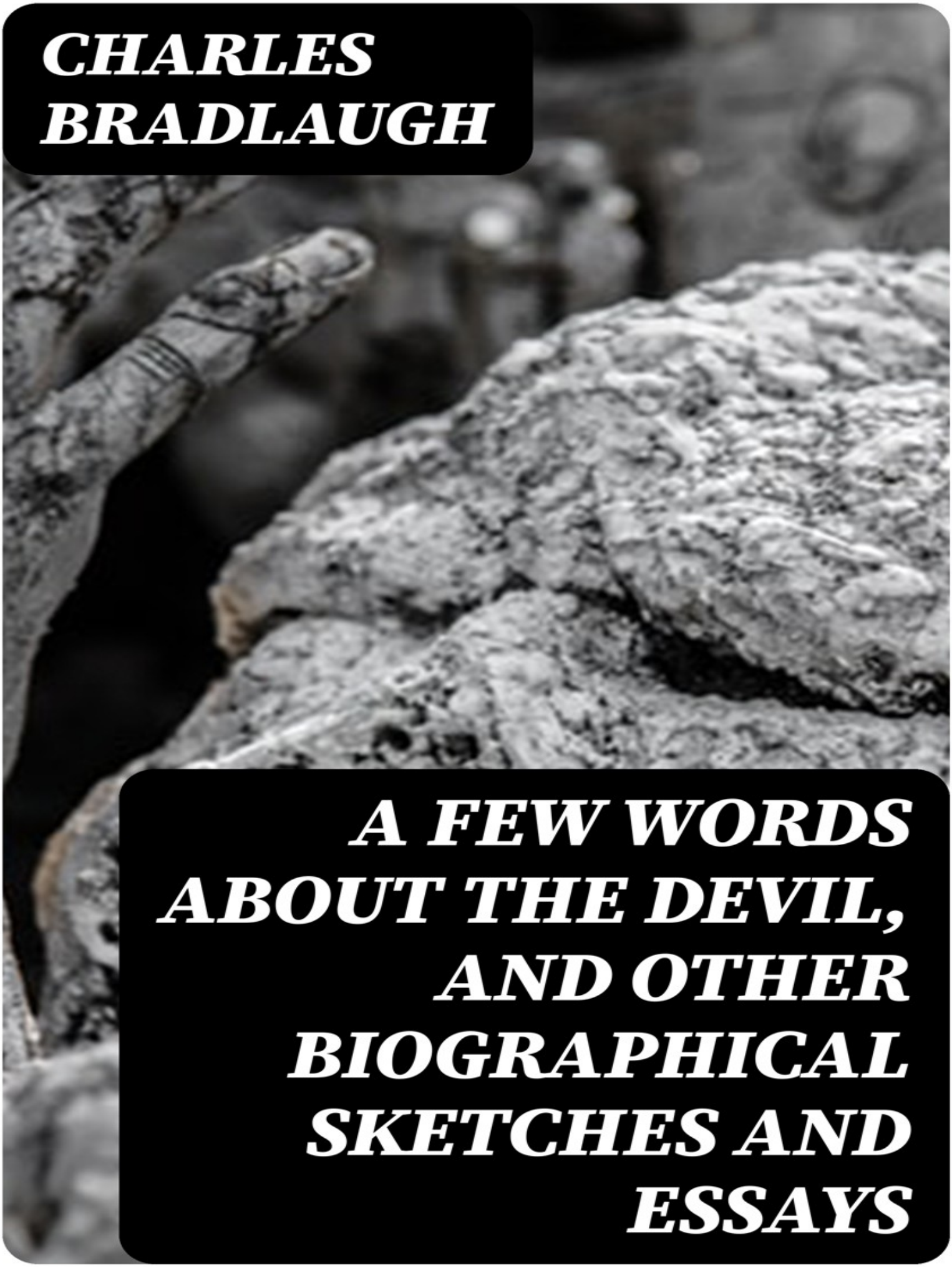
CHARLES BRADLAUGH



A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE DEVIL, AND OTHER BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND ESSAYS

Charles Bradlaugh

A Few Words About the Devil, and Other Biographical Sketches and Essays

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A PAGE OF HIS LIFE.

