

that only a bottle of good champagne would have any effect on me. I got it, but with that and two intervals for refreshment and a stirrup cup . . . But the experience that stands out highest was when a gray old elder of the Kirk was persuaded to hear it in northern Scotland. "It was a gran' lecture," he said afterwards. "Of course," he added, "it was a pack o' lees, but it was a gran' lecture."

But, as Bernard Shaw said to me, folk smelled sulphur wherever I went, and this section of my work gradually failed. The agent, like my literary agent, demanded that I should abandon all controversial work. I declined, and they abandoned me. I had for some time tried a compromise by lecturing on the ancient civilizations, with lantern views (largely restorations and copies of classical paintings), and for this purpose I made lengthy pilgrimages to the ancient ruins. I had visited Rome and studied its rich monuments in 1905, when I attended the Freethinkers' Congress. In 1922 I made the long journey across Europe to Athens and Crete, but that is worth a page of description in a later chapter. In 1925, during the dictatorship of General de Rivera, I ventured again, camera in hand, into Spain, and my long-standing interest in the old Arab (falsely called Moorish) civilization was quickened into enthusiasm at sight of the few splendid monuments of it—the ruins at Toledo and Seville, the Great Mosque and the Bridge at Cordova, the Alhambra at Granada—that the vandalism of the Spanish Catholics had spared; and I afterwards devoured all the works of the Liberal Spanish professors, now as dead as their Liberalism in Spain, who, being masters of Arabic, had learned and told all the facts about this great civilization. It deepened my sense of grievance against modern historical scholarship that it fosters the almost universal superstition about the restoration of civilization in Europe by the Church by, from fear of offending the churches, slighting or ignoring what was clearly its main inspiration. With great interest, too, I visited and spent many days amongst the relics of America's original civilization in Mexico and Yucatan, but of the quaint experiences of that pilgrimage I will speak later.

This last tour was in 1925, and from my photographs and borrowed pictures I prepared the usual lecture. By that time, however, my heavy lecturing work was drawing to a close, as I will explain later. Here I may confine myself to that purveying of science to the general public to which I devoted so much of my earlier public life. My interest in science was, as I said, first excited by the bearing of the teaching of so many branches of science on philosophy and religion. At that time, 50 years ago, nine-tenths of churchgoers and their writers scornfully rejected the truth of evolution, though only a few old men—in science, Wallace (for Spiritualist reasons), Virchow (for political reasons), etc.—still professed to dissent, wholly or in part, from the general agreement of the scientific authorities in the many branches of science which bore upon it. In fact, it is hardly too much to say that four-fifths of religious believers (which includes all Catholics) still profess to ridicule this consensus of the world's experts on the subject. My work lay with the general public, not with experts and not with small and advanced minorities in the various churches, and I had to cover the entire field from astronomy to prehistoric archaeology and dip into sciences in which I had otherwise little interest. I realized, for instance, that the system of philosophy I had taught contained, in its zeal to dig a wide gulf between the material and the immaterial, the old argument that the organism creates substances (sugar, perfumes, dyes, etc.) which not even the most skilful chemist can make in the laboratory. This, I now found, had been done 40 years earlier, yet similar arguments about the natural origin of life are still used in the religious world. Other sciences, psychology, prehistoric archaeology, etc., had to be mastered in order to be able to examine thoroughly all arguments in connection with the nature of the mind.

But in using this scientific material for controversial purposes I

discovered that I had some facility for making the facts of science clear to the general public and, as from the start I had determined to get most of my income apart from my Rationalist work, I became, as a normal part of my work, a popularizer of science; and it amuses me to record how even the religious public, a large part of whom knew what my real interest in science was, so long tolerated me in this field. In some places, especially when speaking for the old Sunday-Lecture Societies, I had audiences of 1,000 to 3,000 people. The cinema was not yet a serious rival, and there were hundreds of series of lectures arranged every year.

On science I was for many years, I think, the most popular lecturer, and the chief reason was that I spoke a language that the people understood. I had two types of rivals. One was the cheap professional or amateur lecturer who generally feels that by sprinkling a number of technicalities over his speech he proves his knowledge of the subject; the other the expert who, besides being so often a bad and tiresome speaker, finds it impossible to avoid the technical phrases in which he thinks. Some of these men occasionally dropped a word of disdain about "the mere popularizer"—quite clearly in some cases because they coveted what they believed to be the profit of the work—and affected to believe that there was no education in my method. On the contrary, there was none in theirs, with a few exceptions. Whenever they came out, as they did every few minutes, with some unfamiliar technical phrase or name, the minds of the hearers, even if they explained it, were held up in irritation and the continuity of attention was broken. With my method I did contrive to give a totally inexpert audience some valuable truths of science. Experts have done much to kill the former popularity of the scientific lecture.

My work was, of course, not confined to lectures. Apart from the mass of scientific facts in my controversial works I was invited to write small manuals of astronomy, physics, geology, etc. I may claim that few errors in them were pointed out even by friendly experts who wrote me. When H. G. Wells launched his famous "Outline of History" and had so wonderful a circulation, the publisher asked him to write "An Outline of Science." He told them that I was the only man who could write such a book, and we signed a contract and I wrote the first four parts of it. But before any of the work went to press the late Sir Arthur Thomson approached the publisher . . . In short, so many difficulties and unpleasantnesses were now put in my way that I had to accept a small compensation and retire. It was part of the compensation that I was to remain the scientific contributor to a certain well-known weekly. I so remained for a month, and Thomson then took my place.

## 7. MY WORK IN HISTORY

"How many books have you written?" is a question that is so frequently put to me that the readers of this autobiographical sketch will surely expect the answer. I so frequently make the remark that at least half of the books that are published in our time ought to have been sent to the guillotine instead of the printing machine that I shall not be suspected of boasting if I say that I have written more than 200 works myself, which is probably more than any other living author. I will not make the excuse that many were small because many also were large—one, "The Key to Culture," runs to 1,200,000 words, several to more than half a million—but I may plead this extenuating feature that I have, especially in the last 30 years, rarely written a book which some publisher had not demanded, and that, in order to reduce the enormity of my crime, I am counting a series of small books (50 Little Blue Books, 50 Self Educator Series, 20 A.B.C. Library, and 17 "Hundred Men Who Moved the World") as one book each.

