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The following appeared in the "Clarion" of  
March 25th last:—

## A BRISTOL MINISTER ON "GOD AND MY NEIGHBOUR."

AN OBJECT LESSON.

(By ROBERT BLATCHFORD.)

A Bristol reader sends me a pamphlet, by the Rev. Hugh C. Wallace, containing, I am sorry to say, some spiteful and ill-considered personal attacks on me, and asks me to say "a few words in defence." No defence is called for. My life and work are my defence. Neither is Mr Wallace's pamphlet worthy of notice, except as a regrettable manifestation of littleness of mind and bitterness of spirit which are, unfortunately, too common amongst professing Christians.

The pamphlet is entitled "'God and My Neighbour': a Criticism of Mr Blatchford's book, by Hugh C. Wallace." It would have been more correctly described as "A Personal Attack on Robert Blatchford, by one who neither knows nor understands him."

Now, although it is perhaps advisable to point out to the several Christian ministers who have descended to the level of personal recrimination the error of their ways, it is not easy to deal with a case like this without seeming to be severe. And I do not want to be severe, nor to give pain to Mr Wallace, nor to any other Christian. My sole desire is to say a few words for the cause of toleration and human kindness, and, at the same time, to convince my assailants, if that is possible, that their conduct is mistaken and indefensible.

On page 5 of his pamphlet Mr Wallace says:—

One is disposed to ask, "How has socialism affected 'Nunquam'?" He is no longer a private in the army but the editor an influential and largely circulated paper. What effect has his infidelity had upon his position? Instead of going down, the "Clarion" circulation has gone up since he commenced his series of attacks upon the Christian faith. In the light of that I am perfectly prepared to believe his statement on page 190 that:—

"My attack is not wanton, but deliberate; not purposeless, but very purposeful."

Here Mr Wallace tacitly charges me with attacking religion for the sake of making money. And he makes this charge, not hastily and in anger, but deliberately and in cold blood.

Now, I submit to Mr Wallace that even if he knew for a certainty that his charge was true, he ought as a Christian minister to have expressed it more gently, and with more dignity. But he has chosen to be deliberately sarcastic and bitter.

And I submit to him that as a matter of common honesty and manliness he ought not to have made so gross and so offensive a suggestion until he had taken great pains to make sure of its truth.

But if he had taken even a very little trouble he would have found out that his suspicion was not only unfounded, but grotesquely untrue. I conclude, then, that Mr Wallace—a professed Christian and a minister of the gospel—has allowed his anger and his prejudice to mislead him into charging with base conduct a man of whose life and character he is utterly ignorant.

But, besides being uncharitable and unjust, Mr Wallace's personal attack on me is manifestly unwise. For even if what he insinuates were true, even if I were as contemptible a creature as he represents me, what bearing would that have upon the question at issue between us? Would the fact that one Agnostic was a rogue prove Christianity to be true? If so, the easy task of finding a professed Christian who is a liar or a thief might be alleged as a proof that Christianity is false.

Mr Wallace, in his pamphlet, suggests that I am mercenary, insincere, incompetent, conceited, frivolous, irreverent, and devoid of spirituality and the saving grace of humour. Suppose I am all that, I am what thousands of other men are, and amongst them some ministers of the Gospel. But what has that to do with the case?

A man writes a book in which he argues that the Christian religion is not true. Mr Wallace retorts by saying that infidelity pays. Is that a wise, or a dignified, or an effective reply. The question of truth or untruth of the national religion is a very serious public question. Mr Wallace is trifling with the subject and with the public when he offers them a pamphlet in which personal attacks upon Robert Blatchford waste the space that should be devoted to answering the arguments brought by Agnostics against Christianity.

On page 14 of his pamphlet Mr Wallace says:

A few years ago there lived at Bowdon a prosperous Christian man; he was clear-headed, far-sighted, a genius and inventor; at the bidding of the Spirit of God he gave up his fine house and grounds, and went to live in one of the darkest slums of Manchester, Ancoats; he did this that he might redeem it from its vice and make it part of the Kingdom of God. His name was Frank Crossley.

There was another man who, by sheer force of character and by honest hard work, climbed up the ladder step by step from being a private in the army to an influential and responsible position in the newspaper world; and then he went to live in a snug little villa in a London suburb. His name was Robert Blatchford. Nothing more need be said.

I think a good deal more need be said, for I think Mr Wallace is very superficial in this matter. He honours Mr Crossley for going to live in a slum, and he suggests that I am to blame because I do not live in a slum. Am I right in assuming that the Rev. Hugh C. Wallace does not live in a slum? Am I right

in assuming that such popular religious leaders as Dr Horton, Dr Clifford, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and the Archbishop of Canterbury do not live in slums, but actually live in better houses than I can afford, and are better paid for preaching the Gospel than I am for preaching Socialism?