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At the request of many friends, and by way of farewell address on leaving for America, I, for the first time in my life, pen a partial autobiographical sketch. I do not pretend that the narrative will be a complete picture of my life, I only vouch the accuracy of the facts so far as I state them. I have not the right in some cases to state political occurrences in which others now living are involved, nor have I the courage of Jean Jacques Rousseau, to photograph my inner life. I shall therefore state little the public may not already know. I was born on the 26th September, 1833, in a small house in Bacchus Walk, Hoxton. My father was a solicitor's clerk with a very poor salary, which he supplemented by law writing. He was an extremely industrious man, and a splendid penman. I never had the opportunity of judging his tastes or thoughts, outside his daily labors, except in one respect, in which I have followed in his footsteps. He was passionately fond of angling. Until 1848 my life needs little relation. My schooling, like that of most poor men's children, was small in quantity, and, except as to the three R's, indifferent in quality. I remember at seven years of age being at a national school in Abbey Street, Bethnel Green; between seven and nine I was at another small private school in the

same neighborhood, and my "education" was completed before I was eleven years of age at a boys' school in Coalharbor Street, Hackney Road. When about twelve years of age I was first employed as errand lad in the solicitor's office where my father remained his whole life through. After a little more than two years in this occupation, I became wharf clerk and cashier to a firm of coal merchants in Britannia Fields, City Road. While in their employment the excitement of the Chartist movement was at its height in England, and the authorities, frightened by the then huge continental revolution wave, were preparing for the prosecution of some of the leaders among the Chartists. Meetings used to be held almost continuously all day on Sunday, and every week-night in the open air on Bonner's Fields, near where the Consumption Hospital now stands. These meetings were in knots from fifty to five hundred, sometimes many more, and were occupied chiefly in discussions on theological, social, and political questions, any bystander taking part. The curiosity of a lad took me occasionally in the week evenings to the Bonner's Fields gatherings. On the Sunday I, as a member of the Church of England, was fully occupied as a Sunday-school teacher. This last-named fashion of passing Sunday was broken suddenly. The Bishop of London was announced to hold a confirmation in Bethnal Green. The incumbent of St. Peter's, Hackney Road, the district in which I resided, was one John Graham Packer, and he, desiring to make a good figure when the Bishop came, pressed me to prepare for confirmation, so as to answer any question the Bishop might put. I studied a little the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of

England, and the four Gospels, and came to the conclusion that they differed. I ventured to write the Rev. Mr. Packer a respectful letter, asking him for aid and explanation. All he did was to denounce my letter to my parents as Atheistical, although at that time I should have shuddered at the very notion of becoming an Atheist, and he suspended me for three months from my office of Sunday-school teacher. This left me my Sundays free, for I did not like to go to church while suspended from my teacher's duty, and I, instead, went to Bonner's Fields, at first to listen, but soon to take part in some of the discussions which were then always pending there.

At the commencement I spoke on the orthodox Christian side, but after a debate with Mr. J. Savage, in the Warner Place Hall, in 1849, on the "Inspiration of the bible," I found that my views were getting very much tinged with Freethought, and in the winter of that year, at the instigation of Mr. Packer, to whom I had submitted the "Diegesis" of Robert Taylor, I—having become a teetotaler, which in his view brought out my infidel tendencies still more vigorously—had three days given me by my employers, after consultation with my father, to "change my opinions or lose my situation." I am inclined to think now that the threat was never intended to have been enforced, but was used to terrify me into submission. At that time I hardly knew what, if any, opinions I had, but the result was that sooner than make a show of recanting, I left home and situation on the third day, and never returned to either.

I was always a very fluent speaker, and now lectured frequently at the Temperance Hall, Warner Place, Hackney

Road, at the small Hall in Philpot Street, and in the open air in Bonner's Fields, where at last on Sunday afternoons scores of hundreds congregated to hear me. My views were then Deistical, but rapidly tending to the more extreme phase in which they ultimately settled. I now took part in all the gatherings held in London on behalf of the Poles and Hungarians, and actually fancied that I could write poetry on Kossuth and Mazzini.

It was at this time I made the acquaintance of my friend and co-worker, Mr. Austin Holyoake, at his printing office in Queen's Head Passage, and I remember him taking me to John Street Institution, where, at one of the pleasant Saturday evening gatherings, I met the late Mrs. Emma Martin. At Mr. Austin Holyoake's request, Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, to my great delight, presided at one of my lectures in Philpot Street, and I felt special interest in the number of the *Reasoner* which contained a brief reference to myself and that lecture.

