

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

LIFE

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What do people mean when they wish one another a happy new Year? As a rule, we presume they simply mean to be polite or agreeable. But what do godly people, who know what true happiness is, mean when they wish one another a happy New Year? Do they only mean "may your happiness continue another year"? And if so, is it supposed or implied that a godly man can be happy in 1877 with no more cause for happiness than he had in 1876? To those who live "after the flesh" a happy New Year requires merely the same amount of health and strength, the same "enjoyment" which any of their past "happy" years bore them. But to any one who walks after the Spirit there can never be a happy New Year without happy new enlightenment, happy new progress, happy new fruits, without—in short, conferring upon the Father in heaven and the great elder Brother there a happy New Year of satisfaction in the furtherance of Their designs.

Millions of praying souls on the last night of the old year resolved to secure a great improvement in their spiritual life, for millions are perfectly well aware that their inner life is far from being what it might be; but how many thousands—alas! we fear it would be better to inquire how many hundreds—have now life "more abundantly" than they had it two months since?

Millions, alas! are dead. Millions, too, who even with some degree of thought and deliberation promised God that if spared to commence another year they would live. In this London there are whole neighborhoods peopled mainly with the dead, whose guilty slumbers are never seriously disturbed. We have sadly paced through such districts, asking ourselves, "Shall we never be strong enough to carry the Gospel message through all these streets, so that all may hear it? Will nobody ever arise to do this work? Why is it not done?"

And how can we avoid the sad conclusion that the millions in London and throughout the country who lie so placidly in the arms of the wicked one remain



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dead because the people of God are not sufficiently alive? We read but the other day of a cyclone in India sweeping 215,000 persons in one night into eternity. But quite as remarkable as the story of death was the statement that the living instead of sitting down in distress, and wailing in anguish, had resumed their usual occupations with such cheerfulness and vigor that very little distress could be found in comparison with what might naturally have been anticipated from the sudden death of one-sixth of the population. The world has been deluged with the terrible cyclone of sin. Death and ruin are everywhere. But "the living"—alas! what are they about? How many of them live not unto themselves, but unto Him who gave Himself for them?

I.—MOST RELIGIOUS PEOPLE ARE CONSCIOUS OF A WANT OF LIFE.

How few of the Lord's people are in the possession of as much religious life today as they once enjoyed? Have not the dying embers of the old year brought to many reflections in some such strain as this?—

Oh, the blessed times we used to have in that little cottage! How happy we used to be together in you vestry! How we used to delight in all the services! How our faces used to beam and our hearts to beat when we just caught sight of one another passing along the street! What a feast we used to get from a few verses of Scripture devoured in a spare minute or two in those days! And how all our nature seemed to be lightened up as with a gleam from heaven when somebody asked us to do something for Christ! It was better than fifty presents that little commission, if it were only to be like a servant of the servants of our Lord's house!

We occupy a far more elevated position now. We are "established in the faith"; so satisfied that all our notions are correct that we never have to go to God or to His word and puzzle and bother as we used to do about things being right or wrong. we are "all right." And we have "a home" amongst the Lord's people. We have been members at —— for so many years now. We never even wonder whether we could be more useful to God anywhere else. We never "wander about" now (and think very little of anybody who does—"rolling stones gather no moss," you know). We used to get "sick of it" when we saw no souls saved for weeks, and meetings were dull, and used to walk any distance to meet with some life. But we have learnt better than that. We are always "in our



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place” (gathering moss, you see—just look how thick it is on us!). We are “settled” (on our lees).

“And our place” is much more important than ever it was. We preach, we lead meetings, we are looked up to by everybody. We attend any number of services both indoors and out. We are always “at our post.” But, after all, “it isn’t like it used to be.” The brightness, the spring, the delight, is gone out of it all. We used to be like children, running and jumping along with a merry laugh that everybody could hear, to do our Father’s will and to catch His smiles and halfpennies for doing it. We have “grown in grace,” become “matured in our experience,” “progressed in the Divine life,” till we are like servants who perhaps “get through” a very great deal of work, but who sigh rather than laugh over it, are content to “get through” our duty, assured that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (we feel very faint indeed most times). The fact is, we are “not so lively” as we used to be—that is to say, we have not so much life.