More important are the themes of the books. Apart from the series of small works in which I endeavor to give the reader a simple account of the meaning of some modern movement, invention, or theory—in which I serve, frankly, as just an interpreter or a peddler in culture—far more of my books are devoted to history (including biography) than to any other subject, and my controversial works contain much more history than science. Scientific men would shudder, and I would smile, at any wild proposal that I should lecture on science in a university, but Columbia University did me the honor of inviting me to lecture in its Historical School, on the beginning of scientific thought in the Middle Ages; and when Professor Shotwell, of that school, was first commissioned to draft a large scheme of translations of medieval documents he asked me to cooperate, though the editing passed to other men, some of them Catholics. With my customary malice I may add that when my friend Shotwell asked me to name another possible British collaborator and I (rather insincerely) suggested Belloc he replied, with an air of pain: "Oh, come, McCabe—we regard you as an historian."

I no more regard myself as entitled to that honorable name, than to the name of scientist, for my work in both branches of culture has always been just to convey to the general reader the socially important facts and truths which the experts establish. But I have made a deeper and more extensive study of history than of science. History is, in fact, to me the continuation, besides sociology, comparative religion, and ethics, of the story which science in the ordinary sense carries forward from the birth of the earth to the end of the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages. It is science. Science reconstructs the past from its footprints in the rocks: history interprets and restores the more recent past from the handprints of man in the manuscripts or books he has written and the buildings he has raised. And, while the interpretative work of the scientist requires an elaborate training and technique, the sources of historical knowledge were available to me in the vast National Library in London and in the ruined cities, temples and palaces I visited in many lands. I concluded, after reading a large number of works on European history by American professors, that I had read at least 10 times as much of ancient Roman, medieval, and post-medieval source-documents (in five or six languages) than any of them has done.

Let me, again indulging my malicious disposition, give you an illustration. Some five or six years ago I complied with an invitation of the British Rationalist Association to write a Rationalist Encyclopedia. In their great concern for accuracy the authorities invited a number of men to read my manuscript and correct errors. One of the first, a professor, candidly told me that as I knew 10 times as much about the matter as he, I need expect no suggestions from him. Other professors and critics (including at least one cleric) were more ambitious. As the work was from the nature of the case mainly historical and none of them knew much about history their amateurish suggestions made me a little impatient, and possibly I crossed many of them out rather rudely. They returned valiantly, apparently armed with microscopes, to the task . . . In short, there was finally sent to me in a couple of years, with great firmness, a paper containing about 70 pages of mature corrections. While I accepted the corrections of a few trifling errors (dates, etc.)—I had not yet seen proofs of the work—I had the pleasure of pointing out that they had, doubtless at considerable cost, made 10 times as many mistakes in 70 pages as I had made in 700; they were more serious mistakes.

Not one of these was an expert historian, but it has been to me a no less irritating experience to find even distinguished historians, when they make excursions from their own fields or when even in their own fields they allow their religious or political opinions to influence their judgment, committing blunders far greater than any of which I have

ever been accused. Lately Professor Arnold Toynbee, who is a master of universal history and has written probably the most learned historical work since Gibbon, has been in high honor in the American academic world. Yet every professor of history who flattered him knows that his vast historical lore is used by him to support a thesis which they would consider foolish and superficial in any other writer: the thesis that religion has not only no call to promote what most of us call civilization but that collapses of world-civilization, like that at the fall of the Roman Empire, are always followed by advance of religion and therefore the present threat of the collapse of civilization should not disturb us. Not even a plausible case for so weird a conception can be made out by a candid statement of historical facts. This might be called an amiable diversion of an otherwise able historian, but one effect of it is that it vitiates in a most important respect his great work on the causes of historical advance and retrogression, on which he is supposed to be the best authority. The modern reader looks to his book especially for some light on the controversy about the share of religion in these ebbs and flows of civilization. He finds none because Toynbee does not consider that it is the function of religion to promote civilization. He does not give prominence to this thesis in his large work. You have to look for its development in a small and out-of-print work, the Burge Lecture.

I may give one more example since it concerns a man of equal distinction in culture and of equally charming and high character. Professor Gilbert Murray is one of the leading Hellenists of our time and therefore no slight authority on the history of Greece. But in recent publications he has expressed dogmatic and most mischievous opinions on great modern events like the French and the Russian Revolutions: opinions which betray a lamentable ignorance of the historical facts and a bitter political prejudice instead of conscientious research. On the Bolshevik Revolution he has, apparently, blindly followed the partisan history of Lancelot Lawton, which makes the Bolshevik leaders murder 1,275 Russian archbishops and bishops whereas there were—see the Catholic Encyclopedia—not more than 75 in the Russian Empire and all but one or two escaped. They were all traitors to the republic, anyway, as any man of common sense would expect. Any conscientious historian will find—indeed most of our standard works like the Cambridge History do find—that a study of the 50 or so revolutions in Europe since 1789 proves that the widespread legend that popular revolutions are bloody and the counter-revolutions marked by a serene concern for law and order rather than savagery is the reverse of the historical truth. Yet Murray and other scholars sustain the popular lie. "All revolutions are full of horrors and inhumanities," he writes in his "Myths and Ethics," and "the Russian Revolution was worse than others." The whole book—originally a lecture at which the historian Professor J. A. K. Thomson genially took the chair—bases its political argument upon historical untruths.

Naturally it is far worse when scientific men wander into history, or those parts of history which are involved in the popular Christian version of it. Some time after the Russian Revolution the British weekly, *Nature*, one of the most solid scientific periodicals in any language, had an editorial article appealing to scientific men to support religion on the basis of just such flagrant historical untruths as I have quoted from Murray. A few years ago Sir Richard Gregory, leading British scientist, said in a lecture and afterwards wrote, apropos of the supposed decay of character in our irreligious age:

"In the age of chivalry, of the 11th to the 14th centuries, duty to noble service gave refinement to the character of the warrior. Love, honor, loyalty, and piety were esteemed as major virtues, and courtesy, courage, obedience, and respect for women as minor."—  
Sir Richard would have been outraged if my friend Lord Snell, who took





JOSEPH MCCABE, AT 80, WORKING IN HIS STUDY

the chair for him, had recommended the flat-earth theory, yet it is not further from the truth in astronomy than Gregory's statements about life in the mythical Age of Chivalry are from the findings of every single high historical authority on the period. And it is not immaterial to add that both Murray's and Gregory's lectures were delivered to audiences of highly educated Rationalists who strongly appreciated them and most of whom regard me as an "extreme" person.