I wrote my first pamphlet, "A Few Words on the Christian's Creed," about the middle of 1850, and was honored by Dr. Campbell of the *British Banner* with a leading article vigorously assailing me for the lectures I had then delivered. After leaving home I was chiefly sheltered by Mrs. Sharpies Carlile, with whose children, Hypatia, Theophila, and Julian, I shared such comforts as were at her disposal. Here I studied hard everything which came in my way, picking up a little Hebrew and an imperfect smattering of other tongues. I tried to earn my living as a coal merchant, but at sixteen, and without one farthing in my pocket, the business was not extensive enough to be profitable. I got

very poor, and at that time was also very proud. A subscription offered me by a few Freethinkers shocked me, and awakened me to a sense of my poverty; so telling no one where I was going, I went away, and on the 17th of December, 1850, was, after some difficulty, enlisted in the Seventh Dragoon Guards. With this corps I remained until October, 1853, being ultimately appointed orderly-room clerk; the regiment, during the whole of the time I remained in it, being quartered in Ireland. While I was in the regiment I was a teetotaler, and used often to lecture to the men in the barrack-room at night, and I have more than once broken out of Portobello barracks to deliver teetotal speeches in the small French Street Hall, Dublin. Many times have I spoken there in my scarlet jacket, between James Haughton and the good old father, the Rev. Dr. Spratt, a Roman Catholic priest, then very active in the cause of temperance. While I was in the regiment my father died, and in the summer of 1853 an aunt's death left me a small sum, out of which I purchased my discharge, and returned to England, to aid in the maintenance of my mother and family.

I have now no time for the full story of my army life, which, however, I may tell some day. Before I left the regiment I had won the esteem of most of the privates, and of some of the officers. I quitted the regiment with a "very good character" from the Colonel, but I am bound to add, that the Captain would not have concurred in this character had he had any voice in the matter. The Lieutenant-Colonel, C. P. Ainslie, earned an eternal right to grateful mention at my hands by his gentlemanly and considerate treatment. I

can not say the same for my Captain, who did his best to send me to jail, and whom I have not yet quite forgiven.

On returning to civilian life I obtained employment in the daytime with a solicitor named Rogers, and in the evening as clerk to a Building Society; and soon after entering this employ I began again to write and speak, and it was then I, to in some degree avoid the efforts which were afterward made to ruin me, took the name "Iconoclast," under which all my anti-theological work down to 1868 was done. I give Mr. Rogers' name now for he is dead, and malice can not injure him. Many anonymous letters were sent to him to warn him of my irreligious opinions; he treated them all with contempt, only asking me not to let my propaganda become an injury to his business.

Soon after my discharge from the army I had a curious adventure. While I was away a number of poor men had subscribed their funds together and had erected a Working Man's Hall, in Goldsmith's Row, Hackney Road. Not having any legal advice, it turned out that they had been entrapped into erecting their building on freehold ground without any lease or conveyance from the freeholder, who asserted his legal right to the building. The men consulted me, and finding that under the Statute of Frauds they had no remedy, I recommended them to offer a penalty rent of £20 a year. This being refused, I constituted myself into a law court, and without any riot or breach of the peace, I, with the assistance of a hundred stout men, took every brick of the building bodily away, and divided the materials, so far as was possible, among the proper owners. I think I can see now the disappointed rascal of a freeholder when he only

had his bare soil left once more. He did not escape unpunished, for to encourage the others to contribute, he had invested some few pounds in the building. He had been too clever; he had relied on the letter of the law, and I beat him with a version of common-sense justice.

I lectured once or twice a week in the small Philpot Street Hall, very often then in the Hall of Science, City Road, and then in the old John Street Institution, until I won myself a name in the party throughout the country. In 1855 had my first notable adventure with the authorities in reference to the right of meeting in Hyde Park, and subsequently gave evidence before the Royal Commission ordered by the House of Commons, presided over by the Right Hon. Stuart Wortley. I was very proud that day at Westminster, when, at the conclusion of my testimony against the authorities, the Commissioner publicly thanked me, and the people who crowded the Court of Exchequer cheered me, for the manner in which I denied the right of Sir Richard Mayne, the then Chief Commissioner of Police, to issue the notices forbidding the people to meet in the Park. This was the first step in a course in which I have never flinched or wavered.

In 1855 I undertook, with others, the publication of a series of papers, entitled "Half-Hours with Freethinkers," the late John Watts being one of my co-workers. I also by myself commenced the publication of my "Commentary on the Pentateuch," which has since been entirely re-written and now forms my "Bible: what it is."

