

A CHRONOLOGY OF
BRITISH SECULARISM
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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

I N T R O D U C T O N

In 1966 the National Secular Society will celebrate its Centenary. Perhaps the grand occasion will see, among other things, the publication of a Centenary Volume on a bigger scale than the present effort, which is intended as little more than a diary or potted history of events. It is the bare bones, the skeletal structure, the mere scaffolding of the movement. Its progress is recorded in terms of its outward appearance only. Behind the event lie the struggle and the joy, the heroism and the suffering.

An episode told in a line hides years of frustration and hardship. The exaltation of achievement is covered by a sober date and fact. Yet we may pave the way for a more intensive treatment of the subject which would do some credit to a hundred brave years of N.S.S history.

The present study does not, however, confine itself to N.S.S organised activity, but rather takes note of outer events impinging on it and leaving their well defined trace.

It is a matter of some difficulty to decide when the history of secularism began. The term itself, in our use, dates from 1851, but the secularist outlook was implicit before that, and I shall start at the opening of Holyoake's career. What follows was primarily suggested by J. E. McGee's *History of the British Secular Movement* (Haldeman-Julius, 1948), but in checking the latter I have had recourse to a variety of other sources, such as local histories and memoranda, published and unpublished reminiscences, conference proceedings and annual reports. In particular, I have tried to complete McGee's account from information probably not available to him in America, profiting, for example, from contact with our veteran members, both personally and through their recorded utterances.

McGee's history is surprisingly detailed and objective, the more remarkable in being published so far away from the scene of events. It is the only work of its kind on a national scale, and it is in no spirit of disparagement that I have made some attempt to attend to the following defects: (1) There are numerous minor errors in it, mainly in respect of N.S.S. branches, which do not detract from the central theme, and which perhaps indicate dependence on very old hand-written matter; (2) there is some unnecessary repetition, possibly the result of compiling the work over a long period; and (3) though the information up to about 1904 is as full as could be wished and to about 1922 quite representative the author appears to have scraped about for material to cover the subsequent period. Yet one must not be niggardly or stinting in praise for a most laudable and painstaking effort.

I am adopting the chronological method in preference to the stream method largely used by McGee, because I like to look at the cross-sections, leaving the reader to pick out the threads which interest him most.

A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM

1840. Under religious pressure a young instructor at Birmingham Mechanics' Institute, George Jacob Holyoake, aged 23, has to resign his position; he then becomes Owenite lecturer at Worcester.

1841. He goes to Sheffield in a similar capacity. The clergy now strike at heretical Owenism by getting its money collections stopped unless a religious oath is taken: many comply with this but Holyoake is among those who refuse and so he again loses his position. He goes to London, where he hears heresy more advanced than his own at the Hall of Science, where he meets Richard Carlile. After four numbers of *The Oracle of Reason* have appeared its editor, Charles Southwell, aged 27,

is fined £100 and sent to prison for a year for blasphemy, and Holyoake takes his place as editor. During a lecture at Cheltenham, Holyoake is provoked and trapped into blasphemy and sent to Gloucester gaol for six months (for saying the Deity should be put on half pay). At this time Henry Hetherington is also given four months for blasphemy.

1842. Holyoake is again lecturing for Owenism at Worcester. He then becomes a branch secretary in London.

1843. Richard Carlile dies after his eventful career fighting religious bigotry. Having lost by imprisonment for blasphemy four editors in succession, *The Oracle of Reason* dies. Holyoake is co-founder of *Movement*, the organ of the Anti-Persecution Union, of which he is secretary, but the journal does not live long.

1845. Holyoake is Owenite lecturer at Glasgow. The failure of an Owenist community leads to some disintegration in the movement, many regarding religion as the barrier first to be removed if free criticism is to prevail, and Holyoake is among them. Southwell is writing his *Confessions of a Freethinker*.

1846. Holyoake founds the *Reasoner*, a weekly organ for Owenism.

1848. Holyoake is co-editor of a short-lived Chartist paper, *The Cause of the People*, and he is on the executive of the Chartist Union.

1851. A nodal point in the struggle is reached. SECULARISM BECOMES EXPLICIT. Trying to start a movement Holyoake issues a statement of secularist doctrine from what he calls the Central Secular Society, London, proclaiming (1) science as the true guide of man, (2) morality as secular, not religious, in origin, (3) reason the only authority, (4) freedom of thought and speech, and (5) that owing to the "uncertainty of survival" we should direct our efforts to this life only. His statement shows affinities with the ethical side of Owenism, he adopts Utilitarianism, and he admires Comte's Positivism as "the scientific Bible of secularism".

1852. The Central Society, if it ever existed in anything but name, has now disappeared but it has served its purpose, because scattered Owenite societies and groups now style themselves "secular", and individuals outside Owenism form other secularist bodies. The Leicester Secular Society is among those existent. Holyoake speaks at a Manchester conference and his *Reasoner* falls in line with the new secularist movement: plans are made for a national organisation. A Congregationalist minister, the Rev. Brewin Grant, who has set himself the special task of combating the rise of secularism, is one of Holyoake's debating opponents.

1853. Holyoake sets up a news and book agency and also purchases a reformist publishing concern, and these merge into a bookselling business at 147, Fleet Street. There is a steady output of propaganda, and Holyoake is agitating for the freedom of the press. Dr. Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science* published, anonymously.

1854. An anti-church monthly, the *Investigator*, edited by Robert Cooper, appears. Holyoake continues his public debates with Grant and others, and among his publications are a secular catechism and a book of secular prayer.

1855. At last the newspaper stamp is abolished. At another secularist conference the plans for a national association are still abortive: there is, however, much give and take between local secular societies in the matter of exchange of lecturers and in combined excursions. Hitherto isolated secularists are finding moral ammunition in contacting others of similar outlook.

1856. The London Secular Society, which is acting as a sort of parent body to five other London groups, founds a general benevolent society for all secular societies. Moreover, the social aspect is developing with picnics and concerts, the latter, one imagines, home-made. Religious pressure has removed Sunday bands from the public parks, and the secularists not only energetically protest to Palmerston, but also lend aid to a Sunday League for providing private bands.

1857. Another sentence for blasphemy gives impetus to the agitation for the repeal of the blasphemy laws.

1858. The Rev. Joseph Barker, returning from America, and himself an ex-opponent of secularism,

debates with Brewin Grant at Halifax. Another of Grant's opponents is an earnest young inquirer aged 25, who has been converted to secularist opinion by attending lectures and offering his opposition to secularist speakers; his name is Charles Bradlaugh. Holyoake publishes *The Trial of Theism*.

1859. The benevolent society of the secularists is now enrolled under the Friendly Societies Act. The *Investigator*, of whose editors Bradlaugh has been one, ceases. Bradlaugh is now turning out anti-Christian works and holding debates on the merits of the Bible. He is also acting as secretary for the Truelove Defence Fund, Truelove having been arrested for libelling the Emperor Napoleon III; the case is dismissed. Bradlaugh has a noteworthy adventure at Devonport, where the police interfere with his meeting and unlawfully arrest him. Determined to resume his lecturing on the same site near the shore he convenes another meeting. The Mayor, replete with Riot Act and military support, and a strong band of Christian witnesses in the shape of a Young Men's Association, assemble to hear the forthcoming blasphemy and to take action. The scene is set on the river's brink. In the words of the famous judge, Sir Edward Parry, "Bradlaugh walks quietly towards the Gate, steps into a little boat, rows out to a barge moored a little distance from the shore, and there nine feet without Devonport Jurisdiction, delivers his lecture: 'Pocket your Riot Act, friend Mayor: Right About, hence to Barracks, ye Military. Home, home, and gnash your teeth in seemly privacy ye Young Christian Men.' This is not, it seems a man to be easily persecuted, to be trampled under foot, or to be whiffed off the face of the earth by plugshot volleys of dull Bigotry" (written in 1885 and reprinted in Parry's *My Own Way*).

