

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ON OPEN-AIR RELIGION

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It is so natural for people to show to every one around them the feelings which are uppermost, and the impressions which are deepest in their experience, that every one's religion naturally comes to the surface. But sin and religion will not agree together, and, as sin abounds everywhere, for peace and quietness' sake religion is generally kept out of sight. This operation is carried on more and more, until, from giving up that unchecked public avowal of faith in Christ which every true convert feels inclined at first to make, a man gradually suppresses every token of religious conviction, until even those who live in the same house with him have no idea he thinks "anything particular" about religion.

And this system of hiding experimental Christianity has been largely adopted even by Christian Churches; for while every effort is put forth by the denominations to display to the utmost possible extent the outward and visible signs of the faith, the same earnestness is manifested very generally in putting away anything that may be considered "harsh" in teaching, that is, everything that can express heart-devotion to any particular truth. And even where the theory of the Gospel is so expounded as to clash with the notions of many, there is a careful avoidance of that close and pointed personal dealing which is so objectionable. Whatever is done, nobody must be offended. Let the hearers *perish* rather than be brought into uncomfortable contact with eternal life.

But this is nothing new. With what sad longing does God speak of the time when his people went out after Him into the wilderness. The Israelites never seem, in all their history to have pleased God so much as in the great open-air service near Mount Sinai. When the nation was settled in its own land, God arranged for all its public services to take place in the open air. But the people soon got tired of such public devotion. If God had made any room in His law for more refined and undemonstrative service, they might have tried it; but as it was, they publicly followed the example of the heathen around them, and openly rebelled against their God, for whom they still cherished some little regard



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secretly. They preferred avowed devotion to graven images before *public* obedience to God.

Does God change? Is it because there is no central temple on earth, and no outward system of worship, that people suppose a private sort of godliness can please God? Is it because we live in the increased light of the Gospel dispensation that we are to have a more hidden religion? *There must be a terrible mistake somewhere*. God surely must expect of us a more public manifestation of our love for Him than ever was required of the Jews. The Jews had no mission of conversion. We have the world to convert, and if we feel inclined to keep our religion to ourselves, there is certainly something radically wrong within us. The men or the people who do not *publicly* profess faith in Jesus, and urge the claims of the Gospel upon others, have serious reason for doubting their own interest in eternal life. Oh, let us be sure our hearts are right with God, and then

A PUBLIC PROFESSION OF RELIGION WILL BENEFIT OURSELVES.

How it quiets and humbles the spirit of a man to be brought face to face with sin! To see that he belongs to a sect which is everywhere spoken against, and that he is himself the object of general opposition and scorn — oh, how it lowers a man in his own estimation! To be surrounded, not with favoring friends, but with cold, opposing foes, brings a man down from the pinnacle of honor on which he may have sat at ease, and shows him somewhat of his weakness and insufficiency. But if under such circumstances we have recourse to our sure Refuge and Strength, we shall find that public confession of our love for Jesus will confirm and strengthen and develop the grace that is in us, and make us on every occasion stronger for the fight.

And how will it guard us day by day to know that we are surrounded by people who have heard and seen us declare ourselves on the Lord's side! Ever conscious of the inspection of unfriendly eyes, we shall be constantly on the watch against the very appearance of evil. But

THE INFLUENCE OF OPEN-AIR RELIGION UPON OTHERS IS UNBOUNDED.



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So common has the suppression of religion always been, that its public declaration is sure to attract attention. It is impossible to show yourself as a Christian without turning the thoughts of all who see you inwards. Only pronounce yourself the Lord's, and you force all who hear you, secretly, if not openly, to decide for or against Him. And the publicity you give to your religion will convince people that there is something real about it. They may say you make "*too much noise about your religion;*" but they know, after all, that noise is always produced by something greater than the noise itself. There is a great deal of noise in the world, and if religion is the greatest theme, there ought to be noise enough about it to drown every other sound. The complaint of too much noise generally arises from the fact that the noise has been too great to leave somebody *at ease in sin, or, what is worse, at ease in Zion.* There cannot be too much noise about your religion, provided there is no more than your religion produces.

No wonder open-air religion is so unpopular, for it leaves nobody alone.

IT IS VERY OBSTRUCTIVE.

It blocks the flowery path of sinful pleasure, and forces men to think about their souls before they plunge into the burning lake. It warns men that there is "*no thoroughfare*" through worldliness and godlessness to heaven. It placards everything that does not savor of Christ, "*Dangerous,*" and tries to stem the flood of the ungodly as they sweep onward to the precipices of eternal ruin. A sort of religion that constantly opposes sin is sure to be

AN OPPOSED RELIGION.

Its hand is against every man, and every man's hand against it. The winners of unrighteous gain tremble before it, and unite with one consent to vote it out of place and a public nuisance. The publican and the Sunday trader find open-air services very disagreeable. The sort of religion which "*sees no harm*" in anything is what they like. The religion which professes to keep itself unspotted from the world is a religion the world always does its utmost to blackball. And then

OPEN-AIR RELIGION IS SO VERY VULGAR.



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It is all very well to believe in Christianity, and no doubt it is to be desired that all should be brought to a knowledge of the truth; but to hawk religion in the open air, and from door to door, makes it so very common! How professing Christians and ministers of the Gospel give open-air services the go-by! The excuse many of them would make is that those who speak in the open air are really so illiterate and unqualified to explain religion that they would be ashamed to stand by them. A noble argument indeed! We enlightened people can't attend open-air services because we do not attend them, but leave all the work to others! Beware, ye who fawn upon open-air work, and yet never show your faces in connection with it, for heaven will be a dreadfully common, vulgar place, and those who are so dainty as to the company they labour for the Master in here, will be far more at home amongst "the kings of earth, and the rich men, and the great men." than in heaven.

OPEN-AIR RELIGION IS DECIDEDLY UNCOMFORTABLE.

It is not easy to speak out for Jesus in all companies, nor to oppose sin with holy violence. It is not easy work to proclaim salvation in the open-air so that people can hear you. Especially is it not easy work when, to the labour necessary, is added the obloquy that may have to be borne subsequently. People who want to get to heaven with the least possible amount of trouble prefer a more retiring and undemonstrative sort of religion. *How very comfortable we may be, if we only keep our religion to ourselves, and let other people take their own course!* But shall we be comfortable on a death-bed, or at the judgment day, after such a life? But there are so many people who make no ado about their religion, and so few who publish Christ! True!

OPEN-AIR PREACHING IS ALWAYS SINGULAR.

It was so when the prophets stood alone amidst a rebellious nation to declaim against that nation's sins. It was so when Jesus spake as never man spake, and when His apostles stood forth before all men, the witnesses of a "new thing." It was so when Whitefield and the Wesleys violated all propriety amidst the thousands of their day, and it will be so as long as the mass of professing Christians hide their light under a bushel. But never mind! *Those who openly confess Jesus will be singularly happy when they die, and singularly happy for ever.*



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Ye members of the Christian Mission, and all others who openly declare your allegiance to the Crucified, let us carry our testimony everywhere. Not satisfied with fixed stands and stated services, let us go into every street and lane and court within our reach with our universal message of peace. Let us see to it that we use not merely our voices to reach every ear, but the promised Spirit of God, to reach every heart. Let us not rest in the mere proclamation of the Gospel, but let us labour and believe to have men brought to God in the open air and wherever we have an opportunity of speaking out for God. Let us be faithful, for *God, even our own God, shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.*