

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ABOUT SENSATIONALISM

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The first great fault of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, in the eyes of their learned observers—the damning sin of every earnest preacher since that period—sensationalism. “He stirreth up the people.” Oh! how very wicked! So universally has the hue and very been taken up against all who endeavor thoroughly arouse the insensible hearts and consciences of their hearers, and so violent has always been the abuse of all who pursue such a course, that now we have even professedly-Christian prints proclaiming, with glowing delight, the excellence of religious services in which there has been “no excitement.”

Which is right—the world and the worldly churches, which condemns and curses sensationalism, or those who use every method they can devise to stir up every fibre of human nature on the subject of religion? We have not a moment's hesitation in pronouncing for the latter, for

I.—SENSATIONALISM IS GOD'S METHOD.

The very first time we find God speaking to man about his soul, it is in a few short, words, warning him of *death* the day he should eat of the forbidden fruit. The awful effect of such a pronouncement from the lips of God Himself on those who had never seen the dread reality which has, alas! become so familiar to all men now, can hardly be imagined. Why was no gentle course of mild counsel administered to Adam and Eve? Why were their sensibilities shocked with so sudden and so horrible a declaration? *Because God chose even in the days of man's innocence the most sensational procedure possible for the benefit of his soul.*

Why was not Noah told to build a college, and to train preachers, who should go forth to call sinners to repentance “*without excitement*”? Why were he and his family set to work to build a great ark for their very lives, and to threaten



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every human being with destruction the moment it was built? Why, why, if not to thrill mankind for ever with the sensation of awe?

Why was Pharaoh raised up? Why was his heart hardened? Why was a series of the most terrible plagues poured forth upon his land and his people? Was it not for the professed purpose of making every nation tremble and quake before the God of Israel?

Why did the Lord, when He wished to attach a people for ever to Himself, come down amid thunder and lightning on Sinai, and make even the best of them all "exceedingly fear and quake"? What meant the doubled-courted tabernacle and temple, the daily exhibitions of fire and blood, the dark, silent holy of holies, and the tinkling bells of the high priest's robe? What meant the dead bodies of Nadab and Abihu, borne away, in an agony that dared not express itself, by their brethren? What, if not that *the only religion God cared about was one that continually moved the worshippers in the most sensational manner conceivable?*

"Oh, but all these are acts; and God's ways are so high above ours that they cannot be but sensational." Exactly; and those whose religious acts are not sensational are not, as were the priests of Israel, acting in God's way, but in their own.

But what sort of words did God put into the lips of the prophets? Let us just look for a few moments at Isaiah, that "sweet, mild" prophet of beauty and joy, for whom Christians profess such admiration. He begins—"Hear, oh, heavens, and give ear, oh, earth." Oh, that is dreadful! How does he speak to the Lord's own people?

"Hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure, and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it." Can there ever be a more sensational preacher? But after he has used such language, the Lord sends down an angel to lay a burning coal on his lips. Has he been too sensational, or is he to be still more so? Hear him—"The Lord will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand."

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"Oh, but all this is from the former half of the prophecy, not from the evangelical part of it." Very well, then, let us turn to the latter part, beginning "Comfort ye, my people."

"I will make thee a new, sharp threshing instrument having teeth; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff." But this very sensational comfort is comparatively mild.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" "Thou shalt see and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee; the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee." Not satisfied with anything yet attained, he gasps for grander sensation still.

"Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens, and come down, that the nations may tremble at thy presence."

The prophet was right. His words were blessed, we find at length, so that a band of people were raised up, who "trembled at the word of God." He concludes by telling these persons of the worm that shall not die, and the fire that shall not be quenched.

"Oh! but this is all from the Old Dispensation," it will be said. "This is all addressed to the rebellious, stiff-necked children of Israel, who could not be moved by anything less sensational."

What then of the "New" Dispensation? Did God change His method in sending forth His Spirit and dealing with the Gentiles? Why could not Jesus talk to those two men on the road to Emmaus without making their hearts burn? Why was not the Church *gradually* endued with power from on high? Why were miracles and tongues poured forth in a wild deluge of blessing all at once? Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead, instead of being left alive, like so many of their followers of to-day? Why was not Paul converted by the instrumentality of Nicodemus; and why was not Peter released from prison by means of court influence? Why did the Apostles use language so violent and so piercing that men were pricked to the heart, and that they frequently rushed like madmen at the speakers, determined to kill them? Why has the great work of converting the

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world been carried on over floods of persecution, and with mighty gales of Divine reviving grace; but that God has still chosen, as a newspaper writer once said of one of us not long ago, "to lead people to heaven in a sensational way." And no wonder that He has so chosen, for

II.—SENSATIONALISM IS THE ONLY RATIONAL METHOD

of dealing with the great realities of eternity.

