

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

ABOUT STOCK-TAKING

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How little we know about anything or anybody! This reflection must come home to us ever and anon amid the varying scenes of life, as some new thing starts up around us—some new thing which has always been, but which we never noticed before! If, however, we are ignorant of that which we ought to know, we must be to blame, and, whatever consequences may ensue, we must bear the responsibility.

We ought to know whether we are or are not becoming richer in true wealth. We ought to know whether we have or have not that which is requisite for the successful prosecution of the business of life. We ought to know whether we are or are not being defrauded of that which is committed to our charge. We ought to know what and what manner of men are placed under our care, and in what condition they are. We ought to know our own defects, and those existing in others with whom we are intimately associated. And all this we ought to know from time to time, so that we may be able correctly to reckon the results of periods of labor.

I.—WE CANNOT KNOW OUR STOCK WITHOUT TAKING IT.

It is very common for men to be entirely in the dark even about themselves in the most important particulars. It is so easy to go on in the ceaseless rush of business and pleasure, without any serious thought about the life that ought to be within us, that, until men are startled and aroused on this subject, they rarely deal with it practically at all. Even when truly converted to God, how often people sink down into a sort of reverie, in which the old, old story of Salvation, and the sweet strains of a home by-and-by are alone appreciated, and their present state and duty are forgotten.

And as to others, how few people are there who would not be startled by the information that there are some heirs of damnation around their hearth, in their



50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

kitchen, their office, their workshop! In London, one is often told there are “no neighbors.” Nobody knows anyone else.

Even in the Church of God, is it not the fashion to know as little as possible of one another? How many professing Christians know anything definitely as to the spiritual life, the character, the difficulties of any others? How many pastors even have any special acquaintance with the inner life of any of their flock? This is little to be wondered at amidst those who are never quite certain even as to their own soul's true state; but that it should be the case where the truth of a known salvation has been preached and received, is simply shameful.

And in spite of the hackneyed expressions so incessantly in use as to the spread of the Gospel, and so forth, how many religious communities know anything positive and certain as to the work done by them, and the fruit of their labor during the past?

To call attention to defects is generally to be put down at once as a “croaker,” and it is only by a very long and weary process that any defect can, as a rule, be demonstrated to those whom it most concerns. How often a terrible evil is allowed to exist, and every attempt to expose it put down, until the very discovery of it must needs produce a revolution!

To how large an extent are men and women little superior to cattle in their own computation or that of others! A man—his origin, his composition, his powers and capabilities, his past, his present, his future! How vast a subject for himself, or for any one else! And yet, how few have ever attempted even this amount of stock-taking!

Ten, twenty, a hundred converted men combined—what they are, what they should be, what they might do. Who has ever sat down to such a reckoning? Are not converts generally put down as items, without being considered in their several individual existences at all? As to making the most of each one, the very idea of such a thing would be startling addition to the thoughts of many.

Here is a convert who has just been gathered into the fold. Take his name and address. How old is he? Ah, he has only lived so many years—he is “only a child!” That is enough! Pray very earnestly that he may be kept faithful, as

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

though it were the most unlikely of all things in the world. And pass on, without stopping to look at him, to find out what he knows; what he can do to help you; what his family is; or the character of his workmates or schoolmates, as the case may be. Count one.

Another. Poor woman! She seems to be truly in earnest, and we shall be very glad to see her at the services. Should her first zeal survive until she sees her way to some useful form of labor, or to ask for something of the sort, perhaps she may become a great blessing to many. If not, she may remain burdened and persecuted; perhaps at home, struggling to do good there, and coming from time to time to meetings in which she finds refreshment; but growing little in her own soul-life, and all but shout out of the Great Master's work, because nobody take the trouble to find out what her peculiar character and ability may be. What matter if we count one more?

And even this man: he does not appear particularly powerful or clever. We are very glad of him, dear fellow, of course; but as to finding out more of his mind and heart, as to encouraging him to attempt what at first sight may seem beyond his power, who thinks of it? He is one more, and that is all.

On the other hand:"What a dreadful reproach Mr. So-and-so has caused!" And all because nobody ever took the trouble to examine him carefully, to find out his mind and his heart, to read the history of his inner as well as his outer life. Perhaps, even when he began to unbosom himself to some brother in the faith at an unusually friendly moment, he was snubbed, or the conversation was left off unfinished, and almost forgotten. If he had only been known—understood, fairly estimated at the proper time, his defects might have been remedied, and a terrible misery averted. But no; he was one, and that was enough! He was clever; he was a good speaker, perhaps; he was quite an acquisition; and so no one ever thought it worth while to find out what he was not.

How can we know what the men and women around us are without taking any means to find out? Nay, how can we know what we ourselves have been, are, might be, ought to be, without some serious attempt to find out? Then the attempt ought to be made, and it would be made were the children of light as wise in their generation as the children of darkness.

