

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

In 1872, a young George Scott Railton moved into the home of William and Catherine Booth, becoming a 'big brother' to the young Booth children. Being recently orphaned (and giving his brother a near nervous breakdown), Railton found spiritual parents in the Booths, who were able to bridle this young wild stallion - ready to win the world for Jesus - and channel that passion into practical, transformative ministry.

Here's a bit of his story:

Exasperation

On the verge of a nervous breakdown; weary Lancelot Railton escaped to a retreat center for Wesleyans who were in need of recovery from the strains of ministry. He needed to recover from his guardianship of his little brother, George. He was out of ideas on how to hold back George who was fueled with an untamable spirit that was the very definition of 'extreme.' He felt like a complete failure as he tried to figure out what to do with his crazy little brother.

As poor Lancelot sat in recovery, a 32 year old evangelist who was also exhausted from relentless ministry sat in the chair next to him. He was in need of extra help in his attempt to reach the masses of East London. A divine miracle was taking place as William Booth sat listening to Lancelot offload about *what in the world to do with George Scott Railton?* Booth's eyes must have sparkled at God's divine sense of humor as the soon-to-be General heard about his soon-to-be first Lieutenant.

The Wild Boy

This wild boy who needed no motivation to engage in mission was George Scott Railton. He was born on July 6th, 1849 in Arbroath, Scotland to Lancelot Sr. and Margaret Railton. He was named after his equally crazy uncle, Dr. George Scott – a pioneer Methodist missionary who founded the Bible and Temperance Societies in Sweden.

Mom and Dad had the 'extreme' bug themselves! In the midst of the battle for the abolition of slavery, both went to the front-lines of this mission field to serve in ministry, meeting in Antigua in the Caribbean. They fell in love, married and



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gave birth to Lancelot Jr. Due to illness, they returned to Scotland where George was born.

Wanting to inspire future generations to embrace the world-wide missionary spirit, Margaret would write for the Methodist church's version of *The Young Salvationist* – telling tales of missionary adventures to inspire kids just like George. By age 8, George would respond to this nurturing by organizing a Junior Missionary Society to inspire other kids to get interested and involved in global mission.

Around this time, his fighting spirit would cause him to fight against his brother, his parents and even God himself. He says, “I would not have God to rule over me; *nobody* was more resolved to go his own way – *the world's way* – than I was... I determined to live independently of God and reckoned I could do very well without Him.” During this time, he began to curse, blaspheme and also struggle with a violent temper – often physically beating up poor Lancelot, who was six years older than him!

When he was 10 years old, George grew sick and thought he was going to die! He knew he was going straight to Hell if this were to happen. While in bed, he eavesdropped on his mother talking to a friend about how to be saved. Taking note of the steps, George knelt down on February 19th, 1860 and asked Jesus to forgive him. He says,

“The joy of God made me for the moment completely free from headache and pains that had burdened me all day. *I marched 'round that little room singing and praising the Lord...* Hearing my mother at the front door I rushed to tell her the good news that I was born again.”

And from that moment, *he never stopped marching*. “Forward to the fight!” would be his new motto. His sinful, self-centered determination was transformed to a saved, Jesus-centered determination. Rather than fighting *against* God and his brother, he would fight *for* God and for the souls of all of humanity.

Once saved, George discovered that he had a God-given aptitude for learning. His parents sent him to Woodhouse Grove School that was opened by the great John Wesley. Under this strict training, he would become known as a



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"really praying boy" – daily engaging in prayer even while lying in his bed, waking very early while not being allowed to rise until 7 AM.

In his studies, Railton began to learn about the 'doctrine of sanctification' – which is about holiness. He realized that even though he was only 13 years old, he could experience holiness. This was not something only for adults, *but also for children*. On February 13th, 1863, George consecrated the fuel of his determination and was *set ablaze by the fire of the Holy Spirit!* Years later, this experience would form his promotion of the message of holiness,

"Holy living is divine living, that is all. Are you willing, this moment to give up your own living, that God may live in you, may dwell in you, and walk in you? He is willing."

