

**THE BIOGRAPHY OF
CHARLES
BRADLAUGH**

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The Biography of Charles Bradlaugh by Adolphe S. Headingley

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ADOLPHE S. HEADINGLEY

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OF
CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

BY
ADOLPHE S. HEADINGLEY.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED.

"If there were no opposition to opinion, the world would either turn about with every breath of novelty or stagnate for ever, in a living death."—*Leigh Hunt*.



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1883.

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68, FLEET STREET, E.C.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THE innate respect that all Englishmen bear towards anyone who unmistakeably displays exceptional perseverance, integrity, and courage, is my reason for presenting to the public a biography of Charles Bradlaugh. That he possesses these great qualities, those who read the incidents of his life will scarcely be able to deny. While his opinions must of necessity excite the most energetic opposition in many quarters, there is every reason to hope that all parties will ultimately acknowledge his personal merits. It is these qualities and the varied events of his life that I have attempted to describe; and in the hope that the book may be welcome to friend and foe alike, I have carefully avoided the introduction of controversial dissertations.

Of course, it is notorious that Bradlaugh is in religious questions an Atheist, in social questions a Malthusian, and in politics a Republican. The defence of these views has been the basis of his every action, and it is impossible to lose sight of this fact in writing his biography; but I have refrained from reproducing any of his arguments in favor of these opinions, so that the story of his life may be read by the most timid Christian or the most orthodox victim

of our conventional laws without the least fear. Not that for a moment I would shrink from the discussion of the great and fundamental questions which Bradlaugh has raised, but that in the present instance I am anxious to spread some knowledge concerning the man, rather than his doctrines.

In a separate work these latter might be fitly considered, the reader being fairly warned as to the character of what he is about to read. But in this volume perhaps the greatest service may be rendered to the cause of truth by simply seeking to elicit those feelings of respect which should exist on both sides if any discussion is to be conducted in a dignified manner and brought to a satisfactory issue. Now it is quite evident that England will be called upon, at no distant date, to discuss the opinions which Bradlaugh represents; and therefore it is essential that we should be better acquainted with this new spokesman who has arisen in our midst.

So as not to express merely my own view of the question, it will be found that Mr. Morrison Davidson, in his essays on "Eminent Radicals," remarks that of all roads by which St. Stephen's may be approached, Bradlaugh certainly selected the least likely and the most arduous, and yet he has succeeded. He has taken infinite pains to spoil his own chances. All the great "interests," royalty, aristocracy, church, chapel, and the public-house, have waged war against him, and yet he has surmounted all these obstacles. "This unique position," adds Mr. Davidson, "he has won by his daring, by his intellect, by his titanic energy, and by his general thoroughness

of character. If he is not a real hero, he is a surprisingly clever counterfeit. In his own way, and by his own example, he has inspired many thousands of the most abject of his countrymen with reinvigorated feelings of self-reliance and renewed hope on earth. He has taught them the inestimable lesson of self-help, of righteous indignation against oppression."

By Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner he has been described as one of the most powerful amongst English orators, and Mr. M. Davidson asserts that, excepting Mr. Gladstone, Bradlaugh has perhaps the most attached personal following of any politician in England. Certainly, the National Secular Society, of which he is the President and principal organiser, possesses eight London and sixty-one provincial branches,¹ not to mention a large number of other bodies who work with, but do not yet form part of, this special association.

When Bradlaugh's seat in the House of Commons was menaced, the efficacy and power of this organisation was conclusively demonstrated by the fact that a few pounds spent in postage sufficed to set all these bodies in motion, and ensured the holding of more than a hundred and forty meetings in his favor during the course of one single evening. On the other hand, when in advertisements, etc., several hundreds of pounds had been expended to convoke only one meeting in Hyde Park against his admission into the House of Commons, barely 400 persons were

¹ There are now twenty-two London and seventy-four provincial branches, besides branches in India, Australia and New Zealand.—
Ed. 2nd edition.

present, and out of these a large minority were emphatically in Bradlaugh's favor, while thousands of enthusiastic supporters waited to greet him in Trafalgar Square and Westminster Hall when he was about to claim his seat.

Under these circumstances, it is impossible to deny the importance, as a great political fact, of Bradlaugh's advent to Parliament; and the facts of his life, irrespectively of all party feelings, should be known, if only as a part of contemporary history. To ensure the accuracy of this fragment of the history of our time, I applied to Bradlaugh personally, and from him obtained the greater part of the material that will be found in these pages. By his courtesy and ready assistance, I am enabled to give a considerable amount of information which has not yet been published, and could only have been obtained directly from him.

ADOLPHE S. HEADINGLEY.

London, July, 1880.

PREFATORY NOTE TO SECOND
EDITION.

THE First Edition, issued in 1880, having been exhausted, an Appendix, by Mr. W. Mawer, has been added, containing a rough diary of the principal events which have happened between the issuing of the two editions.

June, 1883.