I could write a large book on such blunders in contemporary works that are invariably treated by reviewers with deep respect, but these instances of recent date will suffice. My American readers will have found scores of such instances from the works of American professors in my books. And since in all these cases the writers have been induced by their regard for religion or fear of offending religious bodies to make this wide departure from the first ethical canon of science, any reader who has not hitherto understood will now appreciate why I have all my life given preponderant attention to history. It is needless to add that I assume that it never occurred to scholars like Murray and Gregory to doubt for a moment the truth of the statements they took from the stream of conventional beliefs. I am merely illustrating that a general and accurate instruction in history is as urgently required as in science, economics, or social questions.

I am tempted to give one further illustration. A year ago Dr. Gilbert Murray wrote an article in one of the magazines with the title "Our Age of Lying." He is a man of sensitive and high character and hates lies, yet he had in the previous year strongly supported and urged his fellow Rationalists to support the imposition, by a new law, of definite Christian lessons on the children in all the schools of Britain, on the ground that this helps to guide and guard character. The truth is that wherever statistics are available, as they are in the case of a number of British and American cities and a number of countries like Eire, pre-war Poland, and Italy, they yield exactly the opposite result. It will, in fact, help the reader further to understand my rebellious frame of mind that while the whole press and periodical literature of Britain discussed this beneficent action of religious lessons not one single writer or speaker inquired, by consulting the statistics, whether in point of fact religious lessons do check crime and juvenile delinquency; and Rationalists themselves instead of publishing the statistics—they refused to publish a small work in which I give these for Eire—agreed to the imposition of lessons in the schools provided there were lessons on other religions as well as the Christian.

I had been professor of ecclesiastical history as well as philosophy in the small clerical college in which I had taught, and I was no stranger to that field of culture, but I began serious work in it only with my "Peter Abelard" and "St. Augustine and His Age," which passed through several British and American editions. But I then, as I have stated, became especially occupied with Rationalist work and read extensively both recent historians and the original literature. In the British National Library (British Museum) one large section of the reference shelves is given up to the hundreds of fat quarto volumes of the Migne (Benedictine) collection of the Latin and Greek Fathers or of all Christian writings known (in the 18th century) from the first to the 13th century. Apart from clerical professors no reader has spent so many days as I have during the last 50 years in that cloistral corner of the great library.

We rarely speak of "discoveries" in history—I have never envied the bliss of the professor who has discovered a new coin of Cleopatra or the manuscript of a few lines of some forgotten work—but I unearthed large numbers of facts that modern historians ought to and do not take into account. When, a few years ago, I lay dangerously ill and delirious I muttered, my good housekeeper tells me, "Thomas a Becket—poor old

Thomas" over and over again. In the week before I contracted pneumonia I had found in the Migne collection the last letter in which the archbishop described his situation. It is barely mentioned—again, I submit, because such mention would be "offensive to Catholics"—in any one of the classic histories of England yet it completely discredits the conventional account of the murder in Canterbury Cathedral in the year 1170. I have translated the letter in my recent "Testament of Christian Civilization" (1946). Don't blame the King, Becket tells the Pope, but "those priests of Baal, those sons of false prophets . . . the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of London"! It was chiefly a quarrel with them about property that endangered his life.

It is not too much to say that the entire history of Europe ought to be rewritten with a strict regard to the historical facts, but apart from the fact that no historical specialist now covers so wide a field few could be trusted, and probably none of the few would be willing, to do the work. In ancient history my interest was limited. The broad question of the rise from barbarism to civilization fascinated me, and, I believe, before Breasted, I stressed the decisive influence of the last Ice Age; and I applied the same principles of materialistic—I have never cared to say "economic"—determination to the remarkable history of Greece. Beyond that I was mainly interested to transmit to the general public the exposure of the fraudulent history of the Hebrews, which one may now read in scores of books, and of the dreary 19th century legends about religion and morals in Babylonia and Egypt. Of late years I have paid greater attention to early Persia and the deep influence of its necessarily ascetic code (since the devil created the flesh and all matter) upon later Egypt, Babylonia, Judaism, and eventually Christianity. In all this, however, my task was simply to select the relevant facts from the large modern literature and enable the reader to form a clear and sound conception of real civilization and its codes of behavior, laying stress on the new light, which I call the False Dawn of Modern Times, which broke gradually upon the world, from Ionia to China, inspiring new forms of art and literature as well as philosophy and science, with the spread of Skepticism in the 7th and 6th centuries B. C.

What academic folk think of my works ceased to interest me decades ago—I would not cross the room to read a review of one—and whether or no that philosophy of history which is unfolded in my 40 or 50 historical works is accepted in a later generation is equally a matter of complete indifference to me personally. At present I should not expect any professional historian to venture to endorse any of my leading conclusions, though there is no dispute whatever in serious history about the facts on which they are based. For instance, I claim to have established, chiefly in my "Rise and Fall of the Gods," that it is an historical law that Atheism spreads in all ages in proportion to the growth of knowledge and of freedom to discuss it. I have supplemented this in my "Hundred Men Who Moved the World" with the evidence that of these 100 men, selected on the ground of their contributions to civilization, nearly one-half were Atheists, half the remainder Deists or Pantheists, few strict Christians, and the great majority far from chaste or spiritual. In my "Golden Ages of History" I described 15 periods which bear that title by the general verdict of historians, and I show that they were all characterized by a conspicuous spread of Skepticism; in fact, I rather strained the evidence against my thesis in order to avoid the charge of prejudice by including Christian rulers like Lorenzo and Louis XIV (whose greatness is a nauseating myth). In fine I showed in my "Splendor of Moorish Spain" (1935) that the main key to the restoration of civilization in Europe after five or six centuries of real general barbarism (adequately described in my "History of Morals," "History of the Roman Church," and more recent "History of the Popes") was the brilliant Arab civilization beyond the Pyrenees, the greatest since the



Greco-Roman, the culture of which gradually penetrated the dense and coarse mind of Christian Europe.

