal*, *United India*, *The Young Citizen*.

As Outer Head of the Esoteric School with branches on every continent, Mrs. Besant has also edited a variety of secret journals and bulletins, which are carefully guarded from the public. Of late years, with the mounting complexity of Theosophical politics, Mrs. Besant has given these secret organs increasing attention as her most important means of controlling her world-wide personal following.

## OTHER PERIODICALS

*Agnostic Journal*. London : W. Stewart Ross.

*Borderland*. London : W. T. Stead.

*Christian Socialist*. London.

*Church Reformer*. London : Stewart Headlam.

*Commonweal*. London : William Morris.

*Family Herald, The*. London.

*Freethinker*. London : G. W. Foote.

*Herald of the Star*. London : J. Krishnamurti.



- Justice.* London : H. M. Hyndman.  
*Labour Elector.* London : H. H. Champion.  
*Nineteenth Century Magazine.* London.  
*Occult Review.* London  
*O. E. Library Critic,* Washington, D.C. : Dr. H. N. Stokes.  
*Progress.* London : G. E. Foote.  
*Quest, The.* London : G. R. S. Mead.  
*Republican, The,* London : George Standring.  
*Secular Review and Secularist.* London : G. J. Holyoake. Later  
 Charles Watts and G. W. Foote.  
*Star, The.* London : T. P. O'Connor.  
*To-day.* London.  
*Truthseeker.* New York.

## BIOGRAPHICAL

- 1879 Asa K. Butts, Sketch of the Life of Mrs. Besant, Prefatory to American edition of her MARRIAGE : AS IT WAS, AS IT IS, AND AS IT SHOULD BE. New York, Asa K. Butts.
- 1885 Annie Besant, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES. London : Freethought Publishing Company.
- 1890 W. T. Stead, PORTRAITS AND AUTOGRAPHS. London : *Review of Reviews*.
- 1891 W. T. Stead, "Annie Besant." London : *Review of Reviews* for October, 1891.
- 1892 W. T. Stead, CHARACTER SKETCHES OF MODERN CELEBRITIES. London : J. Haddon and Co.
- 1893 Annie Besant, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. London : T. Fisher Unwin.
- 1894 William E. Gladstone, "True and False Conceptions of the Atonement." In the *Nineteenth Century*, September, 1894. (Mrs. Besant's reply was published in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, 1895.)
- 1913 Susan E. Gay, LIFE WORK OF MRS. BESANT. London : Women's Printing Society.

- 1917 Bepin Chandra Pal, MRS. ANNIE BESANT. A Psychological Study.  
Madras : Ganesh.
- 1917 Anonymous, MRS. ANNIE BESANT. A sketch of her Life and Services to India.  
Madras : Natesan.
- 1924 Annie Besant, D.L., QUEEN'S HALL JUBILEE DEMONSTRATION, July 23, 1924. Report of Speeches.  
London : Published by Secy. Jubilee Demonstration.
- 1924 G. B. Shaw, George Lansbury and Others, DR. ANNIE BESANT, FIFTY YEARS IN PUBLIC WORK.  
London.
- 1924 Theodore Besterman, BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ANNIE BESANT.  
London : Theosophical Society.
- 1927 Theodore Besterman, THE MIND OF ANNIE BESANT.  
London : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1929 Geoffrey West, THE LIFE OF ANNIE BESANT.  
London : Gerald Howe.

## ATTACKS ON ANNIE BESANT

- 1886 W. P. Ball, MRS. BESANT'S SOCIALISM, AN EXAMINATION AND AN EXPOSURE.  
London.
- 1889 G. W. Foote, MRS. BESANT'S THEOSOPHY.  
London : Progress Publishing Company.
- 1894 E. Edmund Garrett, ISIS VERY MUCH UNVEILED.  
London : *Westminster Gazette*.
- 1894 K. R. Sitaraman, ISIS FURTHER UNVEILED, OR, SOME MORE LIGHT ON THE PRE-W. Q. JUDGE MAHATMAS.  
Madras.
- 1894 Anonymous, WHO IS MRS. BESANT AND WHY HAS SHE COME TO INDIA ?  
Madras : Christian Literature Society. (The Christian Missionary Organization.)
- 1894 Anonymous, INDIA, PAST AND PRESENT.  
Madras : Christian Literature Society.

- 1894 John Murdoch, LL.D., **THE THEOSOPHIC CRAZE ; ITS HISTORY : THE GREAT MAHATMAS HOAX : HOW MRS. BESANT WAS BEFOOLED AND DEPOSED : ITS ATTEMPTED REVIVAL OF THE EXPLODED SUPERSTITIONS OF THE MIDDLE AGES.**  
Madras : Christian Literature Society.
- 1894 Kaliprasanna Kavyasidara, **MRS. BESANT IN INDIA : HER STRATAGEM AND FOOLISHNESS EXPOSED.**  
Calcutta : Secular Press.
- 1895 E. Adams, **THE PLOT AGAINST THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.**  
London : Cox, Windsor House.
- 1897 Former Associate of the S. P. R., **THEOSOPHY : THE HISTORY OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY IMPOSTURE : THE NEW RELIGION OF MRS. BESANT.**  
London : W. R. Bradlaugh, Anti-Infidel Tract Depot, King's Cross. (Brother of Charles Bradlaugh.)
- 1908 **The Theosophic Voice.**  
Chicago.
- 1909 Joseph H. Fussell, **MRS. ANNIE BESANT AND THE MORAL CODE.**  
California.
- 1910 Joseph H. Fussell, **MRS. ANNIE BESANT AND THE LEAD-BEATER ADVICE.**  
San Diego, California.
- 1910 Joseph H. Fussell, **INCIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT.**  
Point Loma, California.  
(Fussell was a prominent member of the Point Loma Theosophical Society.)
- 1912 J. N. Maskelyne, **THE FRAUD OF MODERN "THEOSOPHY" EXPOSED.**  
London : Routledge.
- 1913 Bhagavan Das, **THE CENTRAL HINDU COLLEGE AND MRS. BESANT, THE RISE OF THE ALCYONE CULT.**  
Chicago : Divine Life Press.

