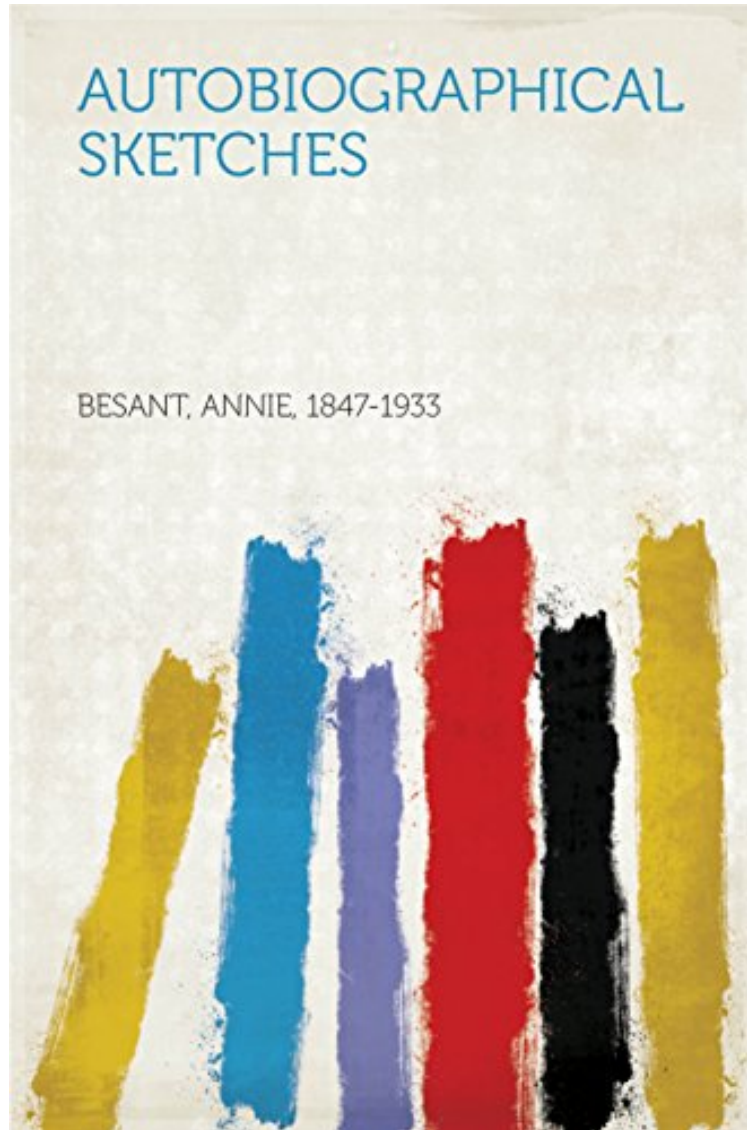


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Autobiographical Sketches

Von Annie, 1847-1933 Besant
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Von Annie, 1847-1933 Besant : Autobiographical Sketches before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Autobiographical Sketches:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Well Written, Much Detail Von Meks Librarian Annie Wood Besant's Autobiographical Sketches were published in 1885 with the purpose of satisfy[ing] friendly questioners and [] as defence against unfair attack. As I had not previously come across the author, not even heard her name, I had no idea what friendly questioners would have liked to know