1860. Charles Southwell dies in N.Z. at 46. Freethinkers of Bradford, Halifax and Sheffield form a company and found the *National Reformer*, the co-editors being "Iconoclast" (Charles Bradlaugh) and Joseph Barker; Charles Watts, aged 24, son of a Wesleyan minister, is on the staff. Another conference still plans in vain for a national secular organisation. The lot of the secularist lecturer is hard; his arguments are being met with boots, stones, pepper and sometimes personal assault; Bradlaugh records a particularly stormy session in his attempt to educate Wigan. His three nights' debate at Liverpool with a Dr. Baylee shows Bradlaugh the complete master of a splenetic opponent. Among Bradlaugh's publications of the year we find *Is There a God?*

1861. Bradlaugh, adopting the neo-Malthusian principles of the Place-Carlile agitation for birth control earlier in the century, makes birth control advocacy part of the *National Reformer* policy, and also starts a Malthusian League, which, however, does not prosper. Not all secularists are yet prepared to champion birth control, and those in opposition include Joseph Barker, whose services are accordingly dispensed with by the *National Reformer* company. In order to unite forces a National Secular Association is proclaimed, but it does not operate and in three months disappears in dissension. For the prospects of national unity it is unfortunate that at this stage the greatest factor making for unity collapses, namely, Holyoake's publishing and printing concern at "Fleet Street House". With its termination the *Reasoner* ceases, and the general atmosphere is far from congenial. Holyoake starts a new monthly, *Counsellor*, which closes when Holyoake is given three pages of the *National Reformer*. This latter arrangement is soon ended, and Holyoake starts the *Secular World*. The Leicester Secular Society is officially inaugurated after a somewhat nebulous existence (there was, of course, a Revolutionary club at Leicester as far back as 1785). Bradlaugh is writing on a variety of topics but always finding time to defend atheism and secularism in pamphlet and on the platform, and even conducting a lengthy epistolary debate with the Rev. T. Lawson on *Has Man a Soul?* John Watts, brother of Charles, adds his quota to the secularist literary output.

I am pausing here to consider two matters which cannot be pocketed into any particular year; they are the progress and activity of secularism as a whole, and the reasons why national unity was not attained.

Inside the ten years 1851-1861 some sixty secularist groups appear. Amalgamations and disappearances render it quite impossible to estimate how many were in existence at any given time. A

third of them are in London, well diffused and with perhaps a slight bias towards East London. One is North London Secular Institute. Scotland and Wales are represented by Edinburgh and Abergavenny respectively, and possibly the Eclectic Society of Glasgow or any similar forerunner that had affinities with secularism. Of the remainder, the South has three, Midlands seven, Lancs fourteen, Yorks eight and the North-East four.

The several directions of agitation show the best reward in the fight for the freedom of the Press. Holyoake, especially keen in this struggle, served on the committee of a national body for removing newspaper duties, the "taxes on knowledge", and their efforts were successful. On the other hand an affirmation bill failed in spite of numerous petitions for oaths equality, already enjoyed by the Quakers. In the fight for educational reform secularists gave help, though it had to be unobtrusive, to a Manchester association for secular education. Meanwhile the secularists had their own schools on Sundays and week nights, maintained by local secular bodies, in London (six), Birmingham, Ashton, Rochdale, Halifax, Huddersfield, Keighley, Glasgow and probably other places. They also kept up the agitation for disestablishment and for the right of public meeting in parks. Besides all this they maintained the direct attack on church doctrines, especially on those of God, immortality and the Bible, regarding these as the essential foundation for secularist practice. This leads us to the question of disunity.

Is the theoretical attack necessary or advisable? That was the problem which did more than any other single factor to split the ranks. Roughly speaking Holyoake said No, Bradlaugh Yes. The former, in his earlier career, often broke his own rule and attacked theology, but as time went on he became more concerned with the fruits of secular philosophy than with its theoretical basis. In his (unpublished) reminiscences Sidney Gimson, son of Josiah Gimson of Leicester, has referred to Holyoake's readiness to placate liberal clergymen for the sake of advancing on common ground. Moreover, no thoroughgoing secularist can subscribe to Holyoake's admiration of Comte's Positivism, which has been called Roman Catholicism minus Christianity. It is only fair to add that a case can be made for secularists getting on with the job without unduly antagonising their potential supporters with such shocking heresies as Atheism and the denial of survival after death, not to mention the exposure of Bible absurdities.

In the event it was Bradlaugh who got the major following; his prestige among secularists increased as Holyoake's declined. In this I feel bound to applaud the secularists of the time. It is good not only to be on the right road but also to know why you are on it. I do not doubt that vast numbers of indifferentists will follow the Holyoakes who lead them to brighter Sundays. They will be equally ready to follow the Churches should the latter decide the time is ripe to take the lead from secularism in order to keep their own heads above water and so retain the privileges that are left to them. Bradlaugh wanted the amelioration of social conditions as much as Holyoake, and in fact his own career in this direction will compare with any in the 19th century. But he intended to have an intelligent following fully conscious of the anti-social nature of religion and of its utterly fallible credentials. In a word, he was "Thorough". He was uncompromising on doctrine as well as in practice. He was, therefore, the most Christian-hated reformer of the century, and that means of any century. And while Holyoake had shed the teachings of religion he never quite shed the atmosphere, with his secular psalms, prayers, hymns and ritual.

To resume the factual account: -

1862. The National Reformer Co. ceases and Bradlaugh becomes proprietor. *Propagandist* appears.

1863. During a period of ill-health Bradlaugh relinquishes the editorship of his paper. He continues to write on poverty and on parliamentary representation. Holyoake's paper becomes the *Reasoner*; he is publishing secular tracts and working on the latest affirmation bill.

1864. John Watts, now editing the *National Reformer*, rents 17, Johnson's Court for it: his brother Charles is sub-editor and is doing some secularist lecturing. After irregular appearances Holyoake's

paper dies. Bradlaugh writes his *Plea for Atheism*.

1865. *The National Reformer* office is moved but No. 17 is kept on by a company under Austin Holyoake, brother of G. J.

1866. Another nodal point is reached; secularism becomes national in character. The NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY is formed. Bradlaugh, who resumes editorship, is President. Its principles are: to promote human happiness, to fight religion as an obstruction, to attack the legal barriers to Freethought: and its objects are Freethought propaganda, parliamentary action to remove disabilities, secular schools and instruction classes, mutual help and a fund for the distressed. The headquarters are in London, and the executive includes several Vice-Presidents of whom C. Watts is one. Besides the officers there is a council chosen by the local secular societies, meeting monthly, with the annual conference held on Whit Sunday and proxy voting permitted. Leicester Secular Society takes its final form. Secularists are now aiding a league for manhood suffrage, of which Bradlaugh is Vice-President. A Reform League meeting in Hyde Park is forbidden; nevertheless, the crowd assemble: the police intervene and so Bradlaugh and others lead the crowd to Trafalgar Square where the meeting is held. Death of John Watts.