- 1913 Eugene Lévy and Edouard Schure, *MRS. BESANT AND THE PRESENT CRISIS IN THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.*  
London : Heywood Smith.
- 1913 Rev. E. W. Thompson, *THE THEOSOPHY OF MRS. BESANT.*  
Mysore : Wesleyan Mission Press.
- 1913 Veritas, *MRS. BESANT AND THE ALCYONE CASE.*  
Madras : Goodwin.
- 1913 F. T. Brooks, *THE THEOSOPHIC SOCIETY AND ITS ESOTERIC BOGEYDOM.*  
Madras.
- 1913 F. T. Brooks, *NEO-THEOSOPHY EXPOSED.*  
Madras.
- 1918 Dr. T. M. Nair, *EVOLUTION OF MRS. BESANT.*  
Madras : Justice Press.
- 1921 T. H. Martyn, Letter to Mrs. Annie Besant.  
Washington, D. C.; O. E. Library League.
- 1921 Report of Mrs. Besant's Suit against *The Daily Graphic.*  
London : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 1922 B. P. Wadia, *TO ALL FELLOW THEOSOPHISTS.*  
Los Angeles.

## EARLY YEARS

Aveling, E. B., see p. 369.

Benn, Alfred W., *HISTORY NINETEENTH CENTURY RATIONALISM.*

London : Longmans Green, 1906.

Besant, Frank, M.A., F.R.A.S., F.R.G.S., *THE PARISH REGISTERS OF BOSTON (ENGLAND), 1577-1599.*

Lincoln : 1914.

Besant, Sir Walter, *AUTOBIOGRAPHY.*

London : Hutchinson and Co., 1902.

Bennett, De R. M., *AN INFIDEL ABROAD.*

New York : 1880.

"A TRUTHSEEKER AROUND THE WORLD.

New York : 1881.

- Bettany, F. G., STEWART HEADLAM, A BIOGRAPHY.  
London : Murray, 1926.
- Blavatsky, H. P., see p. 370.
- Bradlaugh, Charles, see p. 367.
- Booth, Charles, LIFE AND LABOUR OF THE PEOPLE IN LONDON  
London : Macmillan, 9 vols., 1892-97.
- Conway, Moncure D., THE VOYSEY CASE.  
Ramsgate : 1871.  
" AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 2 volumes.  
London : Cassell, 1906.
- Council of Law Reporting, Chancery Divisions, 42-43 Vict. In  
re Besant, 1879.  
London.
- Great Britain. PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.  
London.
- Holyoake, George J., HISTORY OF THE LAST TRIAL FOR ATHEISM.  
1850.  
London.
- Lansbury, George, MY LIFE.  
London : Constable, 1928.
- Lecky, William H., HISTORY OF RATIONALISM IN EUROPE.  
London : Longmans Green, 1869.
- Marryat, Florence, LIFE AND LETTERS OF CAPTAIN MARRYAT.  
London : 1872.
- Mill, John Stuart, AUTOBIOGRAPHY.  
Milford : 1924.
- Morley, John, LIFE OF W. E. GLADSTONE.  
London : Macmillan, 1897.
- Quin, Malcolm, MEMOIRS OF A POSITIVIST.  
London : Allen and Unwin, 1924.
- Robertson, Hon. J. M., LIFE PILGRIMAGE OF MONCURE D.  
CONWAY  
London : Watts, 1914.  
" HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.  
London : Watts, 1929.
- Scott, Thomas, FAREWELL ADDRESS.  
Ramsgate : 1877

- Salt, Henry, **THE LIFE OF JAMES THOMPSON.**  
London : Watts, 1914.
- Stead, W. T., **THE MAIDEN TRIBUTE OF MODERN BABYLON.**  
London : *Pall Mall Gazette*. 1885.  
"INTERVIEW WITH, ON THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE :  
London : 1891.
- Trevelyan, George M., **BRITISH HISTORY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.**  
London : Longmans Green, 1922.
- Voysey, C., **FAREWELL ADDRESS TO HIS PARISHIONERS.**  
Wetherby : 1871.
- Webb, Beatrice, **MY APPRENTICESHIP.**  
London : Longmans Green, 1929.
- Whyte, Frederick, **WILLIAM T. STEAD.** 2 volumes.  
London : Cape, 1925.

## CHARLES BRADLAUGH

- Bradlaugh, Charles
- 1873 **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MR. BRADLAUGH. A PAGE OF HIS LIFE.**
- 1879 **HINTS TO EMIGRANTS TO THE U.S.A.**
- 1884 **HOW ARE WE TO ABOLISH THE LORDS ?**
- 1889 **INDIAN MONEY MATTERS.**
- 1890 **MR. BRADLAUGH'S INDIAN REFORM BILL.**
- 1884 **BRADLAUGH-HYNDMAN DEBATE, WILL SOCIALISM BENEFIT THE ENGLISH PEOPLE ? etc., etc.**
- Bonner, Hypatia B., **CHARLES BRADLAUGH, HIS LIFE AND WORK.**  
London : T. F. Unwin, 1894.
- Foote, G. W., **REMINISCENCES OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH.**  
London : Progressive Publishing Co., 1891.
- Great Britain, **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, 1880-1889.**  
London.
- Headingley, Adolphe S., **THE BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH.**

- London : Remington, 1880.  
 Robertson, Hon. J. M., CHARLES BRADLAUGH.  
 London : Watts, 1920.

