

POPULAR ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANITY

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Popular Attacks on Christianity by C. L. Drawbridge

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C. L. DRAWBRIDGE

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ON CHRISTIANITY**

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BY THE

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THE inhabitants of the United Kingdom may be divided into three classes :

(a) Children (who believe what they are told to believe) ;

(b) Women (whose religious intuitions are keen, and who therefore tend to be religious) ;

(c) Men (who aim at being rational, and at only believing that which is adequately supported by evidence).

Or, again, the population of Great Britain may be classified thus :

(1) Those who are religious and believe in God ;

(2) Those who are aggressively irreligious and emphatically disbelieve in God ;

(3) Those who are indifferent to religion, because they cannot tell what they ought to believe or what they should disbelieve.

On Sundays those who are definitely religious go to church. And Church workers, both clerical and lay, devote all, or nearly all, their energies to preaching to, and teaching, those who already believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and in a future life.

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Those who are actively hostile to all religion assemble in the parks and other open spaces, which are crowded all day on Sundays, and Atheist¹ public speakers of various schools mount small platforms, and during the whole of Sunday heap ridicule and fierce contempt upon Theism in general, upon Christianity in particular—and upon the clergy most of all.

Hundreds of thousands of those who are indifferent to religion, and of those who—without being in the least indifferent—do not, and perhaps cannot without assistance, tell what they ought to believe, wander out into the parks and other open spaces, where they find themselves mingling with the Atheists assembled there in the Secularists' strongholds.

The Church is slowly beginning to realise that if working-men and others will not go to church, the Church must go to them, where they are known to assemble in their thousands, in the parks and other open spaces, and where they are ready to listen to those who know how to speak to them.

Some years ago I happened to stroll across a London park one Sunday afternoon, and there I saw a most eloquent and most blasphemous Atheist lecturer, who is a Materialist, addressing a large and very attentive crowd of men and lads. Most of the latter, probably, either belonged to Sunday schools and Bible classes or else had left them but recently. The eloquent and humorous anti-religious demagogue was blaspheming and using the most disgraceful language, and the lads

¹ Atheists nowadays do not actually deny the existence of God. Their contention now is that there is no evidence of the existence of God. They frequently say that the man who denies the existence of God is almost as foolish as the man who asserts His existence, because there are no data for forming any opinion on the subject. But they do all that they can to show that Theism is demonstrably false.

were listening with intense interest to his fierce and contemptuous attack upon Christianity. I could not resist attacking the lecturer and defending the Christian religion there and then. And ever since that day I have spent hours every Sunday, and also on week nights, speaking in the parks, and organising an anti-Atheistic campaign; and day by day, year after year, I have been doing my best to combat the deliberate manufacture of Scepticism in the open spaces and in the Press by trained advocates of Atheism.

Every Sunday, when other devout Christians are quite otherwise engaged, quietly and peacefully worshipping in church, I make my way past scores of churches, and busy cinematograph palaces, and through streams of festive holiday-makers to some park. There, within sound of many church bells, and within sight of many church steeples, but beyond the horizon and outside the field of attention of the Church, I find about a dozen portable platforms each of which is occupied by a popular lecturer and is surrounded by a crowd. There are probably three Atheist meetings being conducted simultaneously, and only one Christian Evidence platform (which belongs to the Christian Evidence Society, or to one of its active branches, such as the North London Christian Evidence League). The other platforms represent various popular causes, most of which are keen rivals to Christianity, and some of which are violently hostile to all religion. There are, however, evangelistic meetings of some kind in many parks and in other open spaces, but the religious people who support such meetings and who form the bulk of the audiences, become exhausted in a third, or even in one-sixth of the time that the average Atheist or Christian evidence meeting lasts, and during which it retains the whole attention of the people.

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These parks are essentially the strongholds of the enemies of all religion, the happy hunting grounds of Atheists, Materialists, and Determinists. The lecturing, the arguing, the questioning, etc., goes on (with but short intervals for meals—which are, however, sometimes dispensed with), all the morning, all the afternoon, and all the evening. With the exception of the short intervals for meals, the vast crowds of people stay there the entire day, and many ignore meal times, and seem to dispense with lunch and tea. These people are there for fresh air, for instruction, and for amusement. Some prefer instruction to amusement, others prefer amusement to instruction, and both kinds of listeners mean by instruction dogmatic statements which may not or may be true, and which consist for the most part of attacks upon current religious beliefs, or upon what are erroneously regarded as being current religious beliefs.

In our big towns the enemies of religion, who are wiser, and are also much more economical, in their generation than are the children of light, carry their stock-in-trade (a cheap stand, a vivid imagination, and a capacity for public speaking) to the nearest public meeting ground, and when arrived there they use the crowded open spaces for their sphere of labour. On the other hand, the clergy build expensive churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, into which they endeavour to entice the people. Their opponents, on the contrary, go to where the men are already assembled in thousands, and where they have nothing else to do but to listen to lectures. The latter method is at once far more effective as a means of reaching the masses, and it is also much more economical.

While the Church is wholly engrossed indoors, and with an horizon bounded by bricks and mortar, a

weary, but enthusiastic little handful of men are at work in the centre of the enemy's various strongholds, in and around which the innumerable truants from Church and from Sunday School are assembled.

Sunday is, for the Christian, a day of worship; but for the majority of the poor it is merely a holiday. The holiday-makers are to be found strolling somewhat aimlessly about, vaguely looking out for a little amusement or instruction, and any propagandist, if he can provide either the one or the other, is sure of a large and attentive audience of men and lads.

Many of these holiday-makers are frivolous enough, but many of them say that they assemble at "their open-air university to learn something"; and they explain that they hold no brief for anything but the truth, but that they wish to hear both sides of every living, popular controversy. I can not think that the Church is *unable* to provide good men for these "open-air universities," men who will teach the vast crowds of men and lads who are so anxious to learn.

It must not be forgotten, of course, that the men and boys who have deserted their places of worship, and have become *habitués* of the parks, have several eloquent and popular "teachers" to choose from in every park, and the crowd inevitably gravitates towards those speakers whom they consider to be the ablest, the most instructive, or the most amusing, leaving the other lecturers devoid of pupils. In every public meeting ground we see the law of the "survival of the fittest" at work. I mean by the "fittest" in this connection not necessarily the most scholarly, nor those who have thought the most profoundly, but rather those who are by birth and by training the fittest to correspond, actively and vitally, with that strange and cosmopolitan environing crowd.