1868. Robert Cooper (b. 1819) dies. Security laws are aimed at making newspapers provide security against blasphemy, and Bradlaugh is prosecuted for not complying with the regulation. He fights the case at law, his supporters raising the money for the action, while the N.S.S. vigorously fights the security laws. Bradlaugh drops the name "Iconoclast" and stands for Parliament at Northampton. J. S. Mill loses his own seat in support of Bradlaugh. The latter is working on the Irish question and Holyoake is pressing for improved working-class representation in Parliament. Austin Holyoake prepares a form to supplant Christian baptism, and C. Watts a secular funeral service. The latter also joins the yearly attack on Christian doctrine. A youth of 18 has come from the west country to settle in London; his name is George William Foote.

1869. Bradlaugh has beaten the security laws, which are now repealed. With the support of Mill and others the Atheist can now give evidence at court, but by a technicality Bradlaugh is refused the right to affirm in court; 200 secularist petitions follow. The Leicester Secular Institute and Club opens. Bradlaugh debates with Wm. Gillespie in the *National Reformer*. Foote is now working for the N.S.S. and has met J. M. Wheeler, the same age as himself.

1870. The technicality is rectified and secularists now agitate for affirmation to apply to the United Kingdom and to jurymen; there are many petitions. In between his debates, editing, writing and speaking for the N.S.S., Bradlaugh is working on land reform. C. Watts, whose son Charles Albert begins work in the Johnson's Court office, is embarking on a series of verbal and written debates with the Christian Evidence Society.

1871. A Trafalgar Square meeting to protest against grants to the royal family is forbidden. Bradlaugh reconvenes it and tells the Home Secretary that the threat of force will be resisted; the Government rescinds the prohibition half an hour before the start. Bradlaugh delivers his inaugural address to the Republican Club as its President, and as he is now "living the lives of ten men" the N.S.S. presidency passes to a benefactor of the society, A. Trevelyan. N.S.S. membership is now well past the thousand mark, but this is misleadingly small, as some of the most ardent workers in the cause dare not risk membership on account of their livelihood. Secularists are now writing their own manuals for schools and classes. Holyoake, who is an official of the N.S.S., revives his *Reasoner* monthly, printed by a Manchester Co-operative Society and with half the space given over to Co-operation. A. Holyoake and C. Watts edit a secular hymn book.

1872. Holyoake's *Reasoner* again fails. *Secular Chronicle*, a monthly, is launched at Birmingham. After a Hyde Park meeting has led to convictions for holding it Bradlaugh calls a great protest meeting, which is not interfered with, and the obnoxious regulations are then annulled. He publishes his *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick*. He resumes the N.S.S. presidency.

1873. Republican Clubs, largely secularist in personnel, hold a Manchester conference of their delegates with Bradlaugh and Foote present, and form a National Republican League, which is

short-lived. There is increased secularist agitation for extending the right to affirm. Leicester secularists form a company under Josiah Gimson and buy land for £4,500. Mrs. Annie Besant gets a legal separation from her husband, a minister of religion, starts pamphleteering and goes to London. C. Watts continues his attacks on the Bible and his battles with Christian Evidence.

1874. On the death of Austin Holyoake the business in Johnson's Court is purchased by secularists for Charles Watts. The N.S.S. restates its objects: they are mainly secular education, disestablishment, the abolition of poverty and the raising of the level of the agricultural worker, land law reform and the abolition of the House of Lords. Mrs. Besant, through contacting the shop of Edward Truelove, Freethought bookseller, joins the N.S.S. On the other hand Joseph Barker, caught in a perilous crossing of the Atlantic, again finds Jesus and returns to the fold. In the literature of the year, Bible teachings are attacked by Watts and Mrs. Besant, the former bringing the verdicts of advancing science to bear on them.

1875. *Republican Chronicle* appears. Mrs. Harriet Law, aged 43, an ex-Baptist who has been converted to secularism by hearing Watts's lectures, takes over *Secular Chronicle* as a weekly. In an "incident" at Willington in Durham, she opposes Joseph Barker in his pulpit ("Shame on you, Joseph!"), and when turned out of the Church she holds an opposition meeting just outside. At a Darwin meeting Mrs. Besant is stoned. She is now a Vice-President of the N.S.S. and under its auspices issues an "improved" collection of secular hymns. Bradlaugh debates with Grant on Atheism, Foote attacks the doctrines of God and immortality, Mrs. Besant attacks Christian teaching and also writes on euthanasia.

1876. At many secular meetings, both outdoor and indoor, disorder prevails, and Bradlaugh runs into trouble at Congleton, speaking to the accompaniment of smashing windows and bottles. Holyoake and Foote start a weekly enterprise, *The Secularist*, eschewing theological attack. A most inauspicious combination, differences develop from the start and after two months Holyoake withdraws, leaving Foote in sole charge and himself starting a new weekly, *Secular Review*, similarly refraining from attack on doctrine. Bradlaugh holds four big debates in the year, Watts two, while Foote writes on Freethought heroes. A newcomer, Dr. E. B. Aveling, aged 25, son of a Congregationalist minister and a student, later teacher, at London University, draws the inferences from evolution as they affect religious teaching.

1877. This is the year of the Knowlton pamphlet and its resulting test of secularist solidarity. Having been published in America in 1832, and first introduced to British readers by Jas. Watson in the following year, this birth control pamphlet is the work of Dr. Knowlton (1800-1850). For publishing it Charles Watts is arrested, the pamphlet being described as obscene. Pleading guilty, he is released and his sentence suspended. Condemned for not carrying the case through, Watts resigns from the N.S.S. Some secularists hesitate to champion birth control. Some even oppose it, and they follow Watts and Holyoake out of the society to found the British Secular Union, which announces branches but has no president. It refrains from attack on doctrine. Holyoake, in frail health, hands over his *Secular Review*, now identified with the B.S.U., to Watts, whose publishing business now takes patronage from the new Union. Foote also goes over to the B.S.U. and brings his *Secularist* into line with it. *Secular Review and Secularist* are then amalgamated under that name with Watts and Foote as joint editors, but Foote returns to the N.S.S. and it becomes *Secular Review* with Watts as sole editor. Mrs. Besant becomes co-editor of the *National Reformer* with Bradlaugh. Among the premises being taken by local secularist bodies is a Freethought Hall at Walworth (ancestral to the S. London branch). Mrs. Besant is now writing much anti-Christian matter, and Foote is making his mark as a lecturer and debater. Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant start their own Freethought Publishing Co. in Stonecutter Street, publish the Knowlton pamphlet and are sentenced to six months each; secularists raise funds for their defence; the sentence is quashed.

1878. The new Knowlton edition sells 100,000 in three months, and a birth control pamphlet of Mrs. Besant's 150,000. Edward Truelove gets four months for selling birth control pamphlets; secularists raise funds for his defence and petition the government, unsuccessfully, regarding his

sentence. This year sees the free distribution at London open air meetings of 48,000 N.S.S. tracts. An ex-Methodist minister of Leeds, Joseph Symes, is now lecturing, debating and writing for the N.S.S. A young journalist from the Isle of Arran goes to work on the staff of an Edinburgh paper, hears Bradlaugh speak there and joins the local N.S.S. branch; he is J. M. Robertson. Watts and Foote edit the *British Secular Almanac*. Edited by G. Standring, the *Secular Chronicle* is now a monthly again. Bradlaugh has one of his most pleasant and instructive debates at Nottingham, his opponent being the Unitarian Rev. R. A. Armstrong. Though it is heavyweight versus lightweight, in respect not only of their physical contrast but also of their debating skill, the "great little Armstrong" proves an able and courteous opponent on *Is it Reasonable to Worship God?* Foote is also debating frequently.

