

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ABOUT LIBERTY

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Perhaps no subject has more largely occupied the minds of men, no theme so deeply stirred them, no object been so desperately sought after by them, as *liberty*; and yet, strange to say, the vast majority of mankind have no proper idea of the meaning of liberty. Nay, they believe the extremest bondage to be the height of freedom, and this false notion of liberty in itself so enthralls them as to keep them back from the attainment of that liberty which is true and lasting.

“We never were in bondage to any man,” is the proud language of nation after nation, community after community, heart after heart, while all the time dark and cruel bondage covers the earth, and the poor captives boast their helpless way to deeper darkness for ever.

What is liberty? Does it consist in the absence of all constraint? Does it mean that my will shall operate without being in any way hindered or affected by any other will? All, this is the ordinary idea of liberty which possesses the human breast; but it is the most direct opposition to truth. Supposing such a state of existence possible to any created being, what end would be served by the possession of it? What should this solitary one, left all to himself, seek after, or what could he attain? He could not be a God; and what else could seek after? A being without an object would surely be of all beings most miserable. Ah! No; this would not be liberty; it would be wretchedness of the worst description. Man's highest glory, his most precious inheritance, is the possibility of climbing up to God, and of being made like Him. To be set free from every influence which can hinder his attainment of this heavenly height, that is the truest, the grandest, the fairest liberty. To be free to raise up far above all heights, above all powers and dominions above all creation, right up into partnership, communion with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Ah! that is liberty!

I.—THERE CAN ONLY BE LIBERTY BY LAW.



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Put a dozen men on board ship absolutely without arrangement or order; let every one be perfectly free from every one else; and what will be the result? Are you not placing every one of the twelve absolutely at the mercy of the other eleven? Nay, are not any five at the mercy of any seven? Who's to determine how they shall treat one another, or what any or all may or may not do? But suppose they do nothing whatever to one another, simply retaining entire independence, then will any of the twelve be able to carry out his wishes as to the course the ship shall take? He may indeed have strength enough alone to unloose all moorings, and to let the ship drift helplessly where the wind or the waves may carry her; but should he do so he must necessarily interfere with the life and prospects of the other eleven, as much as with his own, so that none of the men have liberty, because none of them are under any sort of law.

But suppose the men, having sufficient intelligence to see all this, elect one of their number to command all, and suppose him to choose others to act under his authority for the better government of the rest. Some may object to the arrangement, and may even leave the ship rather than submit to it; but upon those who remain you can now confer liberty. To some has been given liberty to command—to manage the rest, and while in doing so, you have taken away the unbounded liberty of the rest to do as they please, you give them now liberty from every anxiety and responsibility while simply performing the task assigned to each one. They are now perfectly free, not to do as they please, but as their officers please, and should any one attempt to prevent them performing their duty, they can look to the officers to defend them from such an attempt. All can be free, because all are under law. The officers no more possess absolute liberty than the men, for in accepting their position they have taken in hand duties and responsibilities which they must either deal with properly or be blamed for nonfulfillment of hereafter, so that the liberty conferred upon all by the establishment of law is equal—all are free only to do their duty.

Just so in the spiritual world. A soul not subject to God is the playing of the devil; utterly without freedom, it can neither rise to that which is good, nor prevent itself from falling into that which is evil. It is in fact a captive, and must always remain so until law comes in to make some demand which may set it free. Now bring in the commands of the Almighty; require that soul to separate from evil and to do good, and you at once create a thought of freedom which had no

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existence before; you have in fact set the mind free already from the darkness in which it was buried; and should the men determine to act upon the advice thus given, the fight for liberty will at once begin. Now that same voice directs the battle, showing the road from darkness to light, and the soul acting in obedience to command after command, repents, believers, follows, until it is set free. Thus every step to freedom is a step of obedience, and in order to perfect liberty there is no other system.

A sinner pardoned, but yet hampered by weights, troubled with besetting sins; how is he to become perfectly free? Certainly not by saying, "Oh, I am free from all law! I can never come under condemnation now." This is to be content with bondage so far as it still exists; nay, more, to be the advocate of bondage. If, on the other hand, the poor troubled one hearing the command to "crucify the old man with the affections and lusts," in reliance on Christ, resolves to obey, and seeing that there is power in Christ to enable him to fulfill the righteousness of the law, does so, the last remnants of slavery will soon be gone, and he will rejoice in the perfect liberty of the children of God. To be free, it is to bear the yoke of Christ, it is to be the clay in the potter's hand, moulded and fashioned in every particle to his liking.

And just so with liberty of societies. You sometimes meet with men, whose boast it is that they are perfectly free from every human yoke. They have no connection with anybody; they look with horror upon all combinations of Christian men. All these, according to them, are wrong, and the Divine plan is for every man to follow the Lord singly. The result is, that no society is at liberty to count upon their help; while in every direction the cry for workmen in the vineyard loudly rises, they stand aloof, and the few may continue to struggle on while they maintain their righteous independence; and thus, those who labor are prevented from doing all they wish for want of the help of those who might assist them. On the other hand, those who hold aloof from all organizations lose the privileges and benefits of all such unions. They have not liberty fully to enter into any.