If any reader still fails to understand my eagerness to prove such points and would remind me that this at least is a book explaining myself I remind him that the guiding principle of my life since the beginning of this century has been social service. The acquisition of knowledge over a wide field has always been the main pleasure of my life. I like a good detective or western story and read several every week. I thrill at a good football match and love to sit thinking at night before a fire with my pipe and, as long as it could be had, a glass of good beer. I like a brisk solitary country or seashore walk, increasing the pace when a hill rises before me, and I like mingling with crowds on the streets of a city. But my time has been mainly given, all my life, except the four years in which I was a little businessman in Manchester, to acquiring and transmitting knowledge, and it has never been a labor. It has been a long holiday in the sunshine, and the thought of "retiring" is almost as repugnant to me as the fear that a time may come when failing energy may impose idle days upon me. But in all this acquisition and communication of knowledge I have, since about 1900, always had a clear social aim: to stimulate men to think and to teach them such facts as, in my conviction, will help them in their search for the way to a social order without the wars, poverty, blunders, and cruelties that disgrace what we call our civilization.

And you have only to reflect that, especially in our day, we hear it on all sides described as "our Christian Civilization" to see the point of the materialism which I teach both in history and science. The phrase is, of course, hypocritical. I do not "mellow" with age, as a man of 80 is expected to do, partly because my mental vitality is as high as it was at the age of 40, but chiefly because I have seen the world pass into such an age of lying, sophistry, and casuistry as I had never known before. The phrase "our Christian Civilization" is the cloak thrown over the present form of the unscrupulous struggle to protect privilege. It gives a pretext to the Catholic Church, in particular, to ally itself with the wealthy who would again drown in blood, as an alliance of Clericalism and Feudalism repeatedly did in the last century—on that point at least the Cambridge Modern History is remarkably frank—the radical forces now embodied in Socialism (of which Communism is one form) and the U.S.S.R., which threaten the position of the privileged minority. If those who would give a sincere meaning to the phrase imagine that they can call it a "Christian civilization" in the sense that the nations which sustain it are in the majority Christian they refuse, as usual, to consider the facts. The available statistics—of these also I have made a thorough study and often published the result—show that the majority in all the leading civilizations are no longer Christians, and that their secession from the Church has grown just in the same proportion as the world has advanced. But the claim usually is that it was a Christian Europe that, mainly or at least largely stimulated and guided by the inspiration of the Church, built up our civilization, and we have therefore to beware of losing this inspiration.

My use of history has been predominantly for the purpose of discrediting that lie as an indispensable prerequisite of getting folk to see the real inspirations and guides of social progress. I have no fanatical zeal for Truth as such, though I hate lying. I generally shudder when I hear professional truth-seekers explain that they have devoted their whole lives to "the greatest of all causes," which they declare to be the "destruction of superstition." The kindly interpretation of me which some well-meaning folk offer, that either from chagrin over a misspent youth (in a monastery) or from some dark feature of temperament, I "hate" religion is melodramatic nonsense. But I could hardly express my philosophy better than in some words recently used, with a different

aim, by a journalist and literary man of the type I most loathe. Just three days before I write this I read an article in London's most respectable evening paper, Lord Beaverbrook's *Standard*, and by the most robust and bucolic representative of the Churchill school, Beverley Baxter. He was, as usual, warning folk by the awful example of atheistic Russia. The delicious irony is that after the sub-heading, "Reject God," he went on:

"Let us be perfectly blunt. *The one nation that is making progress today is Russia.*"

To any person who has open-mindedly followed the story of the U.S.S.R. since the Bolshevik Revolution and seen its people surmount the most formidable difficulties any European nation has encountered since the Thirty Years War that is a tremendous compliment, not only to the Soviet leaders but to the ideals they followed. Just when they had built up a civilization upon a desert of ruins it was shattered again, and more devastatingly than the civilization of any other European nation, yet "it is the one nation that is making progress today!"

Of course, Baxter meant that it has sold man's heritage of spirituality for a mess of pottage, but I am weary of pointing out the fallacy of that syrupy word. If he means art, letters, and science, what nation is more devoted than the Russian to cultivating these? And in the treatment and reduction of crime and general excellence of character the Russians are at least equal to any. But the important point is that their leaders, in rejecting every religious belief, have risen from the war-wreck better than any others. Whatever proportion of the nation are still Christians—the Russian Atheists themselves say 40 percent, while in England and France the proportion is not more than 20 percent—all men in the governing classes and in the body of 20,000,000 Communists that rules the rulers have rejected God and Christianity. And they make more progress than any others. The Atheist is on the positive side a Humanist, and it is when you abandon God that you really begin to learn the power of man, when you abandon heaven that you become zealous for the betterment of earth.

This is no place to explain that I came to the same conclusion as the Russians by a thorough study of the real history of Europe during the last 2,500 years. Why not, someone may ask, just construct what I claim to be the positive and veracious history of civilization without so much polemic? It would be futile. There is still in the environment of the race outside Russia, seeping into the minds of men from every editorial, radio-deliverance, and long political speech, the false and mythical version of its history. You have to discredit these myths—about the "triumph" over paganism, the early church and its legendary swarms of martyrs, the Dark Age, the Age of Chivalry, art and culture and the Middle Age, and so on—before men will candidly consider the truth. Let it not be imagined for a moment that by the truth I mean the opinion of a few Freethinkers as opposed to the general teaching of historians. Historians today, except a few second-rate or third-rate professors who play up to the religious bodies, never cover the whole history of civilization and therefore are little equipped, if they were inclined, to touch upon what they would call the delicate topic of the influence of religion. But there is no room for doubt as to what they think. When Professor Leuba made his famous confidential inquiry into the beliefs, as stated by themselves, of the leaders of culture in America he summed up this part of his results ("Belief in God and Immortality," p. 259):

"There is little difference between the greater historians and the greater scientists; only about one-third of each believe in God.

The proportions are not very different regarding immortality."

And as we may take it for granted that those who refused to reply to his inquiry were not believers ashamed of their belief or fearing penal-

ization, the proportion of believers is less than a third. In any case in all my works I give detached and exact references for such facts as may startle the reader, and in cases of more serious skepticism a reference to the original Latin or other sources.

