

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ABOUT DESERTERS

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We live in a world almost entirely peopled with deserters; and, in fact, desertion—the worst desertion—the desertion of all that is best and truest and noblest, is so common, that it has even become honorable to be a deserter. Honorable indeed amongst the ranks of dishonor and sin to-day; but alas for the reputation of the honorable deserters of to-day when the great and terrible day of light and truth and wrath shall come!

Amongst the many varieties of deserters we may observe, however, those whose desertion is not so complete in its wrongfulness, or so ruinous in its nature, as that of the main body, although the amount of harm done by the deserters amongst the Lord's own people eternity only can reveal. Sad indeed the thought that from the ranks of Christ's own soldiers desertions, total or partial, should so frequently take place; and that, in the great work of the world's salvation, it should seem so supremely difficult to organize and maintain regular, disciplined forces. But we suppose it always has been so; at any rate, it is so now.

THERE ARE DESERTERS FROM PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS.

Who can look through the many placards displayed in the London police-stations, referring to men who have deserted their families, without an intense feeling of repugnance to the individuals referred to? The parish authorities may be supposed to care for nothing but the financial effect of such desertions; but to the ordinary public, surely the first thought and feeling in such cases must be, that here are men who have no natural affection left.

And the ties existing between individual members of religious societies must be of anything but a true Divine-family character, or they could not be so often and so lightly broken. Then Christianity whose professors care so little about one another that they can part company at any time without any grave reason, or

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any painful regret, is certainly a very different thing from the Christianity whose professors were distinguished by their love for one another.

And how very unworthy are the causes for which the Lord's people frequently separates from one other! We are all ready to laugh at the child who takes the pet, and "won't play," because some little thing is done by a companion which is not agreeable; and yet how many Christians every year leave their church, or break off intercourse with some fellow-laborers, because someone does not bow to them, or because of some equally insignificant offense!

There are many *self-willed* deserters too. These all have, or imagine they have, a peculiar faculty for management or leadership. They must be the head, or they will be nothing, and the moment their opinion or wish is overruled, off they go to benefit some other people with their under-estimated talents.

And then there are a host of proud deserters. Once they were quite content to associate with the poorest, humblest laborers in the vineyard; but they have got on in the world, and now, their health, or the claims of their family, or some more remote circumstance, is found to demand their separation from the people they once loved so well, and they move off to some community more respectable.

On the other hand there are many *cowardly* deserters, especially in the early days of any movement that aims high. England has been highly amused at the story of the wild flight of the Fantees the moment they imagined an Ashanti to be in sight. But, alas! There are multitudes of Christian Fantees. If there were no mighty spiritual foes to face, no hard battles to be fought, in order to win souls for Christ, the army of the Lord would soon swell to enormous dimensions; but, as day after day of conflict comes, and as march after march, and watch after watch passes wearily along, and still the war continues, and still our enemies are powerful, and they are strong, and still manifestly hate us with cruel hatred, one after another comes to the conclusion that victory is impossible, or, at any rate, that a larger organization, a stronger battalion, than they are engaged in, can alone hope for success. Shall we never see a Christian "Black Watch," a body of men determined to stand or fall together under all circumstances? These are the only sort of men who win victories. The largest organization mainly composed of men who dare not act alone, or with only a few comrades, would be incapable of fighting. It might look big, and make grand displays, but for



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practical purposes it would be worthless. But if desertion from persons and organizations is common,

DESERTION FROM PRINCIPLES

is carried on wholesale. Masses of men are found ready to embrace and to hail principles they do not understand, or which they have never thought out, and the moment it becomes necessary for these principles to be acted upon,