On the other hand, those who combine gain liberty of action in the Master's work, just in proportion as they surrender their individual freedom to act without consulting others. The freedom with which a man can use his body depends upon the amount of control he may have over every part of it. If one tooth



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aches, or one finger be cut, or one nerve be strained, the whole body is affected and rendered less capable of healthy action; but if every part of the body be perfectly well, it becomes to him comparatively easy to do anything he wishes to do, because he can use each member of his body to do its part.

Just so, any company of the Lord's people gain power by the submission of each one to the general will, and lose in every case where one insists upon having his own way. Healthy, strong co-operation can only be possible to brethren, who in honor prefer one another, and submit themselves one to another with a hearty goodwill. A band of people, each one of whom does as he likes, is a rope of sand.

II.—LIBERTY IS VERY PRECIOUS.

Liberty is in itself a great blessing. We have no need to enter the prison corridor and hear the clink of bolt and chain; no need to cross the seas and look at the poor jaded dying slave, to learn how precious freedom is. To feel how great a gift true liberty is, we have only to look back, it may be a little while in our own experience, to the time when evil thoughts companions, words, habits crowded us on in a mad, wretched rush to ruin, and to remember the pangs we felt when the consciousness of our sin came upon us with all the weight of eternity, and we felt as if the very power of God Himself could never set us free.

Praise God for the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free! As our glad hearts rise and, shaking off the long, weary dream of night, look up to the clear light of heaven now shining upon us, and as we mount by faith to the very throne we shall sit upon, can we help joining in the very song we shall soon sing for ever there of glory to our God and to the Lamb? As we wander gaily through the world, they may well stare at us. We ought to be strange beings to all the rest, for while they, with their facie liberty, are running on the in madness and chains, we are the freed men whom this world is not large enough to hold—the Israel of the Lord.

But liberty is more especially precious, because it so multiplies every other blessing. Europeans have often laughed over the great Chinese guns which were found some years ago so securely fixed in the forts they were meant to defend, that they could only be of use against an enemy who would be good



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enough to station himself directly in front of them. The same guns mounted so as to be freely worked by turning every way, might have done terrible mischief.

Satan knows the greatness of human nature, but can afford to laugh at it while bound in fetters of sin. Free from the yoke of bondage, however, every power and faculty of man's being becomes mighty to destroy evil and do good; the nature feeble to helplessness becomes glorious in its power.

In times of panic one often hears of capital "locked up." The pounds, shillings, and pence, which have been invested in land, buildings, or machinery, or other unsalable property, were of the same value as any other cash; but money not at liberty for use in any direction is money utterly worthless in an emergency. Is it not too true of an immense amount of the Lord's professed property here below, that it is so locked up, so mingled with the affairs of the world, as to be practically useless to the Master who stands in such urgent need of it amidst the extreme difficulties of the great war?

People often talk about laying their all upon the altar; but it is to be feared that a great deal of the time, talent, and possessions, laid upon God's altar, are all the time held by a little string, just as the performing monkeys one sometimes sees in the streets, and the moment there seems any likelihood of the Lord's really taking the gift offered, it is jerked back. There is the appearance, but only the appearance, of true liberty, for earthly desires and tastes still have a secret hold on the heart.

To our only rightful owner we are only valuable in proportion as we are free from every influence other than His own. We have heard of scoundrels who make a lawless living by systematically selling and re-selling dogs, which are trained to run back to the old kennel at the first chance; and yet is not this what the devil is training thousands, if not millions, of professing Christians to? They answer on Sundays and at prayer-time to the call of God, but run back to the world as soon after as possible, and are all but worthless to Christ, because they are to so slight an extent free from the world.

And if the want of liberty so mars the Lord's interest in us, how much do we lose ourselves? There are many to whom time is rather a nuisance than otherwise: they do not know what to do with themselves—the fact is, they are not truly free.



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They appear to be entirely unbound. They are, in truth, held back by hellish influences from yielding themselves up servants to the King of Kings. Once truly His, the King's business requires haste; hours and moments cease to be troublesome, and become of priceless value. A lifetime seems miserably small to do His work, and even Eternity, as finite eyes try to scan it, seems all too little for the mighty gratitude of the free.

We have laughed over the story of the negro slave who took off his hat in a shower of rain to preserve it, gravely remarking that it was his own, while his head belonged to his master; and yet the principle which he so strangely applied was sensible enough. Fathers, mothers, wives, children, lands, possessions, are all mean and contemptible indeed in the eyes of a true-born sons of the Great King, as long as they are not His; but once set free for His pleasure, they acquire a thousand times their original value.

The wealth and resources of France have been enormous for many years past, but their value in the eyes of Frenchmen, as well as in the view of the whole world, rose immensely when the war indemnity was paid off, and the foreign legions marched away. Even so shall we be able to rejoice in all the talents, gifts, graces, and privileges God gives us, just in proportion as we are free from every earthly aim and influence, devoted and subjected to our Father in heaven.

The Word of God, sealed to a mind enchained by false teaching, becomes a mine of gold to him who reads it free from every prejudice. The Lord's day—a weary idleness to one who is bound to the world—becomes a longed for delight to the servant of the Lord. Yea, heaven itself will only be of value in proportion to the use made of time in the interests of the kingdom.

The liberty of the sons of God is ours; it is necessary; it is inexpressibly precious. We must have it—must proclaim it, and spread it through the world. The more we value it, the more are we bound by every holy tie to seek to liberate our fellows. May God help us, not merely to be faithful to our glorious birthright, but to labor night and day to extend its glorious benefits everywhere! Amen.