1879. The *Secular Chronicle* dies. Foote attempts a monthly, *Liberal*, containing anti-religious matter, but the venture fails. Mrs. Besant is deprived of the custody of her child because of her views. Her current work includes a plea for India and Afghanistan. Standring attacks royalism. Foote writes his *Philosophy of Secularism*.

1880. At the fourth attempt Bradlaugh is elected for Northampton. His request to affirm instead of taking the religious oath is refused by Commons; his offer to take the oath is also refused, and a committee recommendation that he affirm at his legal peril is rejected by the House. He then presents himself to be sworn and is faced with fierce hostility: refusing to withdraw he is removed to the Clock Tower and there detained. N.S.S. membership reaches 6,000 and there is an untold increase in outside support: Aveling becomes a Vice-President of the N.S.S. The new Hall of Failsforth Secular Sunday School is opened. Secular funerals are legalised. *Republican* appears. Watts takes W. S. Ross (Saladin), who had been prepared for the ministry at Glasgow University, as co-editor of his *Secular Review*. An International Federation of Freethinkers is formed; Watts and Holyoake express themselves on secularism in Britain. Mrs. Besant attacks barbaric forms of punishment. Symes exposes the attitude of Christians towards slavery. Foote defines atheist morality and Aveling continues to adduce the support of science for secularism.

1881. This is an eventful year. There is a nation-wide controversy over Bradlaugh, who on one occasion is forcibly ejected from the House by ten policemen and others in a brutal struggle, as a result of which Mrs. Besant has to restrain Bradlaugh's assembled supporters from violence against his persecutors. Gladstone moves that he shall affirm at legal peril, so that when Bradlaugh votes it is taken to court: the Northampton seat is then declared vacant. There is naturally a strengthening of the secularist campaign for affirmation rights. The N.S.S. acquires the support of a new organ, *The Freethinker*, which, edited by G. W. Foote, is identified with N.S.S. aims. It is militantly anti-Christian and employs the weapon of ridicule. The first number is mainly the work of Foote but there is an article by Symes. The price is one penny and there are eight pages. Starting as a monthly it becomes, after four issues, a weekly, with J. M. Wheeler as sub-editor. It is published by the Freethought Publishing Co., of Stonecutter Street. Foote makes the paper both scholarly and incisive, and the clergy are immediately incensed by its "blasphemy". There appear "Comic Bible Sketches" illustrating absurd miracles, taken from the French (Leo Taxil's *La Bible Amusante*). The Christmas number, which incidentally contains the first signed article by Aveling, is particularly blasphemous. At the opening of the Leicester Secular Hall the speakers, besides Gimson, are Holyoake, Bradlaugh (who is urgently called away on business connected with his parliamentary struggle), Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Harriet Law, with the poet James Thomson also on the platform. The works of Col. R. G. Ingersoll are being made available in Britain by Truelove and by Sugden of Leek. Mrs. Besant is engaged in opposing vivisection.

1882. Bradlaugh is again returned for Northampton and is still debarred. He is vigorously opposing royal grants. The Freethought Publishing Co. goes to 63 Fleet Street. Camberwell Branch N.S.S., an offshoot of Walworth, acquires buildings and becomes a London stronghold. Foote becomes a Vice-President of the N.S.S. In a steady flow of pamphlets he is ridiculing Bible heroes. Symes exposes Christian persecution and Mrs. Besant takes up Bradlaugh's attack on the land system. *The*

Freethinker so angers the bigots that a charge is brought against it and Foote appears before the Lord Mayor for blasphemy. The case is adjourned while the authorities consider how to get Bradlaugh implicated. The printer refuses to handle any more Bible sketches and the next issue (July 16) is without one; for July 23 he refuses to print at all, and continuity is saved by a few copies worked from a hand press at the last moment. For August 6 the term "comic" is dropped and there is a "Serious Bible Sketch", taken from an old Bible, and, of course, equally blasphemous. Foote's reaction to the Mansion House charge is to intensify the blasphemy, and *The Freethinker* proudly displays its new badge in heavy block letters on the front page, "Prosecuted for Blasphemy". The next Christmas number is deliberately designed to provoke the blasphemy law, and an indictment follows. Charles Bradlaugh is giving valuable legal aid and Foote's supporters find securities for £600.

1883. Foote, his partner Ramsey, and the new printer Kemp, are tried before Mr. Justice North, an R.C.; the jury disagrees and the case is terminated and another one immediately opened by order of the judge, before another jury. The judge shows the utmost malice throughout, frequently interrupting and hampering Foote in every way. Foote gets 12 months, Ramsey nine, and Kemp three. Foote's famous reply is: "My lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed." Bradlaugh foils the attempt to implicate him; he obtains a separate trial and is acquitted. After nearly two months in prison, Foote is brought to answer the charge of July, 1881. He again conducts his own defence and is this time, by Lord Coleridge, permitted to make a brilliant long speech packed with learning, argument and wit and prepared under the worst of conditions in prison. The jury disagrees and the case is dropped. J. M. Wheeler has a breakdown through anxiety and overwork, and Aveling edits *The Freethinker*. There is now an even greater agitation by secularists for the repeal of the blasphemy laws. There is also a petition for Foote, signed by many eminent scientists and literary men and even some clergymen. Holyoake starts *Present Day*, a monthly which, after his fashion, makes no doctrinal attack. Mrs. Besant brings out a form for secular burial and one for the naming of infants. Josiah Gimson (b. 1818) dies. F. J. Gould, a schoolteacher condemned for heresy, is now writing for secularism. Headingley's biography of Bradlaugh appears.

1884. A huge crowd of sympathisers awaits Foote outside Holloway gaol as he completes his year there. He is entertained to a luncheon at the Hall of Science, where two days later he speaks on "How I fell among thieves." He immediately resumes editorship of *The Freethinker*, and writes, "*The Freethinker* shall, as I promised from Holloway Gaol, be a greater terror than ever to priests and bigots; they shall hate it with the hatred of fear. I defy as I despise their power, and would rather return to the loathsome brick vault I have tenanted for a whole long year than suffer them to divert me a hair's breadth from the policy I have pursued since this journal was started" (March 9). In the next issue the blasphemous sketches are resumed, together with an open letter to the Catholic judge, and a copy of the paper with a card of compliments, is left at his house by Foote himself. Aveling now leaves secularism for socialism, and the newly formed Fabian Society attracts several prominent secularists, who make it their first love. This leads to the death of the British Secular Union, whose leaders lose interest in it. Watts thereupon goes to Canada to take up a Rationalist pastorate, and the publishing business is carried on by his son C. A. Watts, who ends its affiliation with the secular movement and publishes *Agnostic Journal*. *The Secular Review* of Watts is handed over to W. S. Ross (Saladin), who is anti-Malthusian; John M. Robertson comes to London as sub-editor of the *National Reformer* and is now writing and lecturing for the secular movement. Secular reform on a non-party basis is now centred exclusively on the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker*, and the attack on Christianity is carried on chiefly by Bradlaugh, Foote, Robertson, Symes and Moss. Foote is put on the committee of a People's League for abolishing the House of Lords, to which project the N.S.S. give assistance. Bradlaugh debates socialism with Hyndman.

