

CHRONOLOGY

- 1847 Annie Wood (later Besant) is born on 1 October in London, the daughter of William Burton Perse Wood, a doctor/businessman, and his half-Irish wife, Emily Roche Morris Wood. Besant has an older brother, Henry, and two years later, a younger brother Alfred (Alfie) is born.
- 1852 Death of father.
- 1853 Death of younger brother Alfie; the widowed Emily Wood moves with her two children to Richmond Terrace, Clapham, near her parents at 8 Albert Square, Clapham.
- 1854 The Woods move to Harrow, so that Annie's brother, Henry, can attend Harrow School as a day student. Mrs Wood opens a boarding house, where Harrow students and a tutor live. After graduating from Harrow, Henry goes to Clare College and later becomes a member of the Royal Society of Arts.
- 1855 Goes to Devon to live with and be educated by a wealthy single woman, Ellen Marryat (the sister of the novelist Frederick Marryat) at Fern Hill, near Lyme Regis in Dorsetshire. Besant, along with Ellen Marryat's niece and several other children, lives there for eight years.
- 1861 Trip to the continent with Miss Marryat. Stays in Bonn, Germany, where she develops skills in German (good enough so that later she can serve as a translator).
- 1862 Trip to Paris with Miss Marryat. Develops skills in French. Confirmed at the (Anglican) British Embassy Church in Paris.
- 1863 Returns to live in Harrow with mother.
- 1866 Visits grandmother in Clapham at Easter. Meets Frank Besant, who is the curate at the Clapham Parish Church (as well as serving as undermaster at Stockwell Grammar School). She has her first religious doubts, which she suppresses. Writes her first pamphlet, 'Notes on Fasting, by a Layman', (published 1870). In the summer, Frank Besant asks her to marry him. Her mother sends her to Switzerland with the radical solicitor William Prowting Roberts and his family. The engagement is announced when she returns.
- 1867 Annie moves with her mother to Warrior Square in St Leonard's, on the Sussex coast. Visits the Roberts in Manchester with her mother, at the time of the Fenian trials, and is introduced into radical politics. On 21 December, Annie and Frank Besant marry in St. Leonard's, at the Church of St Mary Magdalene. They go to live in Cheltenham, where Frank Besant is master at Cheltenham College.

- 1868 Writes book on the lives of the Black Letter Saints (never published) and a story, 'Sunshine and Shade: A Tale Founded on Fact', published under her initials 'A. W.' in the *Family Herald: A Domestic Magazine of Useful Information and Amusement*.
- 1869 Birth of son, Arthur Digby Besant.
- 1870 Birth of daughter, Mabel Emily Besant.
- 1871 Illness of both children with whooping cough. Mabel almost dies. Besant has renewed religious doubts, and becomes very depressed.
- 1872 The Besants move to Sibsey, in Lincolnshire, where Frank Besant is made vicar of the parish church, due to the influence of Annie's relative, Lord Hatherley, who is Lord Chancellor. Later in the year, Besant visits her mother, who is living in London with Henry Besant. Besant hears the theist clergyman Charles Voysey, and reads theist writings of Thomas Scott and Frances Power Cobbe. She loses her faith in the divinity of Jesus, which she publicly reveals when she refuses to take communion in her husband's church.
- 1873 Writes pamphlet 'On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth', signed 'by the wife of a beneficed clergyman', followed by 'According to St. John. On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth, Pt. II: A Comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Three Synoptics', published by Thomas Scott. Weakened by nervous exhaustion, she takes her children to visit her mother and brother in London. Refusing her husband's demands that she conform, they agree to a Deed of Separation, with Frank getting custody of Arthur and Annie custody of Mabel. Besant moves with her mother and daughter to Folkstone, where she works briefly as a governess.
- 1874 Rents house in Upper Norwood, London, near Thomas Scott and his wife. Death of her mother on May 10. Goes to a meeting of the National Secular Society at the Hall of Science, and meets Charles Bradlaugh. Realizes that she is not a theist, but an atheist. Gives first public lecture, 'The Political Status of Women', on 30 August at the Cooperative Society's Hall. Writes first article for the *National Reformer* under the name of 'Ajax', and becomes a regular contributor and later coeditor. Moves with daughter to Bayswater.
- 1875 Becomes a full-time lecturer and writer on free thought and social reform. Tours England and Scotland. Elected a vice-president of the National Secular Society. Frank Besant begins attempts to deprive her of custody of Mabel.
- 1876 Moves to St John's Wood. Has a 'Monster Petition' presented to Parliament, to protest funding the trip of the Prince of Wales to India.
- 1877 With Bradlaugh, forms the Freethought Publishing Company, to publish the banned birth control pamphlet, *The Fruits of Philosophy*, by Charles Knowlton, as a test of the limits of free speech. They are arrested and tried for obscenity in the High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench. They are convicted but on appeal their conviction is overturned on a technicality. Besant begins publication of her own birth control pamphlet, *The Law of Population*, in serial form in the *National Reformer*. Publishes *My Path to Atheism*.
- 1878 Frank Besant successfully petitions the court to remove Mabel from Besant's custody, claiming she is not a fit mother. Besant is granted visitation rights, but decides not to see her children because she feels the visits would be too hard on them. After they come of age, they voluntarily return to their mother.