The blood and fire Spirit became an inferno in Railton and would never again be quenched.

That fire would be tested one year later when his Mom and Dad sacrificed their lives to care for families who were dying of cholera. Contracting the disease and knowing the inevitable fatal outcome, they called Lancelot and George home to say their farewells. Just before their death on November 10th, 1864, their Dad's final word to them was, "Boys, there is a grand work for you to do, I believe." At 15, George would fall under the care of Lancelot – a mission that would lead Lancelot to the point of exasperation!

The Lone Ranger

Orphaned and destitute, George would leave school and join a shipping company in London. He learned management skills and quickly mastered speaking Spanish. Still being fueled with the red-hot, blood-and-fire Spirit, he was discontent with simply working in a mundane job and would seek to witness to the Spanish sailors he encountered in the shipping yard. He was frustrated with what he sensed was the lukewarm Christianity he encountered in the Methodist churches in London and wanted something more vibrant and real.



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Railton believed that,

“the life of the soul saver is the grandest, merriest, strangest life that can be lived on earth – the life of Jesus lived over again in us. It will cost you all, but it will be a good bargain at that.”

And so by age 19, he was ready to fulfill the ‘grand work’ of ministry and jumped onto a ship headed for Morocco to win Africa for Jesus.

It’s no surprise that his friends were wondering, ‘*Where in the world is George Scott Railton going???*’ They dismissed him as being ‘too young’, ‘too inexperienced’ and some even said that his decision was ‘contrary to the call of Christ’ – but his *forward to the fight* determination would not listen to these naysayers. He believed that,

“In our work, as in war, daring disobedience is sometimes the best faithfulness.”

Therefore, he left with a banner that said, “Repentance – Faith – Holiness”, but also left without plans for how to survive on the mission field! His impetuosity trumped his practical wisdom and before long he was met with some very real challenges – obstacles including no money for food, for lodging... and no plan on how to return, yet he refused to admit he was wrong and nearly starved to death!

Eventually, the British Consul, Sir John Drummond-Hay took pity on the young teenager - thinking he was utterly mad, and arranged to send him back on a merchant ship headed for London to be returned to his weary brother, Lancelot. Who would have known that less than ten years later after this insane, teenage (unexpectedly short-term) mission trip, George Scott Railton would be encouraging the 17 year old Eliza Shirley to begin her own unthinkable crusade for souls in America?!

On return to London, Lancelot tried to care for his brother, but again George’s determination led him to march out on a new mission for the Cornish mines. He would say years later, “How can you sit idly by knowing souls are doomed to die?” To his brother’s dismay, there was to be no idling for Railton! Even though most average people would think it absurd to do so, Railton set out to walk 150



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miles – without money and without a plan. Two-thirds of the way there, with shoes worn out and having to sell his coat for a little bit of food, he was completely destitute and had to be rescued yet again by his poor brother, Lancelot. And yet George was *still* determined to discover the ‘grand work’ the Lord had planned for him.

Railton would later reminisce on how the Lord was forming in him the core values that would shape the rest of his life:

“All this appeared to me to be trying, but was not sufficient to shake my faith in God’s purpose with regard to me. Only after three years was I to learn how that strange journey had won for me the opportunity of my life, and so had been well worth the while... How can I doubt that God arranged it all to preserve me the more fully to Himself, and to train me for after-service in His War?”

After the Cornish mines incident, Lancelot sent his young brother to an Uncle in northern England to work, but George used this opportunity to mentor a band of teenagers who would preach in open airs. Who would realize that he would end up mentoring several young people who would become key Salvation Army leaders? His mission was all-consuming and his methodology remained unconventional. Eventually, even his Uncle was trying to figure out: *What in the world should we do with George Scott Railton?*

The General and his Lieutenant

No wonder Lancelot sat with his head in his hand as he talked to William Booth in 1872. As he listened to the mad tales of the beginning of the East London Christian Mission, Lancelot began to realize that sitting next to him was possibly the only man in the world who was potentially crazier than his own brother! William Booth’s vision of how to reach the masses was not limited just to East London, he had a vision to see the *whole world* come under the salvation found in the blood of Jesus and the holiness found in the fire of the Holy Spirit. Lancelot couldn’t help but say, “I have a brother who I think would suit you. I must tell him about you.”