1885. Bradlaugh is again elected for Northampton. In his non-stop activity in many directions he is urging votes for women, drawing up a Radical programme, and serving as Vice-President of the Sunday League, which is being materially aided by the N.S.S. Bradlaugh is addressing overflowing meetings in the country, speaking on one occasion to 3,000 at Leicester. This year N.S.S. member-

ship is at a new peak; there are 102 branches and five independent secular societies, and regular outdoor stations at 20 places in London alone. Mrs. Besant is now in the Fabian Society and is combining secularist with socialist activity. Robertson joins Bradlaugh in advocating neo-Malthusianism, and similarly rejects socialism, this being also the attitude of Moss, Foote and Ball. C. A. Watts projects the short-lived *Agnostic* and starts the more successful *Literary Guide*, price one penny.

1886. *Present Day* ceases. *Radical* appears. Bradlaugh finally takes his seat on oath, and being busily engaged in Parliament, allows much of the N.S.S. leadership to devolve on Foote, who is continually lecturing and debating, and who is especially occupied at this time in rebutting Christian lies about infidel deathbeds. Moss also writes and lectures over the extent of the secularist field, both on doctrinal and immediate matters. There is a re-statement of N.S.S. principles. A bill for the repeal of the blasphemy laws fails. There is increased agitation for disestablishment.

1887. Bradlaugh has become one of the most impressive speakers in the House, formidable in debate and commanding the respect of both sides. Of his conflicts with Lord Randolph Churchill, *Punch* records that "Bradlaugh kept his temper when Grandolph lost his, meeting all contradictions and denials with inexorable Hansard. The more Grandolph wriggled, the more self-possessed and incisive Bradlaugh grew, and the more uproarious the merriment of the House. General impression that Grandolph had met something more than his match, and that Bradlaugh had scored off long-standing account." After several affirmation bills have failed, Bradlaugh introduces one but it is blocked. He is also active on trading rights, land cultivation and royal grants. A Trafalgar Square meeting for Radical reform is interfered with: Bradlaugh fights the case in the courts and the government, frustrated, lets the matter drop, and secularists raise money for Bradlaugh's expenses. He has epistolary debates on socialism with Belfort Bax and Mrs. Besant, and allows the latter to write for socialism in the *National Reformer*: to clarify the position she resigns as co-editor but continues to contribute.

1888. Bradlaugh's affirmation bill carries as the Oaths Act by a majority of 100. "Not many years ago members crowded the lobbies to see Bradlaugh kicked downstairs. Now they throng the benches to hear him," says *Punch*, continuing "Bradlaugh master of the situation. Terrible conviction that he might, had he pleased, have Old Mortality kicked downstairs, or even the Attorney General." Bradlaugh's speeches on Ireland are cheered by the Parnellites, he is known as "the member for India", and his prestige rivals that of Gladstone himself. There are many attempts to discredit the secularist leader by slander and libel, including a libellous biography traced to W. S. Ross and others; the judge orders all copies to be destroyed. Foote and Ball prepare their *Bible Handbook*, a little masterpiece of patient research making a ready appeal to the eye.

1889. Though it has the support of Asquith, at its second reading Bradlaugh's blasphemy bill still fails. On account of ill-health, he foretells his resignation from the N.S.S. presidency; suffering from Bright's disease he goes on a voyage to India. *Radical* ceases. After reviewing a book on Theosophy for W. T. Stead and subsequently meeting Mme. Blavatsky, Mrs. Annie Besant is converted to that religion, and in consequence gradually relaxes her association with secularism; Foote then attacks Theosophy. Having served their purpose, *The Freethinker Bible* sketches, of which some 300 have now appeared, are discontinued. Wheeler produces a *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*. The *Agnostic Journal*, edited and owned by Ross, takes the additional name *Secular Review*.

1890. The Freethought Publishing Co. ceases and Freethought publisher is now Robert Forder in Stonecutter Street. Bradlaugh resigns as foretold by him, and G. W. Foote is unanimously acclaimed as the new N.S.S. President. Bradlaugh continues to write and debate, and in his reformist work he is interested at this time in the eight-hour question. Foote is writing open letters to the clergy and attacking the belief in an inspired Bible, and he is engaged in the exposure of Christian lies about dying infidels. The Rev. H. Price Hughes has circulated the story of such a "converted atheist" and Foote tracks the lie down and exposes it in *A Lie in Five Chapters?* Holyoake aids Hughes and attacks Foote from the columns of a religious paper. A. B. Moss continues to match the Bible against scientific discovery and Robertson writes on over-population. A young man of 22 from Leicester, of

Jewish extraction, is lecturing in the parks for the N.S.S.; he has not been converted to freethought, for he is a natural freethinker with no religious upbringing to shake off, and the first freethought lecture he hears is his own; Chapman Cohen is his name.

At this change in the secular leadership, as Bradlaugh hands the historic gavel to his successor, Foote, it is opportune to consider the general state of the N.S.S. First, the defection of Mrs. Besant was without consequence. No one followed her to the oriental way of thought with which she had shown some sympathy. Like Holyoake, she was not averse to all the ceremonies of religion in themselves, such as hymns, prayers, psalms, burial and baptismal rites. When she embraced Theosophy it did not materially affect her basic advocacy of secularism as against organised Christianity. But she never became a materialist, which many of us consider the completion of the secular philosophy and therefore the final adequate justification for secular reform. She soon became, on the death of Mme. Blavatsky, the High Priestess of Theosophy, but could never make it prosper in this country. Secularists in 1889 were surprised at her change of outlook but went their way, nevertheless.

The factor which might have tended to some disunity was the rapid advance of socialism but, generally speaking, the secularist who became a socialist did not therefore leave secularism; he supported both.

The number of N.S.S. branches in 1890 was 62, with four independent secular societies. This decrease in the number of branches from 102 in 1885 is largely superficial, because of amalgamations of local branches. Inside 30 years since 1861 there appear exactly 250 branches, some no doubt of fleeting duration, yet testifying to the spread of secularist outlook through lectures, publications and petitions. No fewer than 57 branches existed in London and district, 20 in the south (one in Jersey), 33 in the Midlands, and 115 in the northern counties, with heavy concentrations in Lancashire, the West Riding and Durham: 12 appear in Scotland, four in Ireland and seven in Wales. All these follow the dispersal of population and therefore the disposition of the best libraries and other facilities for self-education. In the matter of direct propaganda London at the peak period had over 100 outdoor meetings a week in the season. The movement was never rich in funds, and Foote, Watts and others lived at times in excessive hardship, while Bradlaugh's heavy commitments were an additional source of worry to him.

1891. Bradlaugh (b. 1833) dies as the House of Commons expunges the resolutions forbidding him to take his seat. He is buried at Brookwood in the presence of thousands of his admirers. Robertson becomes editor of the *National Reformer*, to which Mrs. Besant makes her last contribution. Charles Watts returns to England and re-joins the N.S.S. Holyoake is now the historian of the Co-operative movement, to which his contribution has been outstanding. Foote examines the Salvation Army and its "General" Booth, replies to Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* and debates with G. B. Shaw on the eight hours question.

