

mind, and to that mind he was merciless. He, too, was a fanatic. He really wished (in a way) to avenge the tortures of his boyhood; and perhaps he felt that his emancipation was not complete until he had converted his torturer. However this may be, year after year with ever-gathering strength, he hurled battalion on battalion at the squat blind citadel—to foreseen repulse. It was probably the parable of the importunate widow, or the endurance which his horrible boyhood had taught him, that made him continue. It is impossible to argue with a Plymouth Brother, for his religion is really axiomatic to him, so that everything he says begs the question, and you cannot get him to see that it does so. This is not so unusual as it appears; it requires a very good mind to acquiesce, even for purposes of argument, in non-Euclidean geometry, so fixed is the mind in its certainty that the whole is greater than its part, and the like.

It is good to hear them discuss anything.

Propose the question of the Origin of Evil; your Plymouth Brother will remark sooner or later, but always irrelevantly, "God is a just God." You argue that his God is certainly not just, or he would not have commanded the rape of virgins by the thousand, or sent bears to devour forty and two little children whose sole fault was to call attention to the baldness of a prophet.

This is unanswerable; give up the story, as the better mind does, and you are launched for atheism or mysticism; hold to it—the Christian's only hope—and the sole possible reply is, "Shall not the judge of the whole earth do right?" "Yes," you retort. "He shall: that is just my proof that your God is a tribal fetish, and not at all the judge of the whole earth." The conversation, after a sulphurous interlude, again rises to the dignity of argument, and on some infinitely subtle and obscure minor point which he had never thought of before—I speak of a rare incident much prized by connoisseurs—you do really and truly prove to him from Scripture that he is wrong.

Is he downhearted? NO!

The momentary cloud upon his brow passes; the glorious sun shines out amid the wrack:

"The devil can quote Scripture."

In vain you reply that this consuming doubt invalidates the whole of his arguments, which are all drawn from Scripture; and this again admitting of no reply, the worthy man will continue to breathe out lightnings and slaughter until physical weariness bids him desist.

Yet it was the cherished belief of John Nelson Darby Bird that the last straw will break the camel's back; or, more practically, that if you sandpaper bricks at the base of a building long enough the building will suddenly and without warning reel and fall. You remember that Noah spent 120 years building the ark—with hardly a shower. When the flood came, it came suddenly. J. N. D. Bird, K. C., was quite ready to "go to the ant, thou sluggard," or to Noah, as circumstances might indicate.

Before he answered his father's telegram he borrowed the billiard chalk from the waistcoat pocket of his clerk, whose sporting instincts had got the best briefs for his employers in horseing and divorcee circles.

(Lord John Darcy v. the Stewards of the Jockey Club. Riddell v. Riddell, Clay, Arthur, Thompson, Battersby, Jacobs, Bernheim, de la Rue, Griggles, Waite, Shirley, Williamson, Klein, Banks, Kennedy, Gregg, Greg and others. These were the remarkable cases that established the reputation of Mr. Bird. His successful defense of Mrs. Riddell had won him, in addition, a vice-presidency of the Anthropological Society.)

To those who are not Plymouth Brethren it will not be obvious why John Bird pocketed the billiard chalk, and a new

digression becomes Cocker.

Chalk is the commonest form in which carbonate of calcium is found in Nature. Under the microscope it is seen to be composed of the dust of the shells of minute marine animals. Geologists consider it impossible that a layer of chalk 10,000 feet thick should have been deposited in the course of a week, or even in the course of, say, 4,004 years.

The year after John Bird was called to the Bar he had fleshed his maiden steel upon his father by taking a piece of chalk, a microscope, and twenty-seven volumes of geology to Carnswith Towers for the long vacation. Father and son talked chalk day and night for nine weeks. It was a drawn battle. The father had to admit the facts of geology. "Then," said the son, "I cannot believe that God wrote a lie upon the rocks." Timothy replied, "Let God be true, and every man a liar!" He also very ably urged that it was not a lie. If men of science were not blinded by the devil (owing to their seared consciences and their quite gratuitous hatred of God) they would see, as he, Timothy Bird, saw, that it was obvious from the chalk itself that it had been created in a moment. Alternatively, God had written a lie upon the rocks in order to blind them. "God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie."

The immorality of this latter proceeding, of course, led to the old "God is a just God" line of argument with its inevitable conclusion in Sheol for the younger Bird.

Phoenix-like, however, he caused lumps of chalk to be conveyed to his father at irregular intervals; for he saw, with the astuteness that had discomfited Lord John Darcy, that his father's belief had really been shaken by the argument. The outworks held; the citadel crumbled. In the deepest shrine of sub-consciousness Timothy Bird, or, rather, something that was in very truth *not* Timothy Bird, knew that the world was not made in six days, that the Book of Genesis was a Jewish fable, that the whole structure of "revelation" was a lie, that the Incarnation and the Atonement were but dreams.

Armed, therefore, with the integrity described by Horace, and the billiard chalk, John Nelson Darby Bird went to Carnswith Towers by the 3.45 for a final wrestle with the Angel.

II.

The old man was sitting up when his son arrived. Arthur Horne and Henry Burton, the one pale, the other sallow, the one stumpy and fat, the other dried up, had come to pray with him. The doctor, who was not of the fold, appeared nauseated at the union of the vultures, and (before he left) communicated a portion of this feeling to the nurse who, although a "Plymouth Sister," had experience in her profession of the realities of life, and consequently to some extent saw things, though dimly, as they really were.

Burton was praying audibly as John Bird entered. Without moving a muscle, he directed the current of his supplications into a new channel.

"And, dear Jesus, we beseech Thee, on behalf of one among us, or perhaps now among us, or soon to be present among us (it would not do to admit that he knew of anything that was occurring in the room), one we truly fear dead in trespasses and sins and so it seems far indeed from the precious blood. May it please Thee that this thine aged servant may at last be gladdened, ere he pass into his exceeding great reward, by Thy wonderful mercy working in this hard heart and unregenerate Adam . . ."

With utter weariness of tautologies and repetitions, the prayer meandered on for another ten minutes. At last came the Amen.

Not until then did Timothy Bird open his eyes and greet