During the autumn of 18571 paid my first lecture visit to Northampton. Early in 1858, when Mr. Edward Truelove was suddenly arrested for publishing the pamphlet, "Is

Tyrannicide Justifiable?" I became Honorary Secretary to the Defense, and was at the same time associated with the conduct of the defense of Simon Bernard, who was arrested at the instigation of the French Government for alleged complicity in the Orsini tragedy. It was at this period I gained the friendship of poor Bernard, which, without diminution, retained until he died; and also the valued frendship of Thomas Allsop, which I still preserve. My associations were from thenceforward such as to encourage in me a strong and bitter feeling against the late Emperor Napoleon. While he was in power I hated him, and never lost an opportunity of working against him until the *decheance* came. I am not sure now that I always judged him fairly; but nothing, I think, could have tempted me to either write or speak of him with friendliness during his life. *Le sang de mes amis etait sur son ame*. Now that the tomb covers his remains, my hatred has ceased; but no other feeling has arisen in its place. Should any of his family seek to resume the Imperial purple, I should remain true to my political declarations of sixteen years since, and should exert myself to the uttermost to prevent France falling under another Empire. I write this with much sadness, as 1870 to 1873 have dispelled some of my illusions held firmly during the fifteen years which preceded. I had believed in such men as Louis Blanc, Lodru Rollin, Victor Hugo, as possible statesmen of France. I was mistaken. They were writers, talkers, and poets; good men to ride on the stream, or to drown in honest protest, but lacking force to swim against, or turn back, the tide by the might of their will. I had believed too in

a Republican France, which is yet only in the womb of time, to be born after many pangs and sore travailing.

In 1859 I saw Joseph Mazzini for the first time, and remained on terms of communication with the great Italian patriot until the year 1869, from time to time bringing him correspondence from Italy, where my business sometimes took me. After 1869 we found ourselves holding diverse opinions on the Franco-Prussian question—Mazzini went for Prussia, I for France—and I never saw him again.

In June, 1858, I held my first public formal theological debate with the Rev. Brewin Grant, B.A., at that time a Dissenting Minister at Sheffield. Mr. Grant was then a man of some ability, and if he could have forgotten his aptitudes as a circus jester, would have been a redoubtable antagonist. During this year I was elected President of the London Secular Society, in lieu of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, who had theretofore led the English Free-thought party, but who has of late years devoted himself more completely to general journalistic work.

In November, 1858, I commenced editorial duties with the *Investigator*, formerly conducted by the late Robert Cooper, which I continued until August, 1859. It had but a small circulation, and was financially a very great failure. For the encouragement of young propagandists, I may here insert a little anecdote of my early lecturing experience. I had lectured in Edinburgh in mid-winter, the audience was small, the profits microscopical. I, alter paying my bill at the Temperance Hotel, where I then stayed, had only a few shillings more than my Parliamentary fare to Bolton, where I was next to lecture. I was out of bed at five on a freezing

morning, and could have no breakfast, as the people were not up. I carried my luggage (a big tin box, corded round, which then held books and clothes, and a small black bag), for I could not spare any of my scanty cash for a conveyance or porter. The train from Edinburgh being delayed by a severe snow-storm, the corresponding Parliamentary had left Carlisle long before our arrival. In order to reach Bolton in time for my lecture, I had to book by a quick train, starting in about three-quarters of an hour, but could only book to Preston, as the increased fare took all my money, except 4 1/2d. With this small sum I could get no refreshment in the station, but in a little shop in the street outside I got a mug of tea and a little hot meat pie. From Preston, I got with great difficulty on to Bolton, handing my black bag to the station-master there as security for my fare from Preston, until the morning. I arrived in Bolton about quarter to eight; the lecture commenced at eight, and I, having barely time to run to my lodgings, and wash and change, went onto the platform cold and hungry. I shall never forget that lecture; it was in an old Unitarian Chapel. We had no gas, the building seemed full of a foggy mist, and was imperfectly lit with candles. Everything appeared cold, cheerless, and gloomy. The most amusing feature was that an opponent, endowed with extra piety and forbearance, chose that evening to specially attack me for the money-making and easy life I was leading. Peace to that opponent's memory, I have never seen him since. It was while in Scotland on this journey I made the acquaintance, and ultimately won the frendship, of the late Alexander Campbell, of Glasgow—a generous, kindly-hearted old

Socialist Missionary, who, at a time when others were hostile, spoke encouragingly to me, and who afterward worked with me for a long period on this journal [*The National Reformer*]. Occasionally the lectures were interfered with by the authorities, but this happened oftener in the provinces than in London. In March, 1859, I was to have lectured in Saint Martin's Hall on "Louis Napoleon," but the Government—on a remonstrance by Count Walewski, as to language used at a previous meeting, at which I had presided for Dr. Bernard—interfered; the hall was garrisoned by police, and the lecture prevented. Mr. Hullah, the then proprietor, being indemnified by the authorities, paid damages for his breach of contract, to avoid a suit which I at once commenced against him. Later in the same month I held a debate in Northampton with Mr. John Bowes, a rather heavy, but well-meaning, old gentleman, utterly unfitted for platform controversy. The press now began to deal with me tolerably freely, and I find "boy," "young man," and "juvenile appearance" very frequent in the comments. My want of education was an especial matter for hostile criticism, the more particularly so when the writer had neither heard nor seen me.