- 1879 Opposes Disraeli's imperialist foreign policy; supports Gladstone's reelection. Prepares to enter London University. Edward Aveling, the socialist and new secular convert, tutors her and they develop an intimate relationship. Besant assists him in teaching science classes in the Hall of Science.
- 1881 Is refused permission to use the Royal Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park for her botany studies.
- 1882 Publishes *Essays Social and Political*.
- 1883 Is refused admission to University College. Begins new monthly literary magazine, *Our Corner*, which lasts until late 1888. A. P. Sennett receives letters from 'Master Koot Hoomi', suggesting that Besant is a possible recruit to the Theosophy Society.
- 1885 Supports socialism and joins the Fabian Society. Publishes *Autobiographical Sketches*.
- 1886 Develops close relationship with fellow Fabian, George Bernard Shaw.
- 1887 Debate with G. W. Foote: 'Is Socialism Sound?' Resigns as coeditor of the *National Reformer*. Involved in the 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration in Trafalgar Square. With W. T. Stead, who becomes an intimate friend, she forms the Law and Liberty League and founds *The Link: A Journal for the Servants of Man*.
- 1888 Organizes the Bryant and May Match-Girl Strike, and then the Matchmakers' Union. Joins the Marxist Social Democratic Federation. Elected to the London School Board.
- 1889 Reviews Theosophist founder Helena Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Joins the Theosophical Society, and becomes coeditor of its journal *Lucifer* and a lecturer on Theosophy. Ceases publication of *The Link and Our Corner*. Sues the Rev. Edwyn Hoskyns (*Besant v. Hoskyns*) for libel in the school board election but no verdict is returned.
- 1890 Resigns from the National Secular Society, the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation. With Blavatsky forms the Working Women's Club in the East End.
- 1891 Death of Bradlaugh and Blavatsky. Along with W. O. Judge becomes joint outer head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. Withdraws *Law of Population* from circulation.
- 1893 Attends World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Writes revised *Autobiography*. Makes first trip to India. Lectures on Theosophy.
- 1894 Accuses W. O. Judge of forging the Mahatma Letters received after Blavatsky's death. Makes first of many trips to Australia and New Zealand.
- 1895 Establishes home in Benares, India. Translates the *Bhagavad-Gita* into English. Begins occult research with Theosophical colleague, Charles W. Leadbeater.
- 1897 Trip to US to reorganize the American Section of the Theosophical Society.
- 1898 Opening of the Central Hindu College, which Besant founded.
- 1901 Publishes lectures on *Ancient Ideals in Modern Life*, in which she shifts from glorifying Hinduism to criticizing its abuses.
- 1904 Founds the Central Hindu Girls' School.
- 1906 Receives the Prince and Princess of Wales at the Central Hindu College.

- 1907 After death of Theosophical Society cofounder Colonel Olcott, Besant is elected president of the International Theosophical Society, and editor of the *Theosophist*.
- 1908 Founds the Theosophical Society Order of Service. Lectures on the imminent appearance of the World Teacher and the development of a new sub-race. Leadbeater identifies an Indian boy, Krishnamurti, as the future World Teacher.
- 1910 Gains custody of Krishnamurti and his younger brother. Collaborates with Leadbeater on study of reincarnation, *Man: Whence, How, Whither*.
- 1911 Forms 'Order of the Star in the East', to prepare for the coming of the World Teacher.
- 1912 Attends mass meetings and marches in London in support of English women's suffrage.
- 1913 *Besant v. Narayaniab*: Krishnamurti's father, backed by anti-Besant forces in India, sues Besant to regain custody of his sons. He claims the boys were sexually molested by Leadbeater. The High Court of Madras rule in favor of the father, but Besant successfully appeals the verdict to the Privy Council in London, and the case is dismissed. Begins advocacy for dominion status for India within the British Empire, but argues, in a series of lectures, published as *Wake Up, India! A Plea for Social Reform*, that India must first reform destructive traditional practices.
- 1914 Establishes the newspapers *Commonweal* and *New India* to advocate Indian home rule. Joins the Indian National Congress.
- 1916 Transfers the Central Hindu College to the newly formed Benares Hindu University. Forms the Home Rule for India League. Starts the Indian Boy Scouts Association.
- 1917 Helps form the Women's India Association, and serves as its president. Interned by the British to the southern Indian hill town of Ootacamund, in an attempt to stop her home-rule work. The internment makes her a national hero and she is elected president of the Indian National Congress.
- 1919 Loses support when she defends the actions of General Dyer in the Amritsar massacre. Condemns Mohandas Gandhi for his non-cooperation campaign.
- 1921 Receives honorary doctorate degree from Benares Hindu University.
- 1922 Goes to London to rally support for the Commonwealth of India Bill. Unsuccessful.
- 1924 Honoured in London for her fifty years of public work.
- 1925 Krishnamurti renounces his role as the coming World Teacher.
- 1927 Joins in celebration in London of the fiftieth anniversary of the Knowlton birth control trial and the founding of the Malthusian League.
- 1928 Announces the existence and work of the World Mother.
- 1933 Dies in Adyar, India, on 20 September.