### FAMILY LIMITATION

- Defoe, Daniel, TREATISE CONCERNING USE AND ABUSE OF MARRIAGE BED.  
 London, 1727.
- Herbert, William, HERBERT'S CHILD-BEARING WOMAN FROM THE CONCEPTION TO THE WEANING OF THE CHILD, MADE IN A DEVOTION CONTAINING ABOVE CLX MEDITATIONS, PRAYERS AND SONGS FOR THE USE OF MRS. F. HERBERT.  
 London : 1648.
- Knowlton, Dr. Charles, FRUITS OF PHILOSOPHY, OR, THE PRIVATE COMPANION OF YOUNG MARRIED PEOPLE.  
 Freethought Publishing Company, 1877.  
 First Edition : " By a Physician."  
 New York : 1832.  
 First English Edition.  
 London : James Watson, 1834.
- Malthus, Rev. T. R., AN ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLES OF POPULATION.  
 London : 1798.
- Owen, Robert Dale, MORAL PHYSIOLOGY, OR, A BRIEF AND PLAIN TREATISE ON THE POPULATION QUESTION.  
 New York : 1831.
- Stopes, Marie, EARLY DAYS OF BIRTH CONTROL.  
 London : 1922.
- Watts, C., A REFUTATION OF MR. BRADLAUGH'S INACCURACIES.  
 London : 1877.
- Watts, K. E., MRS. WATT'S REPLY TO MR. BRADLAUGH'S MISREPRESENTATIONS.  
 London : 1877.

## EDWARD B. AVELING

Aveling, Edward Bibbins, D.Sc.

- 1876 COMPARATIVE PHYSIOLOGY.  
 1879 IS LIFE WORTH LIVING, AN ANSWER.  
 THE BOOKWORM AND OTHER ESSAYS.  
 1880 THE STUDENT'S DARWIN.  
 WHY I DARE NOT BE A CHRISTIAN.  
 1881 THE WICKEDNESS OF GOD.  
 GOD DIES, NATURE REMAINS.  
 1882 DARWINISM AND SMALL FAMILIES.  
 A GODLESS LIFE THE HAPPIEST.  
 1888 THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN AMERICA, etc.,  
 etc.

Aveling, E. B. and Eleanor Marx Aveling.

- 1885 THE FACTORY HELL.  
 1886 THE WOMAN QUESTION.

Bernstein, E., MY YEARS OF EXILE.

London : Parsons, 1921.

Maynard ( ) of Plymouth, EXPOSURE OF THE INFIDEL

NOTIONS OF DR. AVELING ON THE PARENTAGE OF MAN.

London : Wade and Co., 1882.

Rogers, Frederick, LABOUR, LIFE AND LITERATURE.

London : E. Smith, 1913.

Salt, Henry S., SEVENTY YEARS AMONG SAVAGES.

London : Allen & Unwin, 1921.

## SOCIALISM

Burgess, J., JOHN BURNS.

London : Reformer's Bookstall, 1911.

Fabian Tract No. 41, THE FABIAN SOCIETY AND WHAT IT  
 HAS DONE. By G. B. Shaw.

London : Standring, 1884.

FABIAN ESSAYS IN SOCIALISM, edited by G. B. Shaw.

London : W. Scott, 1889.

(Mrs. Besant wrote the essay on Industry.)



- Gould, F. J., **HYNDMAN, PROPHET OF SOCIALISM.**  
 London : Allen & Unwin, 1928.
- Hyndman, H. M., **RECORD OF AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE.**  
 London : Macmillan, 1911.
- Mann, Tom, **MEMOIRS.**  
 London : Labour Publishing Company, 1923.
- Pease, E. R., **HISTORY OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.**  
 London : Fifield, 1915.
- Stewart, William, J., **KEIR HARDIE, A BIOGRAPHY.**  
 London : Cassell, 1921.

### HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY

Blavatsky, H. P.

- FROM THE CAVES AND JUNGLES OF HINDUSTAN.**  
 London : Theosophical Pub. Co., 1892.
- ISIS UNVEILED ; A MASTER KEY TO THE MYSTERIES OF  
 ANCIENT AND MODERN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY.**  
 2 volumes.  
 New York : Bouton, 1891.
- THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY.**  
 London : Theosophical Publishing Company, 1891.
- THE SECRET DOCTRINE : THE SYNTHESIS OF SCIENCE, RE-  
 LIGION AND PHILOSOPHY.** 3 volumes.  
 London : Theosophical Publishing Company. 1888-1897.
- THE LETTERS OF H. P. BLAVATSKY TO A. P. SINNETT.**  
 London : Unwin, 1925.
- SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF H. P. BLAVATSKY, with an  
 introduction and commentary by Eugene Rollin Corson.**  
 London : Rider & Co., 1929
- Blavatsky Association, **TRANSACTIONS.**  
 London : 1924-1927.
- Bragdon, Claude F., **EPISODES FROM AN UNWRITTEN HISTORY.**  
 Rochester : Manas Press, 1910.
- Butt, G. Baseden, **MADAME BLAVATSKY.**  
 London : Rider & Co., 1926.

Cleather, Alice Leighton, H. P. BLAVATSKY AS I KNEW HER.  
A GREAT BETRAYAL.

New York : Macoy, 1924.

Conway, Moncure D., MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE WISE MEN OF  
THE EAST.

London : Constable, 1906.

Coulomb, E., SOME ACCOUNT OF MY INTERCOURSE WITH  
MADAME BLAVATSKY FROM 1872 TO 1884.

Foote, G. W., THE NEW CAGLIOSTRO, AN OPEN LETTER TO  
MADAME BLAVATSKY.

London : Progressive Publishing Company, 1889.

Hartmann, Franz, REPORT OF OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING  
A NINE MONTHS STAY AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE  
T.S., AT ADYAR, INDIA.

Madras : Scottish Press, 1884.

Home, D. D., LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SPIRITUALISM.

New York : Carleton Co., 1877.

Judge, W. Q., THE ESOTERIC SHE, THE LATE MADAME  
BLAVATSKY.

London : Surat, 1893.

Kingsland, William, WAS SHE A CHARLATAN? A CRITICAL  
ANALYSIS OF THE 1885 REPORT OF THE S. P. R. AND THE  
PHENOMENA CONNECTED WITH MADAME H. P. BLA-  
VATSKY.

London : Blavatsky Association, 1927.

Lillie, A., MME. BLAVATSKY AND HER THEOSOPHY.

London : Swann Sonnenschein, 1884.

Olcott, H. S., PEOPLE FROM THE OTHER WORLD.