1892. Though there has been some disintegration by secessions after Bradlaugh's death, there are over 1,000 new N.S.S. members in the year. Foote attacks Roman Catholicism and the resurrection myth. Holyoake writes his autobiography. Dr. Moncure Conway, of the newly formed Ethical Society in London, writes his life of Paine. Robert Forder publishes a re-phrased edition of *Every Woman's Book* (Place and Carlile, 1826) on contraception.

1893. Mrs. Besant makes her last appearance on the secular platform and writes her autobiography. The N.S.S. Immediate Practical Objects are published. The *National Reformer* ceases, having failed to survive for long the death of Bradlaugh. The N.S.S. supports a bill which would legalise freethought bequests, but it is blocked.

1894. The N.S.S. joins in the agitation for the abolition of the hereditary House of Lords. J. W. Gott, a merchant of Bradford, starts the *Truth Seeker*, monthly. Foote publishes his essays, *Flowers of Freethought*. Watts pursues the doctrinal attack on God and immortality. Hypatia Bradlaugh's life of

her father appears.

1895. This is Holyoake's last year as an N.S.S. Vice-President, and C. Watts again holds that position. The literary output of the year is again mainly that of Foote and Watts.

1896. Foote and Watts visit America and are enthusiastically welcomed by freethinkers in New York: during their activities they speak to an audience of 2,000 in Chicago. Four London Ethical Societies amalgamate as the Ethical Union. Failsworth secularists produce their own hymn book.

1897. Harriet Law dies aged 65. The N.S.S. issues a manifesto on secular education. Hypatia Bradlaugh starts and edits the *Reformer*. Foote tackles the new "higher criticism", aimed at purifying Christian doctrine. Father Anthony, a young priest of 30, has come out of the monastery and pronounced himself a Rationalist: as Joseph McCabe he embarks on a glorious career in the cause of secularism and reform, writing an account of his *Twelve Years in a Monastery*.

1898. Chapman Cohen, who has been an editor of Gott's paper, begins contributing regularly to *The Freethinker*. McCabe is employed by Leicester Secular Society as their lecturer and organiser. Foote's right-hand man, Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, dies at 48. The Secular Society Ltd. is formed by Foote to safeguard freethought bequests. Geo. Bedborough is prosecuted for circulating sex literature by Havelock Ellis and pleads guilty; no action is taken.

1899. The Freethought Publishing Co. Ltd. is formed by Foote, with R. Forder a director. At 17 Johnson's Court the Rationalist Press Association is founded; the *Literary Guide* of Watts, now twopence, is identified with it. F. J. Gould succeeds McCabe as secretary of the Leicester S.S. and writes its history. In America, Col. Robert G. Ingersoll dies; his works are widely used by British secularism.

1900. C. Watts is investigating the claims of Spiritualism, and J. M. Robertson writes his scholarly *Christianity and Mythology*.

1902. The pressure for secular education is being well maintained, in line with the French move in this direction. Foote continues to attack religion as a bar to progress, a theme now treated by Robertson in his *History of Christianity*. Gould starts the Leicester *Reasoner*, which, however, is short-lived.

1903. Foote starts a less militant monthly, *Pioneer*. The Rev. J. T. Lloyd, aged 54, is converted to secularism and joins the movement. Percy Ward starts a British Secular League, with Holyoake president and J. W. Gott treasurer; its headquarters are at Bradford and it is in the Holyoake tradition.

1904. Two more journals go out of existence; they are *Pioneer* and Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner's *Reformer*. From outside the movement Blatchford reaches a wide public with his *God and My Neighbour*.

1905. The Torrey-Alexander revivalist mission has been vigorously opposed by the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker* and much national publicity for the movement has resulted. The British Secular League, its H.Q. now at Liverpool, ceases to operate. After irregular appearances *Truth Seeker* dies.

1906. Death this year takes away G. J. Holyoake (b. 1817), Charles Watts (b. 1836), W. S. Ross (b. 1844) and Joseph Symes (b. 1841). The output of Rationalist literature is supplying valuable ammunition and now includes *The Churches and Modern Thought* by Vivian Phelps. Spiritualism enjoys increasing popularity and is becoming an important point of the doctrinal attack. Many secularists are supporting the suffragette cause and the first "suffra-gent" is Bayard Simmons, who is sent to Brixton gaol.

1907. G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen are members of the Executive of the new Secular Education League and there is a Trafalgar Square demonstration under the auspices of the Social Democratic Federation, with the N.S.S. strongly represented and Foote a main speaker. A Rationalist Trust is formed by the Leicester secularists.

1908. The Freethought Publishing Co. is dissolved and the Pioneer Press is founded and personally owned by Foote.

1909. The expected lies about Bradlaugh's deathbed have been circulated in spite of adequate precautions taken at the time, and his daughter is thus easily able to expose them.

1911. There has developed a bitter and prolonged campaign at Birmingham for equal rights with Christian bodies in permission to engage the Town Hall for secularist meetings. J. W. Gott is imprisoned for blasphemy. Foote debates with an unpleasant opponent, Dr. Warschauer, who tries to restore his battered prestige by writing an account of the debate from his own angle.

1912. The N.S.S. is represented at Brussels on the occasion of the unveiling of the Francisco Ferrer Memorial. Chapman Cohen, who is now taking more editorial responsibility on *The Freethinker*, writes his *Determinism or Free Will?*

1914. Among other bodies the N.S.S. is active in successfully thwarting official intentions to prevent collections at meetings in London parks.

1915. G. W. Foote (b. 1850) dies; many tributes are published in *The Freethinker* and other journals. Chapman Cohen becomes editor of *The Freethinker* and President of the N.S.S. The Pioneer Press, now a Company (G. W. Foote and Co.), goes to 61 Farringdon Street. A legacy to the Secular Society Ltd. has been challenged and the Bowman test case starts. Secularists are exposing the influence of the clergy on the war mentality.

1916. Various Sustentation Funds have been repairing the annual loss of *The Freethinker*, which, under war conditions, now rises to £400. The N.S.S. is energetically protesting against compulsory religious observances in the Army and Navy.

1917. There have been recent cases in which obstacles have been put in the way of witnesses claiming the right to affirm, and the N.S.S. has made successful protests. The Bowman Case closes successfully for the Secular Society Ltd. and among many congratulations from public figures Eden Phillpotts speaks of "this great victory".

1919. Standring starts a paper, *Birth Control*, but it does not succeed, and of some 30 freethought and anti-clerical publications which have appeared in 80 years only *The Freethinker* and the *Literary Guide* remain of a non-political character on a national scale: there is, of course, the *Rationalist Annual*, which has taken the place of the old *Agnostic Annual* (last issue 1907). With increased production costs the price of *The Freethinker* is advanced a penny to 3d. Cohen has a long epistolary debate with the Hon. E. Lyttleton; his latest book is *Religion and Sex*.

1920. The N.S.S. has had a four-year struggle for the right to sell literature in the London parks, other organisations also involved; the collective protests have been organised by Miss E. Vance, the N.S.S. Secretary, supported by Harry (later Lord) Snell; the campaign is successfully concluded. Cohen debates with Horace Leaf on Spiritualism and Joseph McCabe with Conan Doyle.

1921. The steady production of pamphlets and books is being maintained by the Pioneer Press; Cohen's *Grammar of Freethought* and *Theism or Atheism* appear. George Whitehead is now being engaged as travelling propagandist during the outdoor season. There is now an N.S.S. Trust Deed.