That will be enough to explain my constant preoccupation with history. It is part of the scientific-humanist interpretation of reality, and it discredits the false guides whose worthlessness explains where man is today, in the sixth or seventh millennium of civilization. If any man still feels that the legend he has heard from the infant-school onward—that the Churches “do good,” that Christianity inspired civilization, that religion is indispensable—let him look round him. For 18 months the most powerful of all churches, the Roman, has been poisoning the mind of America with hatred of another great civilization and trying to drag America into a more barbaric war than ever yet reddened this planet; and this on top of the alliance of its supreme head for five or six years with the supreme criminals of history who perished at Nuremberg. Look to India where the savage clash of two other “great religions” has led to such horrors. Look to Palestine, where the conflict of two “great religions” explains much of the barbarity of today and portends a far worse conflict in the near future. Look to Japan, where the intimate alliance of the fifth and sixth “great world-religions,” Buddhism and Shinto, with capitalist and imperialist thugs has brought ruin upon a nation and desolation upon the whole eastern world. I might say look round America, where the churches claim to have a great influence on the dangerous policy of Washington. Look round the world, in fine, and notice the sterile silence of the archbishops and other church-leaders in an age that lacks guidance as man never did before . . . so I hope they will give me this simple epitaph when I die: He was a rebel to his last breath.

## 8. ON THE LECTURE-PLATFORM

The facts and truths of science and history fill the greater part of my works. Indeed these and their relation to religious beliefs may be said to occupy almost entirely the works I have published in America through E. Haldeman-Julius in the last 20 years. Apart from the general summary of knowledge (“Key to Culture”) and a few booklets on questions of the day these sum up my work. It amuses me to hear at times how some discussion on the campus has been heavily closed by the assurance of some junior professor that I write on too many things to be accurate. I repeat that that would give a glorious opportunity, of which they do not seem to have availed themselves, to my numerous clerical critics. But my habitual readers understand. Even in science and history I, unlike the professor, who has to know the year in which some royal criminal or pious character died, to be able to tell the hybrid Greek and Latin names of obscure species of insects or of Mesozoic reptiles, select my facts. They must have relevance to the meaning and guidance of life. Beyond this I have studied only such elements in economics and sociology, such outstanding events in the world of art and letters, as I needed to form my own judgment.

In addition I have translated about 30 books from German, French, Spanish, Latin, or Italian, and I have published a few anonymous or pseudonymous works or written books for other men. Five or six years ago my British publishers suggested that, as my name was anathema, I might write a few books under a pseudonym. I chose to translate my Irish name into English and masqueraded for a year as Martin Abbotson; and the experiment was a complete failure. For another publisher I once translated or rather made a little book or a series of booklets, guides to opera-goers, on Wagner’s Ring; and I had the satisfaction of

hearing musical friends, who regard me as a philistine because I prefer Handel to Stravinsky, warmly recommend these anonymous guides. I helped the bluff Sir Hiram Maxim to compile—rather, I compiled for him—his “Li Hung Chang’s Scrap Book.” But my most extensive work of this kind was to write nearly all the works to which my friend Bishop William Montgomery Brown put his name.

It was an open secret, for Bill was a fine man but no scholar and the bishops of the Episcopal Church never believed that he wrote the learned books that he hurled at them year after year. It chanced that I was in America on the eve of his trial for heresy in 1924, and he invited me to spend a week with him in Galion. I wrote a defense for him, but he had a number of other counsel, some with fantastic ideas of strategy. When reporters told him that if he had confined himself to the paper which I had written for him the bishops could hardly have condemned him, he asked for my assistance on a much more extensive scale. He pleaded that it was largely through reading my books that he had become a heretic and he was entitled to my help. He offered me the appointment of (paid) literary secretary and I wrote practically all that he published from 1924 to 1937, including “Science and History for Boys and Girls,” which was, he told me, translated into Russian and used in the Soviet schools. At times he made alterations in or additions to the manuscripts, always for the worse, but I was content with his promise that my authorship of the books would be disclosed at his death. It was in fact left to me to disclose it, which I promptly did.

Brown’s position and personality puzzled Americans. We became close friends, and at one time or other I spent weeks with him in Galion or during his visits to Chicago. Shortly before his death he was invited to read a paper at the Congress of Religions there, and it was loudly applauded. I had written it. I went with him one day to a Women’s Club to which he lectured. Sitting with me was the chief Unitarian preacher of Chicago, Bradley, and he listened with astonished appreciation until I whispered to him that I had written the speech. There was little difference between the bishop’s creed and mine. His “God,” and he gradually quit using the word, was just “whatever good there is in man”; and he went beyond me in denying that there had ever been such a person as Jesus. His chief tenet, that the phrases of the Christian theology might be used as emotional symbols of human truths—the Holy Ghost was science, and so on—was innocuous. He did not for a moment say, as the Modernists do, that these symbolical meanings are *in* the formulae but that the Christian phrases could be used to express them, just as we use the word salvation in many senses.

He was always shy of discussing this point with me or of explaining why he, in some back room in Chicago—probably at heavy expense—got a wandering prelate from some eastern branch of the Catholic Church to make him a bishop when he lost his American title. He was a man of the finest character. A rich and pious lady who had paid for his clerical education left him her large fortune, and I fancy that he wanted to be loyal to her memory. He and his wife lived, without a servant, in his large house in Galion—many a time I have seen Bill bent over the stove cooking his supper—so that practically the whole of the money should be applied to the cause (and to Communism). What became of it I do not know. Bill assured me that he had provided that I should continue to write the books, now under my own name, which were sold cheap or given away, after his death, but I could not get even the \$100 or so he owed me at the time of his death. It was something that through him I had placed a score of books and booklets applying science and history to religion in the hands of a large section of the American public whom I should otherwise never have reached.