Hartford : 1875.

Sinnett, A. P. (compiled by), INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF MME.  
BLAVATSKY.

Redway, 1886.

"EARLY DAYS OF THEOSOPHY.

London : Theosophical Publishing House, 1922.

Society for Psychical Research, REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE  
APPOINTED TO INVESTIGATE PHENOMENA CONNECTED  
WITH THE T. S., PROCEEDINGS, Part IX, vol. 3.

London : December, 1885.

Also, vols. 9, 11, 17 and 24 ; and JOURNAL, vols. 1, 2 and 6.

Solovyoff, V. S., MODERN PRIESTESS OF ISIS.

London : Longmans Green, 1895.

Tingley, Katherine A., H. P. BLAVATSKY, FOUNDRRESS OF THE ORIGINAL THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN NEW YORK, 1875, THE INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OF WHICH ARE NOW AT POINT LOMA, CAL.

Point Loma, Cal.: WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL THEOSOPHICAL LEAGUE, 1921.

Wachtmeister, Countess Constance, H.P.B. AND THE PRESENT CRISIS IN THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

London : Privately printed, 1895.

"REMINISCENCES OF H.P.B. AND THE SECRET DOCTRINE.

London : Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893.

Witte, Count S. Y., LES MEMORIES.

Lausanne : 1921.

Yeats, W. B., AUTOBIOGRAPHIES.

London : Macmillan, 1926.

Zhelikhovskaya, V. P., MÉMOIRES D'UNE PETITE FILLE RUSSE.

Paris : 1896.

## THEOSOPHY

ADYAR : THE HOME OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. VIEWS TAKEN EXPRESSLY BY ALCYONE (J. Krishnamurti) WITH DESCRIPTIVE LETTER-PRESS BY C. W. L. (Leadbeater).

Adyar : Theosophist Office, 1911.

Anonymous, THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT.

New York : Dutton, 1925.

Bragdon, Claude F., OLD LAMPS FOR NEW.

New York : Knopf, 1925.

"THE NEW IMAGE.

New York : Knopf, 1928.

Collins, Mabel, LIGHT ON THE PATH.

London : Reeves and Turner, 1885.

- Farquhar, J. N., MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA.  
New York : Macmillan, 1915.
- Flournoy, T. F., ESPRITS ET MÉDIUMS : MÉLANGES DE MÉTAPHYSIQUE ET DE PSYCHOLOGIE.  
Géneve : Librairie Kündig, 1911.
- Howell, Basil P. (edited by), THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,  
THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS.  
London : Theosophical Publishing House, 1915.
- Jinarajadasa, C., THE GOLDEN BOOK OF THE THEOSOPHICAL  
SOCIETY, 1875-1925.  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House, 1926.
- Judge, William Quan, ECHOES FROM THE ORIENT.  
New York : The Path, 1890.  
"LETTERS THAT HAVE HELPED ME.  
New York : The Path, 1891.  
"THE OCEAN OF THEOSOPHY.  
New York : The Path, 1893.  
"ISIS AND THE MAHATMAS.  
New York : The Path, 1895.
- Keyserling, Count Hermann, TRAVEL DIARY OF A PHILOSOPHER.  
New York : Harcourt Brace, 1925.
- Krishnamurti, Jiddu, AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER.  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society, 1911.  
"THE POOL OF WISDOM.  
Holland : Star Publishing Trust, 1928.  
"LIFE IN FREEDOM.  
New York, Liveright, 1928.
- Leadbeater, C. W., SCIENCE OF THE SACRAMENTS.  
London : St. Albans' Press, 1920.  
"STENOGRAPHIC REPORT OF MEETING CALLED BY COLONEL  
OLCOTT TO DISCUSS CERTAIN CHARGES AGAINST C. W.  
LEADBEATER.  
London, 1906.
- Leuba, J. H., PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS MYSTICISM.  
London : K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925.
- MacCurdy, J. T., PSYCHOLOGY OF EMOTION.  
London : K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925.

- Maeterlinck, M., **THE GREAT SECRET.**  
London : Methuen, 1922.
- THE MAHATMA LETTERS TO A. P. SINNETT**, compiled by A. Trevor Barker.  
London : Unwin, 1923.
- Maitland, Edward, **THE LIFE OF ANNA KINGSFORD.**  
London : Watkins, 1913.
- Olcott, Col. H. S., **OLD DIARY LEAVES.**  
London : Theosophical Publishing Society, 1887-1892.
- Silberer, Dr. H., **PROBLEMS OF MYSTICISM AND ITS SYMBOLISM.**  
New York : Moffat Yard, 1917.
- Spence, Lewis, **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OCCULTISM.**  
New York : Dodd Mead, 1920.
- Strachey, Ray, **RELIGIOUS FANATICISM.**  
London : Faber and Gwyer, 1928.
- Surat, Denis, **LITERATURE AND OCCULT TRADITION.**  
New York : Dial Press, 1930.
- Underhill, Evelyn, **PRACTICAL MYSTICISM.**  
New York : Dutton, 1915.
- van Manen, Johan, MRS. BESANT'S THEOSOPHY ACCORDING TO THE BISHOP OF MADRAS.  
Adyar : Theosophical Publishing House, 1913.
- Webster, Nesta H., **SECRET SOCIETIES AND SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENTS.**  
New York : Dutton, 1924.

## INDIA

- Chinol, Sir Valentine, **INDIA.**  
New York : Scribners, 1926.  
"INDIAN UNREST."  
London : Macmillan, 1910.
- Gandhi, M. K., **AUTOBIOGRAPHY.** 2 volumes.  
Ahmedabad : Navijan Press, 1927-29.
- Lovett, Sir Verney, **HISTORY OF THE INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT.**  
London : Murray, 1920.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

375

Pratt, James Bissett, **INDIA AND ITS FAITHS.**

Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1915.

**STATEMENT EXHIBITING MORAL AND MATERIAL PROGRESS OF  
INDIA, 1917-1926.**

Calcutta : H.M. Stationery Office.

