

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ABOUT CULTURE

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The Gospel according to Arnold, the theory that men can be improved into being, if not they should be, at any rate, all they can be, has always had thousands of advocates under one form or another. And a very beautiful theory it is too. If all the roughnesses, all the deformities, all the inequalities, all the inconsistencies, could only be cultured off every individual and every community, what a delightful world we should live in! But, unfortunately, this beautiful theory will not work.

The Italians, living under the most refined of climates, with a profusion of learning and fine arts and genius present for centuries in all parts of their land, have had so large a share of culture, that the manners of the very peasantry have become perfect, and the whole nation seems to have an eye and ear trained to perfection for beauty and harmony. If the Italians have not been fully cultured, they have certainly had more culture than any other nation in Europe; and with what result? Do they as a nation appreciate what is true and hate all that is false? Italy is the fountain of the most preposterous lies of modern times. Does the nation love order and law and right? Trial by jury is almost useless, as the most unquestionable villains are acquitted. Is the law of gentleness and kindness which good manners seem to betoken, written upon the hearts of the people? Italy is the only country in Europe where satiation is common, and its people are distinguished for cruelty to animals. Culture is a dreadful failure.

It is so easy to sit down and draw a beautiful picture of what is desirable and what *might* be. Castles in the air can be built anywhere, for you need to secure no land for their foundation and no workmen for their construction. How many boys and girls after reading some book of wonders, draw upon their imaginations for a picture of their own future, and rise to the sublimest heights; but alas! alas! the pictured will not come. It is gone — the school bell is ringing, and the lesson is not ready.



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How many hearers of the word sit planning how they will alter their lives, how they will care about their souls and serve God; but nothing is done, and death comes, and they are not ready.

How many idle Christians plan endless schemes for the advantage of their fellows. As they pass along the cold wintry street, they see and feel miseries of the poor, and determine that they will exert themselves on their behalf; but once established in their own armchair, with slippered feet upon the fender, the wants of others are forgotten and the culture that is sought is not that of their own power for usefulness; but of their power of enjoyment. Alas for the culture theory. It gives beautiful visions; but nothing more.

But even supposing that culture were a great success in the case of individuals, it is manifestly impracticable for the mass, simply for want of the necessary appliances. How many Bethnal Green Museums, how many National Galleries, how many conversations and lectures would be necessary to culture the people of East London? We suppose our "culture" philosophers would give up the present generation and go in for the culture of the next, very consistently with a theory which condemns everything that is, and praises something that is to be.

When culture shall have done its best for every individual of a great people, what then? Let every one be educated, every one suitably employed and provided for, everyone in a good humor with themselves and every one else, every one still "developing;" you would make great immortal beings comfortable in a perishable world; and you would make them content only to dream about eternity. Culture is of no use.

But stop! Is there no such thing as culture? Is there no possibility of making that great rough fellow over the way a gentleman? Thank God! there is. The culture of God can fit that man to sit down at the table of the King of kings. In this Mission are hundreds of ladies and gentlemen by the grace of God. Here are men and women, who might once have been addressed as the "brutish among the people," who are developing faculties and powers they never imagined they possessed, when they were under the culture of the devil. Godliness is the true culture.

YOU CANNOT TRULY CULTURE THE DEAD.



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You may train the fiercest tiger that ever leaped in the jungle; but the most stately tiger of marble that ever sculptor chiseled will be unmoved by the trainer's whip or the trainer's tongue. You may lead and teach the wildest character in the East-end of London, if his soul be alive, if his soul is born again of the Holy Ghost; but you cannot raise the most intelligent Belgravian a step nearer to God, you cannot improve him, so long as he remains dead in trespasses and sins.

TRUE CULTURE BEGINS AT THE ROOT.

You may train and cut a hedge until it looks very nice and regular; but it bears no good fruit. "Make the tree good, and its fruits good." An unchanged heart is wrong, and can only go wrong. Only God can put it right.

If you wish to improve to the utmost extent the fruit and the productiveness of a tree, you plant it in the best possible soil, and in order to make the best of a Christian man, he must be planted by the river of water of life. He must constantly draw fresh sap, fresh life, fresh vigor, fresh energy from the fountain of life.

CULTURE CAN ONLY BE EFFECTED BY POWER.

No man can culture himself. There must be an interior power ever pushing upward and outward if the plant is to attain a perfect growth, and there must be an exterior power to prune and train and guard the tree if it is to attain a perfect form. Unless the power of the Holy Ghost is at work in the heart, men do not grow up into Christ Jesus. They are quite content to be "good trees," and to disgrace the husbandman to whom they belong. A powerless Christian, a Christian who does not grow, is like a dwarf in God's great family, and God dislikes spiritual dwarfs.

Ah, how frightened Christians generally are of the Husbandman! They will rather keep away from the means of grace, than have the power of Him who has no respect of persons exercised in cutting off their worldliness and evil habits, and repressing their unruly will and tendencies. But the only way to be lovely in God's sight, is to let Him have His own way with us, however painful it may be to us for

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the present. He alone is able, and, praised be His holy name! He is now willing to make us just what He would like us to be, if we will only submit to Him.

There is something seriously wrong about the Church, the community, the religious movement which does not increase, or which does not improve as it grows older. As surely as the good husbandman of the world attends to all his trees and makes the best of each, so surely does God lead forth and beautify with His salvation, every soul and every people which really belongs to Him and is left to His power. Oh that we saw more of the Divine husbandry displayed amongst the Lord's people! Then should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. Then the ignorant would become wise, the rough gentle, the idle diligent, the obscure prominent, the silent eloquent. What companies of preachers and teachers and prayer-leaders, what battalions, what armies would spring up if God were allowed to culture His people as He wishes to do.

CULTURE IS EFFECTED SYSTEMATICALLY.

There is an accepted mode in which trees and plants are to be trained. And God has an accepted and declared way of train souls for Himself. He lays down clear and bright in His word His mode of bringing sons unto glory. The path of *the just* is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Absolute and constant conformity to right effected by the mighty power of the Spirit is the true culture. "And we, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed from glory into glory as by the Spirit of the Lord," until the plant ceases to wear the image of the earthly, and puts on for ever the perfect image of the heavenly.

But are we thus beholding the perfect glory? Are we being changed daily into that lovely likeness? Oh for grace to look more constantly to Jesus! Then our life within and without alike shall take the exact form God loves to see.