I had found myself in time just as fluent with tongue as with pen, but here again the insinuation that I turned against the Church a skill



that it had given me is ill-founded. We younger preachers had to write out our sermons, submit them to our "superior," and learn them by heart. More than once I saw the ladies beneath the pulpit start with apprehension when, in my nervousness, I momentarily lost my "lines," and there was no prompter in the wings. Before I quit the Church I could not speak for 10 minutes without this elaborate preparation. I have all my life tried as far as possible to avoid speaking without some hours of preparation, except when it was repeating a lecture. In my early lecturing days, in fact, my notes often ran to several pages, and, if it were not a lantern lecture on science, I wrote out and memorized a few purple patches to insert here and there. Almost always I covered a half-sheet of paper with an outline of the lecture, heavily scoring the main points to meet my eye, though in time I used no notes on the platform. At one place I heard one official say to another, "McCabe's lost his notes," and the reply, "Good God, do you mean he's lost his head?"

Most of the stories of speakers who could stand up and make brilliant or witty speeches without preparation are apocryphal or greatly exaggerated. My friend Robert Gladstone told me that his uncle, the famous statesman, used to spend hours stretched on a couch preparing a speech; though he was a slow speaker. The level of political speaking has fallen low since those days, except in the case of Churchill, who spends three or four days in the preparation of an important speech and must memorize a good deal of it. Ingersoll's daughter, my good friend Mrs. Ingersoll-Brown, told me that her father did not prepare the vibrant emotional passages which add so much to the charm of his speeches, but I fancy that her memory was at fault. The passages in the published speeches show considerable polish in comparison with the verbatim reports in the papers at the time they were delivered. A janitor once gave away that brilliant popular lecturer on science, Professor Tyndall. He found him in the afternoon before a lecture practicing a little trick: "accidentally" knocking a book off the table and vaulting over—he was a good Alpine climber—to pick it up. But this must have been in Tyndall's early years, for he was a serious and conscientious man.

There is, in short—if the reader will not take the word in an ugly sense—a seamy side to the tapestry of good public speaking. I once heard Chesterton, whom I was to oppose, explain to an audience that he had only had time to put together a few notes in his taxi. The speech was published verbatim in his next volume of essays. For my part I never regarded speaking as an art but a means of communicating knowledge; and in some respect the best means, for one can pack more knowledge into an hour's talk and imprint it more effectively than in many pages of a book. Discussing the point once with a lady, I found that her ideal lecturer was the Secularist leader Foote because, she said, "he never says anything that we don't know." Doubtless that was a clumsy way of expressing her appreciation. My own idea was that I would never mount a platform unless I felt that I could tell the audience something that they did not know, putting what little art or grace I could into the telling. This, indeed, enabled me to overcome the nervousness I felt at first—good speakers have admitted to me that they never overcome it—before mounting the platform. I exorcized it by reminding myself that I knew more about the subject than my audience did.

After the first few perspiring experiments in extemporizing I soon became a fluent and rapid speaker, but a friend sent me to take six lessons from a famous professor of elocution. At the first lesson he began to tell me the difference between vowels and consonants, and with my usual readiness I asked him to tell me something that I did not know. There were no lessons, but he was a good fellow and, after hearing me reel off a bit of my latest lecture, he gave me a valuable counsel. My delivery had the common fault: it was monotonous. "Look at that

picture," he said, pointing to the wall. "Certain figures stand out—the rest is background." I improved, though I have never regarded myself as a lecturer of any distinction. It is the message that matters. "Well, what do you think about the question now?" one man was heard to ask another after one of my lectures. "I don't know," he replied. "You see, McCabe is such a convincing beggar that I always take time before I allow myself to be convinced by him." He referred, I hope, to the matter rather than the manner of my speeches.

From earlier adventures that I have described it will be apparent that I have lectured in every type of room to every kind of audience: millionaires' drawing rooms and hobo colleges, universities and in a mental hospital (mostly to melancholics, including once a famous poet), theological colleges and giddy social clubs, slum dwellings and stately manors, the saloons of liners (once hanging on to a column in a wild storm—and to a thin house), theatres, churches, schools, public baths, parks (to many thousand people), miners' club rooms, etc. I have lectured, impromptu, in Latin and (in a Paris congress) in French. My lectures, naturally, included many on the Church of Rome, but I have rarely had disturbances. Once I arrived at a town (Wigan) in the north of England and was met by a dejected group who said that, as the Catholics had threatened a riot, the chief of police had forbidden the lecture (on science). I went at once to the chief's house and—well, he came himself to the lecture, which, he told me, he greatly enjoyed. The 20 reserve police in a nearby building were not called out, and I became quite a popular lecturer in the town. Once in Sydney, when I advertised a reply to the cardinal who (knowing that I was 2,000 miles away) had criticized me from his pulpit, a Catholic wrote me, piously, that if I gave that lecture I would "leave either my bones or my balls in Australia." My friends were alarmed and, against my will two tall detectives escorted me to the hall. I should loathe to count all the lectures entered in my little book since 1902 but as I see that for at least 20 years I gave 150 to 200 a year, including tours, the total must be well over 4,000.

Once only in the half-century have I missed a lecture through illness (gastric influenza), though I have lectured sitting and sipping brandy on the platform or with my head and hands (after a touch of anthrax) heavily bandaged. It was often arduous work, and the pay was generally small. One Saturday morning I was in Southport, 200 miles from London, when I heard that there was a strike and all trains were cancelled. I was advertised to give two lectures in Wigan next day and one in London on the Monday. Packing my baggage for mail, I set out with my lantern slides and a toothbrush and, getting what little aid from street cars that I could, walked (15 miles) to Wigan. At 8 p.m. on Sunday, after two heavy lectures, I took a chain of street cars from town to town for 20 miles and reached Manchester about midnight. The police told me that there was not a room available in the whole city, but they let me into the depot, which they guarded, to get what sleep I could in a railway day-coach. They roused me at 6 and told me where I could get some breakfast, and I felt that I was taking my ham and eggs for once in a pale, almost silent, company of 40 to 50 whores and petty burglars. A voluntary service, the police told me, would run a slow train to London, and I arrived there after a nine-hour crawl, without having had a crumb to eat or a drop to drink, in time to rush afoot across the city and deliver another heavy lecture. The grand net profit of the three days was \$30. Most of these adventures were in connection with Rationalist lectures. How the Rationalists rewarded me will appear later.