Discussions now grew on me so thick and fast that even some of the most important debates may perhaps escape notice in this imperfect chronicling. At Sheffield I debated with a Reverend Dr. Mensor, who styled himself a Jewish Rabbi. He was then in the process of gaining admission to the Church of England, and had been put forward to show my want of scholarship. We both scrawled Hebrew characters for four nights on a black board, to the delight

and mystification of the audience, who gave me credit for erudition, because I chalked the square letter characters with tolerable rapidity and clearness. At Glasgow I debated with a Mr. Court, representing the Glasgow Protestant Association, a glib-tongued missionary, who has since gone to the bad; at Paisley with a Mr. Smart, a very gentlemanly antagonist; and at Halifax with the Rev. T. D. Matthias, a Welsh Baptist Minister, unquestionably very sincere. All these were formal debates, and were reported with tolerable fullness in the various journals. In the early part of 1860 I, aided by my friends at Sheffield, Halifax, and other parts of England, projected the *National Reformer* in small shares. Unfortunately just after the issue of its prospectus, Joseph Barker returned from America, and was associated with me in the editorship. The arrangement was peculiar, Mr. Barker editing the first half of the paper and I the second. It was not precisely a happy union, and the unnatural alliance came to an end in a very brief period. In August.1861, I officially parted company with Joseph Barker as editor. We had been practically divorced for months before: the first part of the paper usually contained abuse of those who wrote in the second half. He came to me originally at Sheffield, pretending to be an Atheist and a Republican, and soon after pretended to be a Christian, and spoke in favor of slavery. I am sometimes doubtful as to how far Mr. Barker deluded himself, as well as others, in his various changes of theological and political opinions. If he had had the slightest thoroughness in his character, he would have been a great man; as it is, he is only a great turn-coat.

In June, 1860, I debated again with the Reverend Brewin Grant, every Monday for four weeks, at Bradford, and during this debate had a narrow escape of my life. In one of my journeys to London, the great Northern train ran through the station at King's Cross, and many persons were seriously injured. I got off with some trifling bruises and a severe shaking.

Garibaldi having at this time made his famous Marsala effort, I delivered a series of lectures in his aid, and am happy to be able to record that, though at that time very poor, I sent him one hundred guineas as my contribution by my tongue. This money was chiefly sent through W. H. Ashurst, Esq., now Solicitor to the General Post Office, and among the letters I preserve I have one of thanks from "G. Garibaldi," for what I was then doing for Italy.

In this year I debated for four nights with Dr. Brindley, an old antagonist of the Socialists, at Oldham; for two nights with the Rev. Dr. Baylee, the President of St. Aidan's College, at Birkenhead, where a Church of England curate manufactory was for some time carried on; and for two nights with the Rev. Dr. Rutherford, of Newcastle. Dr. Rutherford has since so identified himself with the cause of the Tyneside workers, that I read with regret any harsh words that escaped me in that debate. Although during late years I have managed to keep all my meetings free from violence or disorder, this was not always so. In October, 1860, I paid my first visit to Wigan, and certainly lectured there under considerable difficulty, and incurred personal clanger, the resident clergy actually inciting the populace to physical violence, and part destruction of the building I

lectured in. I, however, supported by one courageous woman and her husband, persevered, and despite bricks and kicks, visited Wigan again and again, until I had, *bon gre malgre* improved the manners and customs of the people, so that now 1 am a welcome speaker there. I could not improve the morals of the clergy, as the public journals have recently shown, but that was their misfortune not my fault. In the winter of 1860, I held two formal debates in Wigan, all of which were fully reported in the local journals; one with Mr. Hutchings, a respectable Nonconformist layman, and the other with the Rev. Woodville Woodman, a Swedenborgian divine.

Early in 1861 I visited Guernsey in consequence of an attempt made by the Law Courts of the Island to enforce the blasphemy laws against a Mr. Stephen Bendall, who had distributed some or my pamphlets to the Guernseyites, and had been condemned to imprisonment in default of finding sureties not to repeat the offense. Not daring to prosecute me, although challenged in writing, the authorities permitted drink and leave of absence to be given to soldiers in the garrison on condition they would try to prevent the lecture, and the house in which I lectured was broken into by a drunken and pious mob, shouting "Kill the Infidel." My antagonists were fortunately as cowardly as they were intolerant, and I succeeded in quelling the riot, delivering my lecture in spite of all opposition, although considerable damage was done to the building.

