

**GOD AND
MY NEIGHBOR**

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God and my neighbor by Robert Blatchford

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ROBERT BLATCHFORD

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MY NEIGHBOR**

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BY

ROBERT BLATCHFORD
EDITOR OF THE CLARION, LONDON

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1914

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TO
MY SON
ROBERT CORRI BLATCHFORD
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

PREFACE

INFIDEL!

I put the word in capitals, because it is my new name, and I want to get used to it.

INFIDEL!

The name has been bestowed on me by several Christian gentlemen as a reproach, but to my ears it has a quaint and not unpleasing sound.

Infidel! "The notorious Infidel editor of the *Clarion*" is the form used by one True Believer. The words recurred to my mind suddenly, while I was taking my favorite black pipe for a walk along "the pleasant Strand," and I felt a smile glimmer within as I repeated them.

Which is worse, to be a Demagogue or an Infidel? I am both. For while many professed Christians contrive to serve both God and Mammon, the depravity of my nature seems to forbid my serving either.

It was a mild day in mid August, not cold for the time of year. I had been laid up for a few days, and my back was unpropitious, and I was tired. But I felt very happy, for so bad a man, since the sunshine was clear and genial, and my pipe went as easily as a dream.

Besides, one's fellow-creatures are so amusing: especially in the Strand. I had seen a proud and gorgeously upholstered lady lolling languidly in a motor car, and looking extremely pleased with herself — not without reason; and I had met two successful men of great presence, who reminded me somehow of "Porkin and Snob"; and I had noticed a droll little bundle of a baby, in a

fawn colored woolen suit, with a belt slipped almost to her knees, and sweet round eyes as purple as pansies, who was hunting a rolling apple amongst "the wild mob's million feet"; and I had seen a worried-looking matron frantically waving her umbrella to the driver of an omnibus, endanger the silk hat of Porkin, and disturb the complacency of Snob; and I felt glad.

It was at that moment that there popped into my head the full style and title I had earned. "Notorious Infidel editor of the *Clarion!*" These be brave words, indeed. For a moment they almost flattered me into the belief that I had become a member of the higher criminal classes: a bold bad man, like Guy Fawkes, or Kruger, or R. B. Cunninghame-Graham.

"You ought," I said to myself, "to dress the part. You ought to have an S.D.F. sombrero, a slow wise Fabian smile, and the mysterious trousers of a Soho conspirator."

But at the instant I caught a sight of my counterfeit presentment in a shop window, and veiled my haughty crest. *That* a notorious Infidel! Behold a dumpy, comfortable British *paterfamilias* in a light flannel suit and a faded sun hat. No; it will not do. Not a bit like Mephisto: much more like the Miller of the Dee.

Indeed, I am not an irreligious man, really; I am rather a religious man; and this is not an irreligious, but rather a religious book.

Such thoughts should make men humble. After all, may not even John Burns be human; may not Mr. Chamberlain himself have a heart that can feel for another?

Gentle reader, that was a wise as well as a charitable man who taught us there is honor among thieves; although, having never been a member of Parliament himself, he must have spoken from hearsay.

"For all that, Robert, you're a notorious Infidel." I paused — just opposite the Tivoli — and gazed moodily up and down the Strand.

As I have remarked elsewhere, I like the Strand. It is a very human place. But I own that the Strand lacks dignity and beauty, and that amongst its varied odors the odor of sanctity is scarce perceptible.

There are no trees in the Strand. The thoroughfare should be wider. The architecture is, for the most part, banal. For a chief street in a Christian capital, the Strand is not eloquent of high national ideals.

There are derelict churches in the Strand, and dingy blatant taverns, and strident signs and hoardings; and there are slums hard by.

There are thieves in the Strand, and prowling vagrants, and gaunt hawkers, and touts, and gamblers, and loitering failures, with tragic eyes and wilted garments; and prostitutes plying for hire.

And east and west, and north and south of the Strand, there is London. Is there a man amongst all London's millions brave enough to tell the naked truth about the vice and crime, the misery and meanness, the hypocrisies and shames of the great, rich, heathen city? Were such a man to arise amongst us and voice the awful truth, what would his reception be? How would he fare at the hands of the Press, and the Public — and the Church?

As London is, so is England. This is a Christian country. What would Christ think of Park Lane, and the slums, and the hooligans? What would He think of the Stock Exchange, and the Music Hall, and the race-course? What would He think of our national Ideals? What would He think of the House of Peers, and the Bench of Bishops, and the Yellow Press?

Pausing again, over against Exeter Hall, I mentally