Williams, L. F. R., Director of Public Information, **INDIA IN  
THE YEARS 1917-18.**

Calcutta : Government of India.



## INDEX

- Adyar ; 186, 187, 195, 204, 208, 212, 215, 216, 231, 236, 265, 270, 273, 275, 278, 280, 287, 298, 305, 306, 314, 321, 330, 332, 339, 340, 341.
- Americans ; 44, 75, 78, 101, 118, 188, 193, 207, 216, 217, 231, 246-248, 261, 252, 253, 257, 258, 260, 261, 266, 267, 268, 272, 273, 278.
- Amritsar ; 301.
- Anglo-India ; 228, 234, 239, 282, 283, 290.
- Arhats, *see* Theosophy.
- Arundale, George ; 275, 277, 280, 296, 305, 333, 339, 340.
- Arundale, Rukmini ; 333, 340, 349.
- Atheism ; 48-59, 61-63, 67, 69-72, 77-81, 94-100, 108, 110-115, 118-124, 132-133, 136-139, 142-145, 149-150, 153, 156, 159, 161, 164-165, 167, 181, 207, 218 ; *see also* National Secularist Society.
- Australia ; 216, 222, 253, 256, 287, 293, 301, 307, 308, 309, 312, 317, 321, 323, 324, 326, 328, 329, 336, 341.
- Autobiography* of Annie Besant ; 16, 24, 25, 48, 101, 105, 147, 181, 218, 223 ; *Autobiographical Sketches*, 147, 218 ; comments on, 218, 224, 225, 226, 227.
- Aveling, Dr. Edward B. ; 109-125, 131-133, 138-152, 155, 218, 262, 327, 336.
- "Back to Blavatsky" movement ; 246, 328.
- Bebel's *Woman* ; 144.
- Benares, Maharajah of ; 232, 233.
- Bennett, D. M. ; 74, 118.
- Besant, Annie Wood ; birth, 3 ; education, 10-13 ; religious tendency, 13-19 ; engagement and marriage, 20-24 ; birth of children, 26-27 ; leaves husband, 42 ; mother's death, 46 ; joins atheists and meets Bradlaugh, 47 ; staff *National Reformer*, 53 ; success as orator and writer, 63-71 ; vice-President National Secularist Society, 71 ; defence Knowlton pamphlet, 77-93 ; loss of daughter, 94-102 ; sues for divorce, 102-106 ; Dr. Aveling and science studies, 109-122 ; assists Bradlaugh in House of Commons struggle, 123-130 ; joins Socialists, 152-154 ; W. T. Stead and Law and Liberty League, 167-176 ; Match strike, 176-179 ; London School Board, 180 ; meets H.P.B., 184 ; joins Theosophical Society, 191 ; death of H.P.B., 204 ; Judge inquiry, 212-217 ; makes home in India, 231 ; educational and social reform work in India, 232-237 ; meets C. W. Leadbeater, 239, President Theosophical Society, 265 ; announces World-Teacher, 274 ; Home Rule for India League, 294-296 ; interned, 296-298 ; endorses Old Catholics, 311 ; aeroplane tour Europe, 316 ; D.L. degree, 341 ; Jubilee celebration, 348.
- Appearance, 14, 67, 199, 210, 299-300 ; health, 28, 31-34, 41, 60, 105-106, 133, 161, 336 ; horoscope, 265 ; capacity for work, 53, 55, 72, 142, 227, 246, 262, 315, 345 ; as an



- Besant, Annie Wood (*contd.*)  
 orator, 54, 61-68, 77, 89, 90, 182, 219, 228, 240, 289, 300, 329, 342. Attitude toward: martyrdom 58, 160, 226, 227, 244, 248, 254, 256, 258, 263, 279, 325, 339; ritualism, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 303, 305, 309, 311, 318, 323, 324, 333-339; sex 24, 114, 117, 144, 201, 202, 262-263; truth, 37, 41, 189, 196, 207, 217-223, 225, 227, 335, 346. Writings: summary, 149, 150; comments on, 182, 316.
- Besant, Arthur Digby (son); 26-28, 42, 99, 102, 104-106, 200, 229, 343, 344.
- Besant, Mabel (daughter); 27, 28, 42, 43, 44, 47, 60, 69, 74, 75, 85, 94, 95, 98, 99, 100-106, 109, 121, 134, 135, 200, 218, 229, 343, 344.
- Besant, Rev. Frank; 18-33, 36-43, 48, 51, 85, 94-105, 108, 109, 115, 135, 137, 178, 200, 228, 238, 343.
- Besant, Sir Walter; 19, 38, 95, 229.
- Birth control, *see* Family Limitation and *Fruits of Philosophy*.
- Blavatsky, Helena P. (H.P.B.); 183-207; sketch of, 193-194; her salon, 198; death of, 204; her ring, 205-206; 212, 213, 217, 219-222, 224, 229, 236-239, 252, 254, 263, 266, 268, 272, 274, 283, 287, 290, 308, 310, 312, 313, 342, 343, 346, 347.
- "Bloody Sunday"; 163, 168, 170.
- Bonner, Mrs., *see* Hypatia Bradlaugh.
- Bradlaugh, Alice and Hypatia; 57, 68, 69, 75, 85, 86, 88, 89, 95, 96, 98, 107-109, 116, 128, 133.
- Bradlaugh, Charles; 3, 47; meets Mrs. Besant, 48-54; brief sketch of, 49-50, 55-58; 60-63, 68, 69; campaign for Parliament, 57-59, 85, 119-122; American tour, 64-65; relations to Mrs. Besant, 71-76, 95-98, 103, 105, 107-108; family limitation, 78-93, 102, 110-112, 115, 117, 118; struggle in House of Commons, 123-130, 132-134, 139, 181; and Socialism, 139, 151, 152, 153, 1571-62; 146, 147, 149, 150; break with Mrs. Besant, 164-166; and L.L.L., 170-176, 178, 179; death, 201; 229, 247, 262, 283, 328, 339, 348.
- Bradlaugh, Mrs. Charles; 49, 56, 58, 89, 95, 103, 107.
- Bright, Jacob; 170.
- British Secular Union; 86.
- Bruno, Giordano; 58, 113, 244, 246, 287.
- Bryant & May; 176-179.
- Büchner, *Mind in Animals* (translation); 133.
- Burrows, Herbert; 119, 154, 155, 158, 176, 178, 179, 180, 182, 184, 202, 204, 215, 253, 262, 267.
- California; 328, 329, 336; Ojai Valley, 329; Point Loma, 246, 328.
- Central Hindu College; 233, 234, 236, 245, 258, 271, 280, 284, 339, 341.
- Chakravarti, G. N.; 210, 214, 228, 231, 236, 238, 245, 254, 261.
- Champion, H. H.; 154, 162, 176.
- Cheltenham, Vicar of; 28, 33, 36.
- Chicago; 210, 248, 266, 342.
- Chirol, Sir Valentine; 236, 299.
- Christian Creed, The*; 150.
- Clairvoyance, *see* Mysticism.
- Co-Masonry; 303, 304, 306, 311, 318, 322, 332, 333.
- Commonweal*, Madras; 285, 292.
- Commonweal, The*, London; 147.
- Commonwealth of India Bill; 329, 330.
- Comte, Auguste; 50, 71, 75, 76, 145.