Shortly after this I visited Plymouth, where the Young Men's Christian Association arranged to prosecute me. They were, however, a little too hasty, and had me arrested at an

open air meeting when I had scarcely commenced my speech, having only uttered the words: "Friends, I am about to address you on the bible." Having locked me up all night, and refused bail, it was found by their legal adviser that a blunder had been committed, and a charge of "exciting a breach of the peace, and assaulting the constable in the execution of his duty," was manufactured. It was tolerably amusing to see the number of dinners, suppers, and breakfasts, all accompanied with pots or cups of Devonshire cream, sent in to the Devonport Lock-up, where I was confined, by various friends who wanted to show their sympathy. The invented charge, though well sworn to, broke down after two days' hearing, under the severe cross-examination to which I subjected the witnesses. I defended myself, two lawyers appeared against me, and seven magistrates sat on the bench, predetermined to convict me. Finding that the evidence of the whole of the witnesses whom I wished to call was to be objected to, because un-believers in hell were then incompetent as witnesses according to English law, I am pleased to say that several Nonconformists, disgusted with the bigotry and pious perjury of my prosecutors, came forward. The result was a triumphant victory, and a certificate of dismissal, which I wrung from the reluctant bench of great unpaid. I was not yet satisfied; some of the magistrates had tried to browbeat me, and I announced in court that I would deliver the lecture I had been prevented from delivering to an audience assembled in the borough, and that I should sue at law the Superintendent of Police who had arrested me. The first portion of my defiance was the most difficult to give effect

to; not a hall could be hired in Devonport, and nearly all the convenient open land being under military jurisdiction, it was impossible to procure the tenancy of a field for an open-air meeting. I, however, fulfilled my promise, and despite the police and military authorities combined, delivered my lecture to an audience assembled in their very teeth. Devonport, Stonehouse, and Plymouth form one garrisoned and fortified town, divided by the River Tamar. All the water to the sea is under the separate jurisdiction of Saltash, some miles distant. I obtained a large boat on which a temporary platform was built, and this boat was quietly moored in the River Tamar on the Devonport side, about two fathoms from the shore. Placards were issued stating that, acting under legal advice, I should address the meeting and deliver the prevented lecture "near to the Devonport Park Gates." Overwhelming force was prepared by the Devonport authorities, and having already erred by too great haste, this time they determined to let me fairly commence my lecture before they arrested me. To their horror I quietly walked past the Park Gates where the crowd was waiting, and passing down a by-lane to the river side, stepped into a little boat, was rowed to the large one, and then delivered my lecture, the audience who had followed me standing on an open wharf, all within the jurisdiction of the Borough of Devonport, and I being about 9 feet outside the borough. The face of the Mayor ready to read the riot act, the superintendent with twenty-eight picked policemen to make sure or my arrest, and a military force in readiness to overawe any popular demonstration—all these were sights to remember. I am afraid the Devonport Young Men's

Christian Association did not limit themselves to prayers and blessings on that famous Sunday.

As I had promised, the authorities refusing any apology for the wrongful arrest, I commenced an action against Superintendent Edwards, by whom I had been taken into custody. The borough magistrates indemnified their officer and found funds to resist me. I fought with very little help save from one tried, though anonymous friend, for Joseph Barker, my co-editor, but not co-worker, in our own paper, discouraged any pecuniary support. The cause was made a special jury one, and came on for trial at Exeter Assizes. Unfortunately I was persuaded to brief counsel, and Sir Robert Collier, my leader, commenced his speech with an expression of sorrow for my opinions. This damaged me very much, although I won the case easily after a long trial. The jury, composed of Devonshire landowners, only gave me a farthing damages, and Mr. Baron Channell refused to certify for costs. I was determined not to let the matter rest here, and myself carried it to the Court *in Banco*, where I argued it in person for two whole days, before Lord Chief Justice Erie and a full bench of Judges. Although I did not succeed in improving my own position, I raised public opinion in favor of free speech, and the enormous costs incurred by the borough authorities, and which they had to bear, have deterred them from ever again interfering either with my lectures or those of any other speaker, and I now have crowded audiences in the finest hall whenever I visit the three towns. These proceedings cost me several hundred pounds, and burdened me with a debt which took long clearing off.

In 1802, I held a four nights' discussion with a Dissenting clergyman, the Rev. W. Barker. My opponent was probably one of the most able and straightforward among my numerous antagonists. About this time a severe attack of acute rheumatism prostrated me, and having soon after to visit Italy, I, at first under medical advice, adopted the habit of drinking the light Continental wines, and although continuing an advocate of sobriety, I naturally ceased to take part in any teetotal gatherings.