Lancelot immediately contacted his brother and connected him with some of Booth’s writings and reports on the Mission. In particular, Booth’s booklet, “How to Reach the Masses,” captured Railton’s attention. He was skeptical that these



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red-hot warriors were for real and so visited the mission in October, 1872. He realized that what he read was an understatement compared to what he actually witnessed. "I had found *at last comrades with whom I could march with all my heart, and without fear of their requiring me in any way to lag behind the Master or in anything betray His cause.*"

In March, 1873, George Scott Railton would become the right-hand man for William Booth. He also moved into the Booth home – becoming one of the family. Catherine and William would become his spiritual mother and father and help him to focus his passion and tenacity towards missional goals.

Frederick Booth-Tucker, who considered Railton a "modern-day George Fox," realized the uniqueness of this bond:

"Mr. and Mrs. Booth recognized and appreciated this untamed genius... They admired his reckless zeal, his single-eyed devotion to his Master's cause... And here was one of Nature's thoroughbreds, requiring neither whip nor spur... There were times, it is true, where the Army chariot was carried round awkward corners at a dangerous speed; when, in his haste for increased and increasing speed, Mr. Railton would have left it a useless wreck by the roadside and have gone on alone, rather than slacken the regulation pace, or pause for needed counsel and repairs. But the *'iron hand in the velvet glove'* which held the reins was there to avert the passing danger."

Potential Unleashed on the World

As Booth's secretary, Railton helped promote the Mission through writing and preaching. He would deal with significant conflicts, cast a vision for the wider world and even help facilitate the transition from the Christian Mission to The Salvation Army.

In 1880, Railton would finally be unleashed into the worldwide mission-field. He would start in America – where he would start in New York City and within a few short months end up in St. Louis! On being recalled to England to assist William Booth with the opposition from the Skeleton Army, Railton would plant a Salvation Army Corps in Nova Scotia, Canada while waiting for a ship to take him to London!

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Over the next 33 years, Commissioner George Scott Railton would circle the world over and over again preaching the gospel and planting the work of The Salvation Army. Over and over, he sneaks into the stories of the work of The Salvation Army in Sweden, France, The Netherlands, Italy, Russia, Turkey, Spain, India, China, Japan, South Africa and Germany. You would never know *where in the world was George Scott Railton*, but wherever it was it was clear that souls were getting saved, sanctified and soldierfied!

"No place on earth I own, no field, no house be mine; my self, my all, I still disown, My God, let all be thine. Into thy gracious hands my life is ever placed; to die fulfilling thy commands, I march with boundless haste."

Marching to Glory

George Scott Railton never stopped "marching to glory" until July 13th, 1913 when, after an exhausting whirlwind trip through France, Holland and Germany. Catching a train in Cologne, Germany he sat down "and was promoted from the infantry of earth to the cavalry of the skies." His final letter was to his wife, Marianne where he says, "I am having the ride of my life... *What will God do next?*"

Were George Scott Railton alive today, it would be easy to label him many things. Some might say he's hyperactive. Others might say he's weird and wild. He might even be labeled a rebel, an idealist, an eccentric, disorderly, impetuous, impossible and not suited for leadership. In exasperation we might throw our hands into the air and write off a young teenager who has the potential to change the world... or, like William and Catherine Booth – see the potential of today's wild stallions.

"The cry of thousands of precious souls going downward to destruction comes up with a mighty wail, which ought to pierce our hearts. *We cannot, we must not, we dare not, we will not* allow the work of God to stand still." - George Scott Railton