- Conway, Moncure ; 44, 53, 62, 63, 137.
- Coulumb, Monsieur and Madame ; 187, 188.
- Curzon, Lord ; 234.
- Czecho-Slovak section ; 339.
- Das, Bhagavan ; 277, 284.
- "Daybreak" ; 54, 55, 70, 110, 136, 143, 146, 153, 157, 160.
- Dialectical Society ; 154.
- Dyer, General ; 301.
- Esoteric Section (E.S.) ; 195, 196, 197, 204-205, 206, 208, 211, 213, 216, 221, 222, 245, 246, 248, 253, 257, 258, 259, 260, 272, 273, 284, 285, 297, 305, 321, 322, 324, 328, 339.
- Fabian Society ; 154, 155, 156, 158, 159, 161, 162, 167, 176, 178, 181, 185, 201.
- Family Herald, The* ; 26, 27, 28, 29.
- Family Limitation ; 77-106, 107, 120, 124, 139, 159, 160, 179, 202, 217, 225 ; Malthusianism, 79, 80, 87, 92, 160.
- Fasting*, essay on ; 27.
- Foot, G. W. ; 79, 83, 87, 112, 122, 141.
- Freethinker, The* ; 112, 141.
- Freethought, *see* Secularists.
- Freethought Publishing Company ; 82, 84, 85.
- Fruits of Philosophy* ; 78, 79, 80, 85, 91, 94, 97, 100, 102, 107, 120, 124, 139, 159, 179, 202, 217, 225.
- Fullerton, Alexander ; 251, 266.
- Gandhi ; 201, 237, 295, 299, 302.
- Gladstone, William Ewart ; 123, 124, 126, 129, 130, 177, 224-226, 337.
- "Glamour," *see* Theosophy.
- Graham-Pole, Major David ; 281, 282.
- Hall of Science ; 57, 62, 64, 65, 72, 111, 115, 116, 117, 129, 185.
- Hartmann, Dr. Franz ; 188.
- Hatherly, Lord ; 32.
- Hay, Admiral Sir John, Bart ; 97.
- Headlam, Rev. Stewart ; 178, 180.
- History of the Great French Revolution* ; 150.
- Hodgson, Richard ; 187, 188.
- Holland ; 92, 323, 332, 336, 342 ; Ommen, 241, 332, 333, 334, 336.
- Holyoake, G. J. ; 57, 79, 83, 87, 135.
- Home Rule for India ; 294, 295, 296, 298, 341. *See also*, Indian politics.
- House of Commons ; 123-130, 133, 134, 159, 165, 178, 181, 194, 297, 330.
- Hrdlicka, Dr. Ales ; 329.
- Hyndman, H. M. ; 140, 141, 147, 151, 152, 154, 155, 158, 160, 175.
- Hypnotism, *see* Mysticism.
- Ibsen, H., *Doll's House* ; 42.
- India ; 48, 194, 195, 208, 210, 211, 212, 216, 227-230 ; Mrs. Besant makes home in 231 ; 231-235, 238, 245, 247, 277, 284, 286, 287, 336.
- Indian National Congress ; 3, 236, 294 ; Mrs. Besant elected President, 298 ; 299, 318, 348 ; *see also*, Indian politics.
- Indian Nationalism ; 233, 234, 290, 292, 293, 297, 298, 299, 349. *see also*, Indian politics.
- Indian politics ; 194, 281, 282, 289, 307, 311, 329 ; *see also*, Indian Nationalism, Indian National Congress, Home Rule for India, Commonwealth of India Bill.
- Initiates, *see* Theosophy.