1922. Cohen is on the Executive Committee of a society for the abolition of the blasphemy laws, Gott having been imprisoned for blasphemy for the fourth time. Among the year's publications is *General Information for Freethinkers*, a guide in asserting legal rights; also Cohen's *The Other Side of Death*.

1923. Leicester Secular Hall becomes the property of the local Secular Society. Secularists are pressing the case for Sunday freedom, with which cause Snell identifies himself. Cohen starts his series of *Essays in Freethinking*. Death of J. W. Gott shortly after his release from prison.

1924. The Lourdes "miracles" are making headlines, and secularists find an unusual ally in an adverse Lambeth Report on them.

1925. Secularists' agitation for the repeal of the blasphemy laws has the support of Snell and Lansbury. An anthropologist, Sir Arthur Keith, is welcomed by secularists as a spirited defender of Darwinism against Special Creation. George Whitehead is writing books on a variety of freethought subjects.

1926. Pressure by freethinkers induces the *Manchester Evening News* to invite Chapman Cohen's participation in a feature "Have we lost Faith?" and a long and profitable controversy ensues.

1927. Prof. Sir A. Keith, in his Presidential Address to the British Association, attacks the Christian doctrine of Special Creation and defends evolution. Death of Prof. J. B. Bury. Bertrand Russell lectures for the N.S.S. at Battersea Town Hall on *Why I am not a Christian: the lecture is published*; Cohen's *Materialism Re-stated* appears.

1928. J. T. Lloyd dies. *The Freethinker* Endowment Trust reaches £8,000. Secularists and Rationalists are strenuously protesting to the B.B.C. against religious privileges on the air. Cohen debates materialism with Joad. Secularists are helping to circulate the McCabe Blue Books. Among the N.S.S. speakers of this period are G. Whitehead (touring from Plymouth to Glasgow), J. T. Brighton in the North-East, and in the London area Messrs. Saphin (an ex-Baptist minister), McLaren, Corrigan, Le Maine, Bryant, Hornibrook, Campbell-Everden, Ebury and Wood.

1929. The N.S.S. and R.P.A. issue a joint circular containing a three-point questionnaire to election candidates on secular education, the blasphemy laws, and the B.B.C. South Place Chapel is sold and Conway Hall erected. Prof. Laski becomes R.P.A. president. The Thinkers' Library is started by Watts and Co. McCabe continues his attacks on the Papacy; Robertson's *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* appears.

1930. Trade depression has its repercussions and the number of lectures sponsored by the Executive of the N.S.S. drops to about 300, though there is the usual larger number by the branches. The Testimonial to Chapman Cohen reaches £1,500. He debates with M. Barbanell on Spiritualism.

1931. Secularists condemn the bargaining of successive governments with the religious vote regarding religious teaching in schools, and also press for an alternative programme during religious services on the air; they are criticising, too, the government's Sunday Performances Bill. The Thinkers' Library has now sold 200,000 copies. *The Freethinker* reaches its Jubilee number. Cohen's latest publication is *God and the Universe*.

1932. The N.S.S. is hampered by religious bigotry reminiscent of the 19th century in two places: at Birkenhead a lecture hall hired by the society is cancelled at short notice under religious pressure and a court case fails to rectify the matter; at Durham, following an anti-N.S.S. demonstration by students, the police attempt to forbid further secularist meetings on the site; the attempt is not successful. There has been an influx of men of science to the Rationalists, for whom Keith continues to defend the evolution of man. Liverpool reports a most successful year with 115 meetings.

1933. The Bradlaugh Centenary is celebrated with meetings, a Commemoration Fund, a B.B.C. talk (brief and unsatisfactory), and Cohen's *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll*. J. M. Robertson (b. 1855) and Annie Besant (b. 1847) die. A gramophone recording is made of Chapman Cohen. Lord Snell becomes R.P.A. president. Ernest Thurtle pleads for Sunday cinemas; McCabe writes his *Existence of God*; A. D. McLaren edits a new edition, with additions, of Foote's *Infidel Deathbeds*.

1934. Secularists protest against the Incitement to Disaffection Bill and maintain the now yearly attack on the B.B.C. In the year the N.S.S. executive sponsors some 500 lectures, mostly open-air; the Dublin Branch N.S.S. is meeting with persistent priest-inspired Catholic hostility. Cohen writes *Letters to a Country Vicar*, Geo. Bedborough exposes the attitude of the clergy to war, and Whitehead's *Inquiry into Spiritualism* appears. Rationalist publications include McCabe's *Riddle of the Universe To-day*, maintaining his reputation as "Haeckel's bulldog".

1935. Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner (b. 1858) dies. The N.S.S. Principles and Objects are revised. The E.C. is responsible for over 500 meetings in the year. McCabe writes a *Social Record of Christianity* and also edits a Voltaire selection; other current works in the doctrinal attack include *Did Jesus Ever Live?* (L. G. Rylands), *Letters to the Lord* and *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought* (Cohen).

1936. Secularists condemn the new Sunday Trading Act. E. Thurtle, M.P., attempts a blasphemy law repeal bill. Other bodies with which the N.S.S. is now co-operating are the Society for the Abolition of Blasphemy Laws, the Secular Education League, the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the League of Nations Union and the National Peace Council. The N.S.S. executive

sponsors 542 meetings in the year, the branches having, as usual, their own lists. Chapman Cohen has a serious and extended illness. H. Cutner's *Pagan Elements in Christianity* appears.

1937. Two of *The Freethinker's* earliest contributors die. A. B. Moss (b. 1855) and W. Heaford (b. 1855), the former maintaining an active interest in the cause right to the end. A new official point of secularist attack is totalitarianism, whether religious or political. McCabe writes his *Papacy in Politics To-day*.

1938. F. J. Gould (b. 1855) dies. The N.S.S. Annual Conference is given a civic reception by the Lord Provost and Corporation of Glasgow. There is Catholic-inspired agitation to prevent the International Freethought Congress (now the World Union of Freethinkers) from meeting in London: the agitation is carried on by means of petitions to the Home Secretary and questions in the House; nevertheless the event takes place most successfully, the N.S.S. playing its part as usual. The executive of the N.S.S. is responsible for 658 meetings in the year, and T. M. Mosley is now lecturing regularly in Nottinghamshire. There has been an Ecclesiastical Committee sitting on Church doctrine revision, and McCabe criticises its findings in *The Passing of Heaven and Hell*. Cohen exposes the similarities of Fascism and Christianity and is also producing a series of "Pamphlets for the People".

1939. There is an organised meeting of secularists at Bradlaugh's grave, on which an outrage has been committed. *The Freethinker* Jubilee Fund and the Rationalist Endowment Fund are launched. There is a revision of the Constitution of the N.S.S., whose Executive sponsors about 700 lectures during the year: winter programmes are seriously curtailed by the blackout.

1940. Geo. Bedborough dies. The N.S.S. helps to resist the clerical agitation for religious tests for teachers, and attacks the arbitrary war regulations regarding religious oaths, church parades and the status of army chaplains. Cohen writes *Almost an Autobiography*. H. Cutner's *History of Sex Worship* published.