And as for the inner life—as for fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ—as for “the light of His countenance, brighter than noon”—as for the overpowering influence of His Spirit—well, we *used* to feel all these; but not now—at least, not much or often.

There are some, thank God! whose experience is far in advance of all this, but who still feel that they are far from having the sort of life they want and might have.

Many and many a time in 1876 they rose, as they thought, at any rate, to a height nearly if not quite equal to what they looked for. The sins that easily beset them seemed all left behind. The life they were panting for seemed, like some mountain-breeze, to come breathing into their inmost souls. The prospect was celestial. Oh, what a life they were going to live! They had some “blessed season.” Their hearts were full to overflowing—at least, tears *did* flow, and oh, what an outflow of love there was going to be! Perhaps they did find life almost as new as when they at first believed for a little while; but, alas! alas! they “got down again.” They had to mix with other people, who questioned and doubted, and did not believe this, that, or the other. They found in everyday life all the old trials, and temptations, and worries, and apparently ten times more besides. And then some brother or sister did or said something unkind, and all was over.



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The beautiful "life" was gone like a charming dream when daylight, and work, and facts came again; and they are even today pretty much where they have been for a very long time—"coming up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of their beloved," as they call it, but really, in plain English, "not out of the wood yet"—longing to have life abundantly, but only having it sufficiently to be always uncomfortable because they have no more.

In some cases it is a special difficulty, perfectly well understood and fully recognized, which keeps people out of the full salvation from all sin which they desire. Some idol, temper, "trouble at home" (this generally means husband or wife), weakness, the inevitable necessity of meeting somebody every now and then, or duty clearly seen, shrunk from, and called "a cross." When anything of this kind exists the sufferer is just like the patient suffering from some disease which can only be cured by means of an operation very painful or peculiar in its effects, who goes on bearing daily perhaps far more than the surgeon would inflict, for want of resolution enough to have the trouble effectually ended.

To such persons the advice of the great Physician is almost painfully simple and brief: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee." Alas! Master, how few of Thy servants are resolute enough for such self-surgery! How many dear good people's prayers, so far as their own experience is concerned, consist largely of the cry, "oh, my hand! Oh, my foot! Oh, my eye! Lord, save me from my eye!" He whose everlasting word—"Cut it off; pluck it out"—must remain unchanged, to tell us of our duty, will never do for any one what they must do for themselves.

Poor Lot vexed his righteous soul every day for years. It was fully his intention to be righteous—always righteous, perfectly righteous; but he could not make up his mind to part with that splendid pasture and the prospect of providing for his family. Oh, no, that would never do! Any amount of righteousness; but Sodom. Surely he must have had some blessed seasons on a Sunday when he left the wicked world for a while to get his spiritual strength renewed, or he could never have kept in the right way at all. Surely the Lord would not have dragged him out of destruction, and called him a "righteous man," if he had not often prayed to be saved and kept from sin, and declared he would rather suffer anything than give up his God. No doubt he fully consecrated himself and all he give up his God. No doubt he fully consecrated himself and all he had to God every



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now and then, and had a good time in doing so; but he gave up nothing in reality, and was barely saved by the skin of his teeth at the last minute. What a lot of Lots there are who will end pretty much in the same way, after having struggled and wrestled for many years for deliverance from the effects of their own unwillingness to yield themselves up, not in word, but in deed, to Him who had bought them with a price, and whom they so much love! Poor Lots!