- Inner Group (I.G.) ; 197, 202, 257, 305, 339.
- Inspiration*, essay on ; 35.
- Ironside Circles ; 172, 174.
- Isis Unveiled* ; 189, 194, 312.
- Isis very much Unveiled* ; 216, 226, 227.
- Jacobs, Dr. Aletta ; 92.
- Jessel, Sir George ; 100-102, 104, 106, 107.
- Jinarajadasa, C. ; 238, 243, 247, 260, 263, 266, 305, 309, 311, 322, 323, 324, 333, 340.
- Judge, William Q. ; 194, 196, 204-222, 223, 224, 227, 229, 239, 246, 247, 254, 259, 262, 263, 337.
- Justice* ; 145, 146, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 158, 160, 170.
- Karma ; 170, 213, 313.
- Keightley, Bertram ; 243.
- Knowlton pamphlet, *see Fruits of Philosophy*.
- Krishnamurti, J. ; 273, 287, 288, 292, 305, 308, 320, 331, 342.
- Kropotkin, Prince ; 176.
- Labouchere, Henry, M.P. ; 120, 121, 124, 327.
- Land Law Reform League ; 119.
- Lansdowne, Marquis of ; 297.
- Law, Mrs. Harriet ; 72, 87.
- Law and Liberty League ; 170-175, 179, 180, 182.
- Law Makers and Law Breakers* ; 125.
- Law of Population, The* ; 91, 202.
- Leadbeater, Charles Webster ; sketch of, 238-240 ; "scientific" investigations, 241-245 ; American charges against, 247-255 ; letters to Mrs. Besant, 256-264 ; reinstatement in T.S., 264-269 ; Krishna-murti episode, 271-285 ; in Aus-
- Leadbeater, Charles Webster (*contd.*)  
tralia, 286, 288 ; 289, 292-294, 301, 307 ; Liberal Catholic Church 306-314, 317-327 ; 333-340, 347, 348.
- Liberal Catholics (originally called Old Catholics) ; 310, 311, 313, 314, 317, 318, 320, 321, 323, 325, 330, 332, 333, 334, 339, 340.
- Lincoln, Bishop of ; 54, 100.
- Link, The* ; 172, 174, 175, 177, 178, 180, 182, 191.
- "Lion's Mouth, The" ; 172, 173, 176.
- Lives of the Black Letter Saints* ; 27.
- London University ; 109, 110.
- Lucifer* ; 197, 202, 220, 246, 252.
- Madras, Lord Bishop of ; 283, 284.
- Mahatmas or Masters ; 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 192, 196, 197, 206, 207, 208 ; facsimile of message, 209, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 219, 220, 221, 222, 226, 238, 239, 240, 241, 245, 248, 255, 257, 258, 259, 260, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 273, 274, 287, 303, 308, 310, 317, 325, 329, 332, 340, 347.
- Malthus, Rev. T. R. ; 80.
- Marryat, Capt. Frederick ; 9.
- Marryat, Miss ; 9-10, 11, 12, 13, 15.
- Martyn, T. H. ; 321, 322, 324, 325, 326, 347.
- Marx, Eleanor (Aveling) ; 140-145, 147, 149, 151, 155, 176.
- Marx, Karl ; 3, 138-143, 146, 149 ; *Das Kapital*, 140.
- Match strike ; 176-179, 349.
- Mead, G. R. S. ; 246, 249, 250, 252, 253, 267.
- Milton's *Paradise Lost* ; 4, 39, 72, 117, 137.
- Montagu, E. S. ; 297, 300.
- Morley, Lord ; 123, 124, 169.

- Morris, James ; 5, 7, 17, 21.  
 Morris, Minnie ; 17, 20.  
 Morris, William ; 147, 151, 155, 176.  
 Mysticism ; 13, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 29, 52, 183 ; occultism, 186, 187, 196, 198, 199, 211, 235, 238, 245-249, 262, 268, 271, 332, 346, 348 ; spiritualism, 182, 183, 186, 238, 239 ; psychic experiences (clairvoyance, etc.), 186-188, 197, 204, 210-212, 216, 220, 221, 234, 235, 239-245, 248, 258, 259, 268, 272-275, 277, 285, 294, 309, 314, 337 ; hypnotism, 197-198, 210, yoga, 213, 234, 317 ; 200, 218, 244, 262, 266, 270, 288, 303, 332, 345, 346.
- Narayaniah, G. ; 273, 274, 275, 278, 279, 282, 283, 284, 286, 287, 289, 291.
- National Reformer, The* ; 47, 50, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 82, 83, 84, 86, 88, 95, 102, 103, 105, 110, 111, 112, 116, 119, 121, 125, 131, 132, 144, 145, 146, 149, 151, 152, 153, 157, 159, 160, 161, 165, 169, 174, 181, 194, 226, 348 ; "Rough Notes," 65, 111 ; "To Correspondents," 65, 69, 70, 83, 112 ; *see also* "Daybreak."
- National Secular Society, *see* Secularists.
- Nehru, Pandit Motilal ; 330.
- New India* ; 292.
- Nineteenth Century Magazine* ; 224-226.
- Northampton ; 57, 58, 59, 62, 85, 119, 120, 124, 126, 327.
- Oatlands ; 69, 80, 81, 109, 117, 118.
- Occultism, *see* Mysticism.
- O.E. Library Critic* ; 313.
- Ojai Valley, *see* California.
- Olcott, Col. H. P. ; 190, 193, 194, 195, 196, 199, 204, 205-209, 213, 214, 216, 231, 236, 248, 249, 252, 261, 262, 263-265, 266, 268, 283, 285, 286, 287, 290.
- Old Catholics, *see* Liberal Catholics.
- Olivier, Lord (Sydney) ; 155, 162, 178, 179.
- Ommen, *see* Holland.
- On the Nature and Existence of God* ; 50.
- "On the Watch Tower" ; 271, 281, 282.
- Order of Brothers of Service ; 281, 305, 306.
- Order of the Rising Sun ; *see* Order of the Star.
- Order of the Star ; 275, 279-280, 300, 307, 329, 330, 332, 335, 339.
- Our Corner* ; 156, 161, 172, 180, 182.
- Pall Mall Gazette, The* ; 169.
- Pentland, Lord ; 283, 296.
- "Pillory, The" ; *see* "Lion's Mouth."
- Point Loma, *see* California.
- Political Status of Women, The* (speech) ; 62, 77, 78, 318, 348.
- Progress* ; 141, 142.
- Psychic experiences, *see* Mysticism.
- Pusey, Dean ; 36, 37.
- Pythagoras ; 244, 255.
- Quin, Malcolm ; *Memoirs of a Positivist* ; 68.
- Radhakrishnan ; 316.
- Reincarnation ; 190, 211, 229, 244, 245, 271, 273, 274, 307, 308.
- Robertson, Hon. J. M. ; 97, 152, 178, 179.
- Rowlatt Act ; 300, 302.
- Saint Stephen's Review* ; 224.
- Scott, Thomas ; 35, 36, 44, 46, 47, 53, 60, 137