In the struggle between the Northern and Southern States of America, my advocacy and sympathies went with what I am glad to say was the feeling of the great mass of the English people—in favor of the North; and my esteemed friend, and then contributor, W. E. Adams, furnished most valuable aid with his pen in the enlightenment of public opinion, at a time when many of our aristocracy were openly exulting in what they conceived to be the probable break-up of the United States Republic. During the Lancashire cotton famine I lectured several times in aid of the fund.

I began now also to assume a much more prominent position in the various English political movements, and especially to speak on the Irish Church and Irish Land questions. On the Irish questions, I owe much to my late co-worker and contributor, poor Peter Fox Andre, a thoroughly honest and whole-souled man, whose pen was always on the side of struggling nationalities.

One of the disadvantages connected with a public career is, that every vile scoundrel who is too cowardly to face you openly can libel you anonymously. I have had, I think, my full share of this kind of annoyance. Most of the slanders I

have treated with utter contempt, and if I had alone consulted my own feelings, should probably never have pursued any other course. Twice, however, I have had recourse to the judgment of the law—once in the case of a clergyman of the Church of England, who indulged in a foul libel affecting my wife and children. This fellow I compelled to retract every word he had uttered, and to pay £100, which, after deducting the costs, was divided among various charitable institutions. The reverend libeler wrote me an abject letter, begging me not to ruin his prospects in the Church by publishing his name; I consented, and he has since repaid my mercy by losing no opportunity of being offensive. He is a prominent contributor to the *Rock*, and a fierce ultra-Protestant. He must have greater confidence in my honor than in his own, or fear of exposure would compel him to greater reticence. The other case arose during the election, and will be dealt with in its proper order.

It was my fortune to be associated with the Reform League from its earliest moments until its dissolution. It is hardly worth while to repeat the almost stereotyped story of the successful struggle made by the League for Parliamentary Reform. E. Beales, Esq., was the President of the League, and I was one of its Vice-Presidents, and continued nearly the whole time of its existence a member of its executive. The whole of my services and journeys were given to the League without the slightest remuneration, and I repeatedly, and according to my means, contributed to its funds. When I resigned my position on the executive I received from Mr. George Howell, the Secretary, and from Mr. Beales, the President, the most touching and flattering

letters as to what Mr. Beales was pleased to describe as the loyalty and utility of my services to the League. Mr. George Howell concluded a long letter as follows: "Be pleased to accept my assurance of sincere regards for your manly courage, consistent and honorable conduct in our cause, and for your kindly consideration for myself as Secretary of this great movement on all occasions." These letters have additional value from the fact that Mr. Beales, whom I sincerely respect, differs widely from me in matters of faith, and Mr. Howell is, fortunately, far from having any friendly feeling toward me. It was while on the Executive of this League that I first became intimately acquainted with Mr. George Odger, and had reason to be pleased with the straightforward course he pursued, and the honest work he did as one of the Executive Committee. Mr. John Baxter Langley and Mr. R. A. Cooper were also among my most prominent co-workers.

My sympathy with Ireland, and open advocacy of justice for the Irish, nearly brought me into serious trouble. Some who were afterward indicted as the chiefs of the so-called Fenian movement, came to me for advice. So much I see others have written, and the rest of this portion of my autobiography I may write some day. At present there are men not out of danger whom careless words might imperil, and as regards myself I shall not be guilty of the folly of printing language which a government might use against me. My pamphlet on the Irish Question, published in 1866, won a voluntary letter of warm approval from Mr. Gladstone, the only friendly writing I ever received from him in my life.

At Huddersfield, the Philosophical Hall having been duly hired for my lectures, pious influence was brought to bear on the lessee to induce him to break the contract. Fortunately what in law amounted to possession had been given, and on the doors being locked against me, I broke them open, and delivered my lecture to a crowded and most orderly audience. I was arrested, and an attempt was made to prosecute me before the Huddersfield magistrates; but I defended myself with success, and defeated with ease the Conservative solicitor, N. Learoyd, who had been specially retained to insure my committal to jail.