Men are dead in sin, and none but fools should dream of awakening them without sensation. Millions of sinners have been appealed to for many a long year, and have become so callous and indifferent, that a very earthquake of sensation alone can suffice to arouse them. Millions more have never listened to God's voice at all, and know nothing whatever of the truth. To these the Gospel will appear just what it seems to be to us. If it seems to be to us "nothing extraordinary," they will never take any notice of it. If it stirs all our thoughts and feelings, and if from burning hearts we send forth words of fire, however they may be called "sensational," they will destroy sin.

How can any one be unsensational? Only by shutting his eyes to eternity. As one reads Isaiah, one feels as if he must have seen the desolation and the salvation of Israel with his own eyes before he could speak so. Inspired by God, he *did* see it far more clearly than fleshly eyes could have beheld it. And now the only men who speak like Isaiah are those who speak from a vivid consciousness of the heaven and hell in front of all their hearers. If these men and women to whom God sends us are going to be wrapped in the endless flames of dark damnation for ever and ever unless they believe what we are sent to tell them, how dare any of us speak otherwise than sensationally?

How can any one speak unsensationally? Only by shutting his eyes to the value of men. The power of one man, who shall reckon it? How many thousands—aye, millions—will ascribe their damnation or their salvation to what one man has done! There are men to-day blasting their character, their intellect, and their home in the public-house, who could hold any audience enchained as they told of the love of Jesus, if only they were turned from darkness to light. Who can look on such a man, and seek his salvation without sensation? And the only way to make the most of any man is to sensationalize him. Every man can be sensationalized; every man can be excited to the exertion of his uttermost



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strength and ability, and only those who know nothing of men's value would leave the great reservoir of energy and skill untapped.

The only sensible way of dealing with men's souls is that sensational one which God has always adopted; for all who do not follow in that good and right path, we would pray—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But this is not all, alas! for

III.—SENSATIONALISM IS THE ONLY TRUE AND SAVING METHOD

of dealing with souls.

The Bible—the one great record of truth—is, beyond doubt, the most sensational book in the existence. There is no feeling of the human soul which its contents do not call forth into fullest activity whenever they are understood.

Christ—the Truth, the Prince of Peace—was there ever a more sensational personage? Coming into the world in the most sensational manner possible, suddenly bursting upon the godless people with the Divine splendor of holiness and wisdom, crowding His public life with miracle and prophecy, assaulting with fury and satire the most cherished traditions of the people, overturning with irresistible words the teaching of every teacher, and proclaiming a revolution of life and worship in the presence of the very highest authorities of the land, raising with words of life and power the lowliest to the leadership of the people, and crushing in the very dust the greatest among men, darkening the heavens and shaking the earth while He rolled back the hellish tide of damnation and opened the gates of heaven as sensationally as He came from it—they must indeed know little of Jesus who would speak of Him unsensationally. No wonder that He should warn all such away from His service with the tremendous words—*"If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me."*

Can any one imagine a greater sensation than would be produced were the great and rich who profess to follow Jesus to be seen, cross on back, amidst the busy throng of the world? Did Christ not mean what He said? Did He not mean that His followers must act and speak in such a manner as would display their devotion unto death to His service? For any man to speak with the prospect of death before him for what he is saying, is for him to speak sensationally.



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How God has denounced those who go softly, who prophesy smooth things, and daub with untempered mortar the souls of their dying fellow-men! How He loathes, above all things, the lukewarm professor who has nothing about him to arouse any sensation but that of intense disgust.

A religion without sensation may be refined and beautiful, like statue Jesus in the most precious marble, but it is equally without life and power—*equally a sham*.

Religious teaching without sensation, and religious movements without excitement, may excel in morality and order, and in everything which men praise, but they are horribly wanting in the power of the Holy Ghost.

There were men in the days of holy Stephen who protested murderously against sensationalism connected with religion. They resisted the first sensational words he spoke to them; and when, from the comparatively small sensation of Gospel truth, he went on to the more overwhelming sensation of his own present vision of Christ, they gnashed upon him with their teeth, and stoned him with stones till he died.

Oh, for such sensational men of God as Stephen to-day! Oh, for such a sensational outpouring of the Holy Ghost as would overwhelm the world with wonder and amazement! Oh, that God may give us grace, in spite of the curse of the world and the frowns of pretended Christians, to go on getting people to heave, though it is in the most sensational manner, for Christ's sake! Amen.