After a few years experience in lecturing I began to engage in debates. I have never challenged any man to a debate, nor do I regard these performances as an effective means of education. My experience is that debates are usually arranged, for one reason or other, which *might* be propagandist, by organizations which separately approach the

desired pugilists. Except in a few cases in which I knew that the opponent selected was of so poor a type that the debate would not be fair to the audience, I always accepted and made a serious preparation. But I had become a fluent extempore speaker, and I occasionally made offers which, though frivolous in appearance, reflected my poor opinion of the case of my religious opponents, though these things were naturally quoted as evidence of my conceit. My Scottish friends many years ago pressed the most distinguished preacher in the city of Glasgow to meet me, and he replied, flatteringly, that he would need six months preparation to meet me; whereupon I told them that since the man must know *some* point in the religious controversy well, he might choose the subject and not let me know it until we were on the platform. He declined, affecting to be shocked at my levity.

Worse was the censure I incurred once in Melbourne, when my friends found every preacher reluctant to do battle and I told the newspapermen, who took an acute interest, that I would debate with any six of them in a bunch and they need not tell me the subject until the last moment. The papers starred my offer. Once on a boat a zealous parson from a poor London parish was lured by the "boys" of the smoking saloon to challenge me on the issue whether the rich or the poor are the more virtuous. For once in my life, in the sacred interest of entertainment, I championed the rich, and when a vote was taken I won heavily; though I do not suppose one of the 300 passengers except myself was worth as much as \$1,000. But when I saw the man's dejection and I hilariously offered a new debate in which he should defend the rich, I the poor, his language was that of the prophets.

My first debate, a two nights' affair, was with a clergyman whose special work in the church was to lecture on the beautiful harmony of the first chapter of Genesis with the teaching of science. As was then common, he relied upon hurling at his innocent hearers the guttural words of the Hebrew text and stunning them. He, of course, did not know that I had studied this Hebrew text at Louvain University. On the other hand, when on the second night I opened and pressed upon him the ancient Babylonian or Sumerian stories from which the legends of Genesis are taken I found him completely ignorant of them.

Some time later a layman, a distinguished engineer, challenged the Rationalist Association to bring forward a champion on the question of the existence of God. In the published debate he makes a plausible show, as I had to depart for Australia just afterwards, and the authorities of the Association, never zealous for my interests, sold him the stenographer's report and allowed him to take appalling liberties with it before publishing it. The debate had been a farce, but the most amusing feature of it, in retrospect, is that he had rushed to debate because he had a grand new argument for God. This was, in 1910, the "discovery" with which Sir James Jeans electrified the religious world 30 years later—the proof that the universe (in the existence of which Jeans did not believe) must have had a beginning and therefore God had created it. As a fact the principle of the argument goes back to Clausius (1850) and it was refuted by Haeckel in 1900 and by me in 1903. In its new dress in the 20's and 30's it was hailed as one of the marvelous corollaries of the discovery of radium. The churches seemed at the time to claim that God had revealed the secrets of the atom to physicists in order to make an end of Materialism. The latest sequel of the revelation is the uranium bomb, and they want science suppressed.

A third champion of the angels whom I met, a lecturer of the Christian Evidence Society, was mobbed by the audience at the close of the second night of the debate and forcibly told what they thought of his effrontery in inviting a London audience to listen to his vaporings and his Sunday school "history." I left them to it and quietly made for the nearest saloon-bar. But I was persuaded later to meet an "important

American evangelist" who had, with much trumpeting, come to London to extirpate the belief in evolution. This was "Professor" Macready Price, Seventh Day Adventist. My Rationalist friends approached him as soon as he had settled in London and had told the press of the slaughter he projected. He agreed to meet me in the second largest hall in London, which was filled. But I had found . . . Let me first explain the technique of debate which I had by this time evolved, as it may be of use to some readers. When you are going to debate, anticipate what your opponent is going to say and say it first, and anticipate what he thinks you are going to say and don't say it. I learned that Price's decisive argument was to have a lantern and throw on the screen pictures of certain formations in the foothills of the Rockies where what the geologist calls older rocks lie on top of what he calls younger. Lecturing in Denver some time before I had seen these rocks—it was a clear case of subsequent overlap due to volcanic pressure—and I did not fear his picture. But he had insisted that I should open the debate, and I had prepared a series of slides of the strata underneath London which lie as evenly as a billiard table for 1,000 feet or more. Price did not even exhibit his pictures, though my friend Earl Russell, who took the chair and shared my little secret, repeatedly whispered the time to him.

Not willingly I fought another duel over evolution about 10 years ago. My opponent, Mr. Dewar, had, with a colleague, written an admirable book in *defense* of evolution about 20 years earlier. It is worthy of all praise to avow one's errors under the pressure of truth, but . . . At all events, when that fine physicist and muddle-headed bibliolater Fleming founded and financed an anti-evolution movement (in the fourth decade of the 20th century) I was not disposed to take serious notice of it. Dewar now appeared as one of its prophets. I always gave my opponent the choice of speaking first or second, and he chose to open the debate. At breathless speed he read a long paper, mainly on the aphides, which seemed to me totally irrelevant, and the debate, as an intellectual entertainment, was ruined from the start.

It had an annoying sequel. I agreed with the Rationalist authorities who had hired two stenographers, that it was not worth publishing, and they sold the report for \$20 or so to Dewar. Presently I received a letter from him enclosing less than a dozen sentences from my three speeches and saying that if I cared to check these sentences he would go to press. It is the invariable custom when a debate is to be printed to submit the reports or proofs of his speeches to each speaker. I found that a religious debater usually takes advantage of this to trim his speeches in the light of his opponent's arguments, but in any case the reports are often inaccurate on account of the technical nature and rapid course of the debate. I saw by these specimen sentences that the reports of my speeches were atrocious, often making me say just the reverse of what I had said, and I refused my consent to publication without my seeing them. Dewar would not even then send me the reports, and he published his speeches, rewriting them to any extent he liked, and, I am told—I never took the trouble to see a copy—gave his own version of what I had said. As a result I soon learned from all parts of Britain that Dewar and his colleagues were boasting in their lectures that I had been so severely beaten in debate that I was afraid to let them publish my speeches. I sent to the secretary of the Rationalist Association a short account of the true position but it was not printed in the organ of the Association, and I suppose many Rationalists even still believe that Dewar was right.