In 1868 I entered into a contest with the Conservative Government which, having been continued by the Gladstone Government, finished in 1869 with a complete victory for myself. According to the then law every newspaper was required to give sureties to the extent of £800 against blasphemous or seditious libel. I had never offered to give these sureties, as they would have probably been liable to forfeiture about once a month. In March, 1868, the Disraeli Government insisted on my compliance with the law. I refused. The Government then required me to stop my paper. I printed on the next issue, "Printed in Defiance of Her Majesty's Government." I was then served with an Attorney-General's information, containing numerous counts, and seeking to recover enormous penalties. I determined to be my own barrister, and while availing myself in consultation of the best legal advice, I always argued my own case. The interlocutory hearings before the Judges in Chambers were numerous, for I took objection to nearly every step made by the government, and I nearly

always succeeded. I also brought the matter before Parliament, being specially backed in this by Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. John Stuart Mill, and Mr. E. H. J. Crawford. When the information was called on for trial in a crowded court before Mr. Baron Martin, the Government backed out, and declined to make a jury; so the prosecution fell to the ground. Strange to say, it was renewed by the Gladstone Government, who had the coolness to offer me, by the mouth of Attorney-General Collier, that they would not enforce any penalties if I would stop the paper, and admit that I was in the wrong. This I declined, and the prosecution now came on for trial before Baron Bramwell and a special jury. Against me were the Attorney-General, Sir R. Collier, the Solicitor-General, Sir J. D. Coleridge, and Mr. Crompton Hutton. I found that these legal worthies were blundering in their conduct of the trial, and at *nisi prius* I let them obtain a verdict, which however, I reversed on purely technical grounds, after a long argument, which I sustained before Lord Chief Baron Kelly and a full court sitting in Banco. Having miserably failed to enforce the law against me, the Government repealed the statute, and I can boast that I got rid of the last shackle of the obnoxious English press laws. Mr. J. S. Mill wrote me: "You have gained a very honorable success in obtaining a repeal of the mischievous Act by your persevering resistance." The Government, although beaten, refused to reimburse me any portion of the large outlay incurred in fighting them.

It has always been my ambition to enter Parliament, and at the General Election for 1808 I, for the first time, entered the arena as a candidate. I was beaten; but this is scarcely

wonderful. I had all the journals in England except three against me. Every idle or virulent tale which folly could distort or calumny invent was used against me. Despite all, I polled nearly 1,100 votes, and I obtained unasked, but not ungratefully listened to, the public acknowledgments from the Mayor of the borough, also from one of my competitors, Mr. Charles Gilpin, as to the loyal manner in which I had fought the contest through.

During the election struggle libels rained from all sides. One by the late Mr Capper, M. P., seeking reelection at Sandwich, was the monstrous story, that in the open square at Northampton I had taken out my watch and defied God to show his power by striking me dead in five minutes. Challenged for his authority Mr. Capper pretended to have heard the story from Mr. C. Gilpin, M. P., who indignantly denied being any party to the falsehood. I insisted on an apology from Mr. Capper, which being refused I sued him, but he died soon after the writ was served. The story was not an original invention by Mr. Capper; it had been reported of Abner Kneeland thirty years before, and is still a favorite one with pious missionaries at street corners. A still more outrageous slander was inserted in the *Razor*, a pseudo-comic weekly. I compelled this journal to give a full apology, but not until after two years' litigation, and a new trial had been ordered. When obliged to recant, the Christian proprietor became insolvent, to avoid payment of the costs. Unfortunately born poor, my life had been one continued struggle, and the burden of my indebtedness was sorely swollen in this and similar contests.

Probably the most severe, and to me certainly the most costly, struggle has been on the oath question. Formerly it was a fatal objection against the competency of a witness who did not believe in a Deity and in a future state of rewards and punishments. Several attempts had been made to alter the law, but they had all failed; and indeed Sir J. Trevelyan's measures only provided for affirmation, and did not seek to abolish the incompetency. In a case in which I was plaintiff in the Court of Common Pleas, my evidence was objected to, and I determined to fight the matter through every possible court, and to get the law changed if possible.

I personally argued the case before Lord Chief Justice Bovill and a full Bench, in the Court of Common Pleas, and with the aid of the present Mr. Justice Denman and the late Lord Chancellor Hatherly, the law was twice altered in Parliament. Before victory was ultimately obtained I had to carry the case into the Court of Error, and I prepared and sent out at my own cost more than two hundred petitions to Parliament. Ultimately the Evidence Amendment Act, 1869, and the Evidence Further Amendment Act, 1870, gave Freethinkers the right to enter the witness box, and I won my suit. The Christian defendant finished by becoming bankrupt, and I lost a terribly large sum in debt and costs. The original debt and interest were over £300, and the costs of the various proceedings were very heavy.

In the winter of 1870 the Mirfield Town Hall, which had been properly taken and paid for for two nights' lectures, was refused by the proprietors, who barricaded the hall, and obtained a great force of police from the neighborhood. In