I cannot see that it is my duty to go and live in a slum, nor to take my wife and children to live in such an unlovely and unhealthy place. Doubtless Mr Crossley was justified in his action, but is Mr Wallace sure that I am not justified in mine?

No human being ought to live in a slum. The best way to help those who are doomed to confinement in such miserable surroundings is by helping to abolish such surroundings, by helping to remove the evil and the injustices which cause the slums. This I have tried to do, in the only way in which it can be done, by preaching Socialism. And, although I may be wrong and Mr Wallace may be right, I think I have done more good in the past dozen years by my public work than I could have done by going to live in a slum. The more especially as I should probably have died there, and done no good at all.

Of course Mr Wallace wishes to convey the impression that Christianity makes men altruists, and that Agnosticism makes them selfish. He might have taken a more logical and a less offensive way of advancing that claim. But stated in any form I dispute it.

During the recent discussion on religion in the "Clarion" I could not help seeing that my Christian opponents were less generous and less courteous to me than I was to them: that whereas I only attacked dogmas and arguments they attacked me personally. Can Mr Wallace explain this difference? I account for it by assuming that my philosophy is better than the Christians' religion.

Finally, I assure Mr Wallace that he has misunderstood and misrepresented me, and I ask him to confine himself in the future to answering his opponents' arguments and to refrain from recklessly maligning their characters. Anyone who knows me or my work would convince Mr Wallace in a few minutes that he has acted unwisely, and has brought discredit upon himself in his desire to injure me. Of course Mr Wallace know no better, but a man in his position should be more careful and discreet.

On page 7 of his pamphlet Mr Wallace says:

I judge him largely by his preface. He finds his fellows so "amusing." He walks along the Strand peopled, on his own confession, by thieves, gamblers, and prostitutes, and he finds them "amusing"; and this is the kind of man who sets himself up to criticise a religion that teaches "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

This remarkable reading of the preface to "God and My Neighbour," and this astounding picture of the frivolous author laughing at the misery of his fellow creatures proved my contention that Mr Wallace does not know nor understand the man he has attacked. To quote Mr Wallace—"There is no more to be said."

THE REV. HUGH C. WALLACE'S REPLY  
TO ROBERT BLATCHFORD'S BOOK,  
"GOD AND MY NEIGHBOUR."

It has been thought well to issue in leaflet form Mr Blatchford's notes, which appeared in the "Clarion," of 25th March last, on the pamphlet published by the Rev. Hugh C. Wallace, of David Thomas Church, Bristol.

As Mr Wallace's attack is mainly personal, stigmatising Mr Blatchford as unfit for the task undertaken, and representing him to be actuated by base and mercenary motives, it is but right that those interested should have a true statement concerning these matters. Mr Blatchford has been for many years an earnest reformer, with a deep passion for the welfare and ennoblement of humanity, and has made this cause his life work. He has had a brilliant literary career, and is recognised as an acute and logical thinker. He is the author of many books, amongst which are "Merrie England" and "Britain for the British." The former obtained a circulation of over a million, and has been translated into many languages.

He is certainly as fit for the work entered upon as were William Cobbett and Shakespeare for the services they so brilliantly performed. Previous to founding the "Clarion," Mr Blatchford was receiving a salary of £1000 per annum for his services to a well-known paper. On this paper his advocacy of the cause he espoused was hampered, and he voluntarily sacrificed the position rather than abandon his principles, and launched the "Clarion" for their free advancement, despite the fact, then known to him, that no paper previously issued for the same humanitarian purpose had paid. And, although the paper was not remunerative for many years, and Mr Blatchford had received numerous outside offers for his services, greatly superior to anything the "Clarion" could provide in a financial sense, he has not abandoned his task. When about to undertake the criticism of theology, Mr Blatchford was earnestly urged by friends of the paper to desist from so doing, in the interest of the circulation of the "Clarion." To this Mr Blatchford replied that he would not sacrifice what he believed to be true to monetary considerations. Such are the facts. It is distasteful to refer further to these matters, but it should be known that although Mr Blatchford is a brilliant novelist and a popular writer, with an international reputation, that in consequence of allying himself with an unpopular cause, he is not so well paid for his public work as is the Rev. Wallace for his professional religious duties. Indeed, it is very, very probable that Mr Blatchford has sacrificed more in the furtherance of his principles than even the Rev. Wallace.

However, placing these matters aside, it is important that any further discussion should be confined to dealing with fundamental facts and essential argument.