1941. *The Freethinker*, N.S.S. and Secular Society Ltd. offices in Farringdon Street are destroyed by fire in an air raid; the new offices are at 2, Furnival Street. A Freethinker War Damage Fund is started. Secularists protest against the government's suppression of publications (non-secularist). L. Ebury is fined £5 for blasphemy after a Hyde Park meeting. The Bradford Branch N.S.S. is revived and H. Day begins regular lecturing.

1944. There is an R.P.A. manifesto to M.P.s on secular education, and the Butler Act is criticised by rationalists and secularists.

1945. During the war there has been an enormous decline in direct propaganda by open-air meetings, and the annual conferences have been confined to London. The new offices of the secular movement are at 41, Gray's Inn Road.

1946. C. A. Watts (b. 1858) dies. The World Union of Freethinkers meets in London. W. Griffiths becomes N.S.S. treasurer. The Executive is able to arrange 280 meetings in the year.

1947. Avro Manhattan's *Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century* appears. At Bradford, F. J. Corina starts, and edits, *Freethought News*.

1948. Corina founds the Freethought Society at Bradford, containing N.S.S. personnel: 212 lectures are sponsored by the Executive of the N.S.S. in the year.

1949. Chapman Cohen resigns the N.S.S. presidency after 34 years: as an octogenarian he is no longer able to be as active as he would wish. R. H. Rosetti is made acting president. Still trying to recover pre-war standards, the E.C. sponsors 224 lectures in the year.

1950. With voice and pen secularists are exposing the dangers of a Catholic grip on political and T.U. machinery. H. Cutner writes *What is the Sabbath Day?* and *Jesus Christ; Man, God or Myth?* and G. H. Taylor writes *Can Materialism Explain Mind?*

1951. The N.S.S. supports the Marriage Law Reform Society to rectify an anomaly in the Marriage Act: it exposes the Pope's "mother or child" edict. The N.S.S. Executive sponsors 243 meetings in the year. Chapman Cohen relinquishes the editorship of *The Freethinker*, which, with the Pioneer Press (G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd.), is being taken over by the Secular Society Ltd., and administered by a Board consisting of W. Griffiths (Chairman), J. W. Barker, R. Johnson and Bayard Simmons. A

Freethinker Sustentation Fund has begun. The new editor is F. A. Ridley. Following the deaths of John Seibert (Secretary) and R. H. Rosetti (President), F. A. Ridley becomes acting President of the N.S.S. and P. V. Morris its General Secretary.

1952. After intermittent appearances *Freethought News* ceases. The N.S.S. Practical Objects are revised and a Handbook issued.

1953. T. F. Palmer (b. 1871) dies. Death of Percy Ward in U.S.A. F. C. C. Watts dies. In succession to him Hector Hawton becomes editor of the *Literary Guide*. Approximately 3.5 million copies of the Thinkers' Library have now been sold. A bill to remove Sunday restrictions is defeated. The N.S.S. reaffirms its adherence to republicanism and exposes the superstitious Coronation ceremonies. Wreaths are laid on the Bradlaugh monument at Northampton during a gathering of secularists and rationalists. There has been a large rise in N.S.S. membership in two years. Continuous five-hour Sunday meetings are being held at the Marble Arch by a succession of N.S.S. speakers. Revision of N.S.S. Constitution and Rules. The N.S.S., R.P.A. and Ethical Societies unite to form a Humanist Council for bringing pressure to bear on the B.B.C. for a fair share of broadcasting.

1954. Chapman Cohen (b. 1868) dies; tributes to his memory come from various parts of the world. The editorship of *The Freethinker* passes to a Committee of three (F. A. Hornibrook, Bayard Simmons and G. H. Taylor). *The Freethinker* makes a statement of policy; Joseph McCabe becomes a contributor and joins the N.S.S. Secularists are exposing the Billy Graham revivalist campaign. The N.S.S. has now a co-operative contact with the League against Cruel Sports. Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund opened.

1955. Death of Sir Arthur Keith (b. 1866). Joseph McCabe (b. 1867) dies; his secular funeral is conducted by F. A. Hornibrook; there are many world-wide tributes to his life's work. Broadcasting history is made, when Mrs. Margaret Knight, of Aberdeen University, is allowed, in a series of talks, to propose a Scientific Humanist, as opposed to a Christian, conception of morality; her subsequent book takes its title from her talks, *Morals without Religion*. There is much national publicity and controversy, some national newspapers evincing the worst forms of Christian acrimony. Throughout the months the opposition subsides and Mrs. Knight embarks on a series of propagandist lectures in various parts of the country; she supports *The Freethinker* and joins the N.S.S. The Manchester Branch N.S.S. is now issuing a monthly Bulletin. C. McCall becomes N.S.S. General Secretary.

1956. Mrs. Knight is the distinguished Guest of Honour at the N.S.S. Annual Dinner. The N.S.S. General Secretary records a two-minute talk at the invitation of the television authorities for inclusion in a programme inquiring into the state of religion, but the talk is excluded; vigorous protests are made. Avro Manhattan, who is now supporting the secular movement, publishes *The Dollar and the Vatican*. N.S.S. protesting against the exemption of vicarages, presbyteries and manses from rates. 75th Birthday Number of THE FREETHINKER.

1957. N.S.S. protest against rate relief for the clergy. International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers at Paris. Margaret Knight appears on TV confronted by three Christian representatives.

We do not need to be reminded that we cannot survive by the mere contemplation of past successes. But a movement which takes no pride in the achievements of its ancestry will probably not accomplish much to be remembered by its posterity. We secularists are rather proud of Bradlaugh and Foote. But when we look backward it is only to gain inspiration and momentum for what lies ahead.

The period sketched is 1840-1957. But these dates show neither the beginning nor the end of the journey. The beginning was wherever man began to think independently. 1851 was when the freethought approach in Britain became channelled into secularism. The freethinker criticises ideas: the secularist is a freethinker who carries this logically on to the criticism of institutions. 1866 was when the British secular movement became nationally organised, and 1881 was the year it gained a permanent mouthpiece. We are not parochial; we make no claim that either the N.S.S. or *The Freethinker* is the sum total of British secularism. We think the facts indicate that they are an

important part. There are other bodies, other groups and individuals, whose work we salute and value. Many freethinkers remain outside the N.S.S., doing good work in their own way and preferring not to be "organised".

There is a great deal that such individuals can do. There is also a great deal that can be done by team work.

Some of our speakers have been at it many years in all sorts of adverse conditions and circumstances, fighting religious bigotry and (what is even more formidable) fighting apathy and ignorance. Next year they will be doing it again. And they will go on doing it, not because they hope to convert the world tomorrow, or because they expect to achieve personal renown outside the movement. They are satisfied to do it in comparative obscurity, leaving popular fame to nonentities, leaving the headlines to the Billy Grahams, the religious morons of the B.B.C. and all manner of theatrical Christian buffoons. They have the greater reward in knowing it is the freethinker who is at the core of civilised progress. Not for them the vulgar outworks of popular fame, but the true line of social betterment.

People every week are writing to their local press, or propagating freethought in their unions and among acquaintances; with the written and spoken word the movement prospers. Nor do we imagine the N.S.S. is the alpha and omega of British secularism.

It is not by one voice or one movement that theology is condemned, but by the whole trend of civilised life guided by educated reason, and it is of this trend that our secular movement is an integral part. We believe that the continuance of this trend, aided by the development of science in many directions, will create an intellectual milieu in which the Christian churches, carrying their medieval lumber, cannot hope to survive.