about her, and why she feared unfair attack. So, my curiosity wide awake, I began to read. Annie Wood was born in 1847. She describes her parents as having an extraordinarily loving marriage. One of little Annie's first memories is of waking up on the morning of her 4th birthday, proudly exclaiming Papa! Mamma! Im four years old!. Sadly, her father died only a year later, leaving her mother penniless and in charge of Annie and her older brother. To make ends meet, they started to run a boarding house for boys from a nearby school, but still money was so tight that Annie was handed over to a rich friend of her mother's for further education. It must have been hard for the mother to send her daughter away, because the two of them were very close (and remained so until the mother's death many years later), but she also knew that Annie would be in very good hands with her friend. Now leading a rather luxurious life of studies and travels all across Europe, Annie developed a deep passion for knowledge, at the same time becoming religious to the extreme. At 20, she married Frank Besant, a vicar not because she loved the man, but because she loved the idea of being a clergyman's wife. To her, it was the next best thing to being a nun. In her book, Mrs. Besant does not speak much about what her marriage was actually like, but the fact alone that her husband is rarely mentioned over the years that follow (in spite of the two of them having two children together and Annie being very much involved in community and church work) is telling. During those years, Annie still used as much of her precious personal time as she could for personal study, mainly of religious and philosophical books, and of the Bible. It was then that she discovered discrepancies to what she had been taught and firmly believed until then all her life. She did not want to give up her faith or openly rebel against anything or anyone all she was looking for was knowledge and truth. She spoke to learned men, clericals and others, always hoping to have her former faith restored. But it was not to be, and eventually Annie realized she could not honestly partake anymore in Holy Communion at the church where her husband was vicar. This caused a rift so seriously between the couple that they separated. Annie took her young daughter with her (the boy already being away at boarding school) and lived on the meagre allowance from her husband and whatever money she could earn with jobs such as nursing the children of wealthy families. Now that she had a greater degree of independence, she studied even more, eventually becoming a prominent speaker for the National Secular Society. She spoke and wrote about all sorts of subjects from religion to women's rights to free thought and birth control. She was prosecuted and had to appear in court several times on charges such as having published an obscene book (about birth control, written by a medical doctor), and in the following years sadly lost the case against her husband who managed to take her daughter from her on the grounds that she was unfit for taking care of the girl with all those unwholesome things going on in her life. For several chapters, the book now goes into much detail regarding the legal battle around the publication of the obscene book (and other works); committees are listed down to the very last name, court scenes are described and whole articles appearing in *The Reformer* are copied. These parts I must admit to having only quick-scanned, not read word for word. I was more interested in the general outcome, which was that freedom of thought and press were eventually confirmed and Annie Besant continued her work. The book ends with her expressing hope of being reunited with her daughter when the girl would be old enough to decide for herself, a hope that came true according to what I found on Wikipedia. She was 38 when she wrote her *Autobiographical Sketches* and lived until 1933, so there was a lot more to come. This was a fascinating glimpse at a section of not only one woman's life, but also the society in which she lived, and the contradictions she herself didn't even recognize as such. For instance, even at her very poorest (she does not have enough to eat proper meals every day, and her rooms lack even the most basic furniture until someone donates a few pieces), she employs a housemaid, the thought of doing all of her own housework herself apparently never crossing her mind. But aren't we all a bit like that, having facets to our thinking and our characters that contrast with each other, sometimes to the point of being opposites? I enjoyed reading this short autobiography, and possibly part of the enjoyment came from not knowing anything about the author beforehand and not having the slightest idea of what direction her life was going to take.

Kurzbeschreibung
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"This important edition brings Annie Besant's first autobiographical work back into print. Written before her conversion to Theosophy, *Autobiographical Sketches* details Besant's remarkable spiritual and political transformation from wife of a Christian clergyman to celebrated campaigner for Freethought, secularism, women's rights, and birth control. Carol Hanbery MacKay's splendid introduction and supplementary materials offer an illuminating context for students and scholars alike. Altogether, the volume is a major contribution to the literature of feminism, autobiography, religion, and radical politics." - Elizabeth Miller, University of California Davis
"'Naughty Annie' (as the press called her) has been ill served by biographers and critics. This meticulous edition of her fascinating first foray into autobiography-before her extraordinary but quintessentially Victorian passage from secularism and Socialism to Theosophy and India-not only allows her to speak again for herself as a woman and a public figure, but, through the rich array of reviews, speeches, essays, and extended passages from her later *Autobiography*, also allows us to understand her against the full backdrop of her life and the times she helped to change." - Joss Marsh, University of Indiana
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