SHALLOW DESERTERS

fly off in all directions. In fact there are immense bodies of Christian people organized and existing professedly for the maintenance and propagation of principles which have passed away, with those who propounded them, into darkness, and all but oblivion. Let us understand and make up our minds as to the great truths which are most important to ourselves, and to the world; let us be fully persuaded in our own minds as to the principles upon which we are called to act, and then we shall be prepared for the sacrifices and endurances which the maintenance of right principles always involves. It is not sufficient for us to perform acts of service to God, and to our fellow-men, we must know why these things are to be done if we are to persist in doing them in spite of hindrances and difficulties. Perhaps nothing is more remarkable in the Mosaic law than the constant explanations of the reasons why God should be obeyed. It was intended that every child in Israel should serve God with his understanding as well as his heart. Those who merely accept a principle because of some supposed obligation to accept it, or because others accept it, are not likely to stand against the current of popular opinion, which almost invariably flows in the wrong direction. But there are those who desert principles they thoroughly approve. There are

WEARY DESERTERS.

It seems so hopeless to convince the world that it is wrong; it seems so hard a struggle to keep up the high standard which conscience demands and approves, while the world protests against it, and the great mass of the Lord's professed people have deserted it. Many a one who, in the days of his first love and zeal, received the simple teachings of the Gospel, and was ready to shout



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defiance at the world with all its fashions and its customs, gradually sinks down to the level of those who have given up what has seemed to them a vain attempt to be separate from the ungodly. How many individuals and organizations who started well, and were determined to act faithfully to the noble principles of the Gospel, become reconciled to the ordinary routine of church-life as it existed before they began to be. To maintain true and right principles have always been, and will always be, a wearisome, laborious task. It will always be easy to surrender principles at the bidding of our own ease, or our own interests; but alas for us, and alas for others whom we might influence, if we thus grow weary of being true and honest!

Do not let us be discouraged if we find but few willing to accept our principles; nay, do not let us add to the number of deserters, however great that number may become. Do not let us be discouraged because we discover that many who were supposed to be thoroughly in love with our principles prove to have no real comprehension of what they imply. Above all, do not let us be discouraged because we cannot convince everyone at once that our principles are right. To make the body of professing Christians see the necessity for complete separation from the world, and for determined, unhesitating efforts to save souls, is not the work of months or years; lifetimes have been well spent in this worthy cause, and many more are necessary before the Church of God will awake to its duties and its privileges. If we have made up our minds to a life-work, let us not faint because less than a life fails to secure our object. If it seems hard to say, "I will live and die for a *thorough Christianity*," let us say, "I will live another ten years for it, and then see the result."

The more Divine, the more heavenly the principles we advocate, the more supernatural, the more eternal the power, the endurance, the faith, and the hope necessary to sustain us in the work.

But let us on no account be numbered with the idle, the selfish

DESERTERS FROM DUTY.

There are many who really believe in our principles, and love as well as admire them, but who leave to others to burden of the strife. There are men and women in our uniform, under our colors, who are always ready to shout in the



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hour of victory, but who are always on the sick-list, or called away on urgent private affairs, or out of ammunition, when the moment comes for them to do something.

If it be true that our God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, if it be true that we are called to be a peculiar people, let us come out before the world, and with our feet upon its pride, its follies, and its fancies, let us march forward under its sneers and downs alike unmoved. What if a host of deserters, who ought to be with us, half join in the sneer of our foes! Let us send back the innocent, joyous laugh of the brave and the true, and follow our Jesus before them all.

If it be true that men and women who do not believe in Jesus go to hell; if it be true that the Lord has called us to warn our fellow-men, and to lead them to our Savior; if it be true that the eternity of many is dependent upon our efforts, let us lay aside every weight, every doubt, and every fear; let us deny ourselves more and more, as we may have opportunity; let us forget ourselves; let us spend and be spent in this great and holy toil.

There is One who never deserts, who never leaves, who never forsakes, those who trust in Him. He has called this Mission into being. He has contrived, adapted, applied, and blessed the means it uses to the ingathering and salvation of multitudes; He has never suffered it to be overcome even in its severest times of straitness and trial. God is in and with the Mission; for it is no mere sect, but a holy organization for a holy purpose. To that purpose, and to that organization, let us cleave as we cling to our God, and in that day when deserters blush, we shall shout the praises of Him who has called us to glory and to Christian manliness.