Some years before this, in 1920, I had had the most interesting and most important of all my debates, though even this had an unpleasant sequel. Spiritualism had, naturally, made considerable progress during and just after the war-years, when mothers were easily persuaded to "get into touch" with dead officer-sons, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,



who had won wide popularity by his Sherlock Holmes stories was "the White Knight" of the new movement. My Rationalist friends challenged him to meet me and he leaped into the arena. We met in the great Queen's Hall, which was crammed to the doors while a strong force of police had to hold off a thousand or so folk who could not gain admission at any price. The eminent lawyer, Sir E. Marshall-Hall, took the chair, and behind Doyle on the large platform were the aristocracy, including foreign ambassadors, of the movement. The debate may be read. I need say only that the Spiritualists, who did not conceal (except from him) their opinion of Doyle's capacity, challenged me immediately afterwards to a debate with a champion chosen by them in order to redeem their defeat, but they withdrew when I accepted.

The unpleasantness was no fault of Doyle's. Except for a Scottish divine with whom I debated recently, as I will tell, he was the one gentleman I met on the platform. I had friendly and appreciative letters from him afterwards. But I was told, when the debate was proposed to me, that he approached the matter in an idealistic spirit and insisted that neither of us should take any payment. That was easy for Doyle, who was a rich man. I was not and, although, as I have explained, I had read all Spiritualist literature of any importance up to a few years earlier, I had now to spend a week or two studying recent claims in Doyle's books. I was then told that Doyle agreed to a fee of \$50. This would not cover my time, and I knew that a debate in the Queen's Hall would probably yield a net profit of more than \$1,000. Unless a debate is arranged in aid of some specified philanthropic object it is usual to divide the net profit between the debaters. I was then assured that the Rationalist authorities would privately raise my fee to \$1,000. I accepted. But when, six years later, grave events, which I will tell, further shook my faith in the Rationalist organizers of the debate, it occurred to me to ask Sir Conan if it was true that he had insisted on the restriction of my fee. He replied:

Dear Mr. McCabe:

My impression was that when expenses were paid half the receipts were to go to the L. Spiritualist Alliance and half to your Rationalist organization. I regret to say that the organizer of the debate proved to be a thoroughly unreliable person who has now been drummed out of the movement—if indeed he was ever in it—I understand that the L.S.A. never received a penny. I hope your people were more fortunate. I need not say that I got nothing. *I never made any stipulation about your getting nothing. I should consider it an impertinence.*

With best regards,

A. Conan Doyle.

P.S. Throwing my mind back, I may have taken the view: Divide the sum and let Mr. McCabe's fee be determined by his own people. That is possible. *I could never have presumed to name the sum.*

A. C. D.

I heard that the Rationalist authorities then said that the representative of the Spiritualists who pocketed their share of the profit had lied to them about Doyle's instructions. It is difficult to see what he would gain. But they did not offer me a cent of the \$450 they took from the profit of the debate.

More interesting but more unpleasant than ever were two debates that I had with Roman Catholic champions of the first rank. It is, of course, forbidden in Canon Law that they should debate with me, but in the first case they had to yield to pressure and in the second case they believed that their champion would completely discredit me. A Dominican monk, now dead, whose name I forget, though he was considered one of their ablest propagandists, had been working zealously amongst the Protestants of South Wales, and on challenge he had to

promise to meet me. I was taking tea in the Miners' Institute before the debate when in came a monk in his picturesque robes who almost embraced me and reminded me that—so he said—we had been fellow-students at Louvain University. But the brotherly love did not survive the debate. He had chosen that I should open, and he looked dejected when I delivered a carefully prepared indictment of his Church. Rising in his turn he at once resorted to trickery. He demanded that I should declare there and then what I thought of Protestantism. I was familiar with the maneuver. He would appeal to the mainly Protestant audience to put no faith in me. On principle—everybody in the room knew my opinions—I declared the question irrelevant to a debate on "Whether the Catholic Church is True?" and he declined to continue the debate. He did resume later but took not the least notice of my points. The most cultivated man in the room declared at the close that I had "wiped the floor with him."

The other Catholic debate was even more unpleasant. The Catholic undergraduates of London University thought that they would have a Roman holiday if I could be induced to meet this leading lay champion, Arnold Lunn. He chose "The Miracles of Lourdes" and, though he demanded the right both to open and close the debate, which no other opponent of mine had ever dreamed of asking, I agreed and met him in the Union Room of the University. It has large arm-chairs for 40 or 50 languid sophomores, and that was all I expected. But, while the organizers had not notified the public, they had put a notice in the Catholic weeklies, and several hundred folk, nearly all Catholics, were, to my delight, packed into the room. Lunn apparently did not know that I had some years before written a book on Lourdes, and I made an even more thorough preparation than usual for this debate. I was convinced from the run of the debate that all that he knew about the subject had been taken from two pamphlets, and I ruthlessly exposed his statements and his claims of cures. The debate was ragged and irregular. When I claimed that the Catholic physiologist Carrel had spent months at Lourdes and did not admit that the cures were miraculous in the Catholic sense (or supernatural), Lunn produced a book of Carrel's in which there was a reference to the "miraculous cures." I demanded the book and pointed out that on the next page Carrel explained that he ascribed the cures to obscure natural forces. Lunn looked at the page and declared to the audience that there was no such passage. Any reader of the book will find it. The confusion was crowned when after two hours the janitor cut off the electric current, and 300 or 400 of us groped in pitch dark for our hats and coats and stumbled along the corridors and staircases into darkest London.

The debate was worth while not only because I obviously made a deep impression on the more thoughtful Catholics but my friend, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, who is greatly respected by the students of London University, made an even deeper impression. Not knowing that Haldane was in the room, Lunn, in an unpleasant attempt to represent me as an inferior sort of person, spoke of a recent literary debate he had had with Haldane and told with what mutual courtesy it had been conducted. The Catholic audience loudly cheered and looked maliciously at little me. But there was dead silence when Haldane, looking dour, rose from behind a bank of girl-students and said that whatever he had felt three or four years ago he now knew that Catholics, from the Pope downward, were all "liars" and he would not trust or respect one of them.

For these debates I never received a cent, as was the case with much of my work. But I will close with a reference to my last debate, in 1946. My good Glasgow Rationalist friends persuaded a well-known and respected preacher to meet me in debate. He was a gentleman of aristocratic character but he had not the skill to convince a Glasgow audience