What a contrast is presented by the conduct of Lot's uncle! We presume he was holding one of his conferences with God when he was told to leave his country and his father's house and go he knew not where. It is not easy to imagine his consenting to this without having a most delightful prayer-meeting in doing so; but as to that the Scriptures are silent. All we know is that he went, and that God went with him. Out came the eye; and Abraham saw as few people since then have seen. Whosoever desires to experience that entire salvation from sin which God's word puts before us, and to enjoy that fulness of life which those only can possess who have no element of death about them, must tread in the steps of Abraham. They must not merely express to God their *willingness* to make a full surrender upon the point, and every point of controversy or difficulty. *They must surrender.*

There are those who feel that their life is very faulty, but who cannot understand how it can ever be better. They always seem to be in a maze upon the whole question. They believe that they have really given their all to God. They live daily in His favor, and the blood of Christ cleanses them from all the sin they daily contract; but yet they feel they should like something more than this, if there be anything more. Their life is already so full of light and blessedness that it is not easy to convince them that the seeds of death still lie within the heart, and that there is in store for them a complete renovation and an increase of energy such as Divine power alone could produce. For such persons there is only one course. They cannot understand any human teaching on the subject. This is never any discredit to any one, and especially in a case where human teachers are so muddled and so contradictory. They "cannot see" that the Scriptures show any defect in their life or any better life attainable, and any one who attempts to show them a more excellent way is met with question after question, and objection after objection, without being able to lead them any further on. The only plan for them is to ask wisdom of Him who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and who alone, after all, is able to let any one know what is that



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acceptable and perfect will of God. If they ask so as to receive, their joy, and God's joy in them, shall be full.

CHRIST IS THE ONLY SATISFACTORY LIFE.

"For me to live is Christ." How simple! How grand! How many are there who can thoughtfully, deliberately, truthfully, say all that?

What does it mean? What can it mean short of what the Apostle elsewhere expresses thus: "I live, yet not I; but Christ liveth in me"? For me to live is for Christ to live over again in my flesh. The idea is common enough in connection with many earthly things. "This man is the very image of his father," they tell you, and go on to describe how he follows precisely in his father's footsteps, has his father's manner, tones, habits, tastes, and that, in short, the father seems to live over again in the son. You look at some photograph, and those who know the person or the spot it represents will tell you that it is "perfection"; that, in fact, it reproduces before you the original. And so they say sometimes of the word-pictures of some orator or scribe. All this is wonderfully like the testimony given to Paul's life: "For me to live is Christ." It was Paul, a perfectly distinct being, born not in Nazareth, but in Tarsus—Paul, who used to persecute Jesus of Nazareth; but Paul, spiritually slain and raised up so perfectly new that the only complete way to describe his new life was to say that it was just Christ over again.

And this nothing more than what God eternally designed to do for every believer in Jesus. Every one of them was "pre-destinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." This Jesus was not to be a solitary being, differing somewhat from His Father, differing especially in His possession of human nature, separated by a great gap from the angels, the central butt of all hell, and without any proper associate in the universe. Nothing of the kind! He was to be "the first-born of many brethren"—"first-born" with an infinite seniority, first by infinite degrees; but only *first*—not out of the series, not out of the family circle, not out of the same "line of things," or "line of business," if you like—only the first-born of "*brethren*." There was to be the same nature, the same freedom from sin, the same perfect harmony—union in fact, with the Father, the same ceaseless devotion even unto death, the same life, in short in every member of the family.

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“Oh, but,” it may be objected, “all this may ultimately be accomplished in us; but never while we are in the flesh.” This repudiation of God’s purpose of love has been all but universal among His children. In one form of words or another the rejection of the stupendous project of the “faithful Creator” comes from the lips of the learned and the ignorant alike again and again, in all times and places. “You may depend upon it,” says the doctor of the Gospel, with the profoundest sense of his authority for saying so, “that we can never be perfectly conformed to the will of God while we are in this world.” “I cannot see,” says the poor way-faring man, “how I can ever be without sin.”

(To be continued.)