- Secret Doctrine* ; 183, 184, 189, 195, 197.
- S. ular Review, The* ; 83, 86, 135.
- Secular Society's Almanack ; 114.
- Secularists ; 47, 50, 51, 52, 57, 58, 71, 72, 73, 74, 79, 80, 84, 86, 87, 98, 107, 111, 118, 121, 126, 128, 138, 139, 143, 144, 146, 160, 173, 174, 201, 219, 221, 244, 346.
- School Board, London ; 180, 201, 290, 349.
- Shanti Kunja (Grove of Peace) ; 231, 251, 252.
- Shaw, G. B. ; 117, 138, 153, 154-158, 162, 170, 178, 179, 182.
- Shelley, P. B. ; 96, 111, 112, 117.
- Short Glossary of Theosophical Terms* ; 202.
- Sibsey ; 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 41, 61, 101, 103, 104, 136, 182.
- Sinnett, A. P. ; 238, 239.
- Social Democratic Federation (originally Democratic Federation) ; 144, 145, 151, 154-156, 176.
- Socialism ; 136-143, 146, 149-166, 199, 218, 339.
- Socialist Defence Association ; 163.
- Socialist League ; 147, 155.
- Society for Psychical Research, *Report* ; 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 195, 254, 263.
- Sorbonne ; 246.
- Spiritualism, *see* Mysticism.
- Springfield Republican, The* ; 101.
- Stanley, Dean ; 15, 36, 45.
- Stead, W. T. ; 23, 45, 167-176, 180, 182-184, 201, 318.
- Steiner, Rudolf ; 279, 293.
- Stokes, Dr. H. N. ; 313.
- Story of Afghanistan, The*, or Why the Tory Government Gags the Indian press ; 194.
- Theists ; 35, 36, 38, 44, 47, 53, 77.
- Theosophic Voice, The* ; 253, 254.
- Theosophical Society ; 3, 186, 189, 191, 193 ; founding of, 194 ; 195, 197, 204-206, 214-216, 220, 239, 245 ; American charges against Leadbeater, 247-255 ; 257-260 ; death President-founder, 264-265 ; Mrs. Besant elected President, 266-269 ; 270, 271, 274, 279, 283 ; revolt against Krishnamurti, 285 ; politics, 290-294 ; ritualism, 305 ; revolt against ritualism, 313 ; 322-326, 328 ; Jubilee convention, 330-332 ; 337, 339 ; membership and finances, 340-341.
- Theosophist, The* ; 194, 215, 266, 271, 306, 307, 308, 310, 314, 324 ; *see also* "On the Watch Tower."
- Theosophists ; 49, 136, 187-190, 197-200, 202 ; Judge and Mahatma messages, 206-217, 219-222, 226, 236-239, 244-246, 286, 292, 312, 320, 321, 329.
- Theosophy ; 186, 188 ; definition of, 189-190 ; 191, 194-196, 201, 202, 207, 208, 214, 219, 221-222, 224-226, 236-238 ; thought-forms, 240-241, 249, 276, 277, 309 ; "scientific" investigations, 241-245 ; Arhats, 245, 305, 309, 310, 316, 333, 339 ; "glamour," 258-259, 261, 264, 274, 280, 281, 338 ; Initiates, 269, 271, 275, 278, 286, 307, 310, 322, 323 ; attacks on, 283, 284 ; 303, 307-109, 311, 322, 350.
- Theosophy and the Law of Population* ; 202.
- Theosophy of Mrs. Besant, The* , 283.
- Thompson, James ; 73, 87.
- Thought-forms, *see* Theosophy.
- Tilak, B. G. ; 295, 299.
- Tingley, Katherine ; 246, 278, 284.
- Trafalgar Square ; 126, 141, 162, 163.
- Trevelyan, B. M., *British History in the Nineteenth Century* ; 177.

- True Basis of Morality, The* (speech) 62.  
*Truth* ; 120, 326, 327.  
*Truthseeker, The* ; 74, 118.  
 Tyler, Sir Henry ; 124, 133, 134, 135.
- United States ; 57, 58, 62-65, 78, 147, 193, 194, 196, 198, 204, 205, 208, 210, 214, 216, 246, 247, 256, 261, 262, 266, 272, 284, 287, 293, 328, 329.
- Van Hook, Dr. Weller ; 266, 267.  
 Van Pallandt, the Baron ; 332.  
 Vaughan, Dr. ; 8, 10.  
 Victoria, Queen ; 77, 89, 129.  
 Voysey, Rev. Chas. ; 34, 35, 36, 51, 53, 137.
- Wachtmeister, Countess ; 195, 212.  
 Wadia, B. P. ; 296, 339.  
*Wake up, India!* (lectures) ; 291.  
 Wales, Prince and Princess of ; 234, 341.  
 Wallas, Graham ; 155, 178.  
 Watts, Charles ; 54, 59, 62-64, 73, 78-82 ; trial, 83, 86, 87, 122, 135.  
 Watts, Mrs. Charles ; 62, 63, 73, 77, 80-83, 86, 87.  
 Webb, Sidney (Lord Passfield) ; 155, 162.  
 Webb, Mrs. Sidney ; 140.  
 Wedgwood, J. I. ; 310, 311, 312, 321-324, 333.  
*Westminster Gazette, see Isis Very Much Unveiled.*  
*What is Theosophy?* ; 208.  
*Why I am A Socialist* ; 161.  
*Why I Became a Theosophist* ; 202.  
 Whyte, Frederick, *William T. Stead* ; 174.  
 Wilde, Oscar ; 200.  
 Wood, Alf (brother) ; 7.  
 Wood, Sir Henry (brother) ; 5-8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 41, 43, 46, 137, 229, 304.  
 Wood, Sir William ; 8.  
 Wood, W. B. P. (father) ; 4-9, 11.  
 World Mother ; *see* Arundale, Rukmini.  
 World Teacher ; 273-288, 329, 331, 332, 333, 336, 337, 338 ; *see also* Krishnamurti, J.  
 Yeats, W. B. ; 198, 199, 217.  
 Yoga, *see* Mysticism.  
 Young Theosophists ; 330, 349.