50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

See how the crowds gather together to observe the launch of a new ironclad! Look at the columns in all the newspaper describing all her build, her guns, her fittings, her appearance. True, she may rot, or become utterly unserviceable before there is any serious occasion for her existence. True, a single torpedo may some day send her to the bottom of the sea; but, then, she forms part of our naval armament, and she must be taken stock of. A great big dead thing! And a living soul comes into the service of the King of kings—a living soul, against whom no weapon formed can prosper! A living soul that might carry terror and destruction to the very gates of hell, and extend the kingdom of Christ far and wide; and we say, “thank God for one more,” and take little or no further notice of him, unless he compels us to do so by further action on his part. This should not be. It must not be if we are to be greatly and widely successful.

II.—THE VALUE OF STOCK-TAKING MUST BE JUST IN PROPORTION TO THE AMOUNT OF PAINS OF TAKEN TO BE ACCURATE.

In all labor there is profit, and the amount of profit gained must always depend upon the amount of labor spent. There is a very ready and, of course, a very useless way of taking stock. Many folks are content with rows of figures. What the figures represent is a matter of supreme indifference to them. But a proper and satisfactory stock-taking must include an examination of everything in detail.

To begin with ourselves. It is very well to know that our names are written in heaven, and that we are numbered amongst the heirs of Salvation here—but are we living like the children of a king and the soldiers of an eternal empire? As one looks at the militiamen strolling along the streets, pipe in mouth, either in their uniform or in their own more miserable clothing, one cannot help feeling as though the country were disgraced by their appearance. What do the angels think, we wonder, as they see “Christians” lounging about the world, in the tatters of fashion, prattling the talk of worldlings, scraping up gold and silver like all the rest, mixing with the giddy throng who are hurrying on to hell, and yet all the while the giddy throng who are hurrying on to hell, and yet all the while professing allegiance to God, and “enjoying” their Sabbaths, their religious services, and their heavenly prospect? We are God’s, it may be; but of what use are we to Him? Has our love become cold, are our hearts far from him, our minds filled with other thoughts, and our lives with self-seeking? Or are we rendering to God the things that are God’s, that is to say, our all, continually?



50 Articles of War

GEORGE SCOTT RAILTON

We are God's; but what is our condition in His sight? Are we divided, or entirely His? Are we defiled within and without with sin, or clean in His eyesight? Are we stooping towards the world, or are we upright before Him? Are we lifted up in haughty self-sufficiency, or are we walking humbly with our God? Are our souls in darkness, severed from the light of heaven, gloomy and sad because we have grieved our Father, or are they beaming with the radiance of His glory, who filleth all in all, walking through day and night, as seeing Him who is invisible?

We have been converted; but what else have we experienced since? Can we see weak places now made strong; great staring defects taken away, new, bright gems of heaven fitted into our hearts? Have we passed out of the sweet, gladsome but fearful dependence of our babyhood into the manly confidence of God's grown-up sons and daughters? Are we children or men in Christ Jesus? Are we today joyous and determined; tomorrow doubtful, wavering, trembling, hesitating, if not giving way? Or are we grounded and settled in love, that is to say, in God?

We are not to examine ourselves by any test of our own, or by any test which others may set up. The manufacturer must himself determine how his goods shall be classed and described. The Author and Finisher of our faith alone can declare the quality of that which He has produced, of that which we have allowed and aided Him to form in us. Does God look upon us with greater pleasure and satisfaction now than He did this time last year, last month, last week? If not, we must have been obstructing and preventing His perfect work in us. It is for the husbandman only to say whether his plants are growing as fast and as well as he wishes. Are we growing in grace as rapidly in every respect as God desires? If not, let us get rid of the worm, the mildew, the cramping influence, whatsoever it be, that is hindering the accomplishment of our Savior's purpose in us.

And as to others. Let us no longer be content hastily to glance over lists of names or rows of faces. These men and women, our brothers and sisters, in what condition are they? Are they full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, or are they comparatively empty and weak? Are they half-hearted, or devoted to God? Are they longing for work and souls, or are they idly resting by the way?



50 Articles of War

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"By their fruits ye shall know them." Let us not be led away by delightful "experiences," or moving expressions; but let us try to search into facts. Let us not merely examine men's public characteristics, and judge of them by speeches, and prayers, and labors for souls; but let us try and get behind the scenes more. Let us find out more about the home-life of those whose souls are especially committed to our care. Let us inquire how men behave to wives and children, master and workmates, neighbors and acquaintance.

Honest men have nothing to fear in stock-taking, and the more careful the scrutiny, the more delightful the result. Let us know more of one another. We shall find our joys multiplied abundantly as we improve our acquaintance with members of the household of faith. Each new fact brought to light will knit our souls more and more closely together, and increase our power to help one another. In heaven we are to know, even as we are known. The nearer heaven, in this respect, we can get here, the better for ourselves and the world. And if we find out evils, how glad we ought to be to have the chance of putting them away from us!

We are hastening on to the great stock-taking of the world, when God shall number up his jewels, and when everything shall be brought to light. Oh, let not that day find us unawares; but let us know all we can and ought to know about the real state of things before hand, so that we may be prepared in that day of light, not for shame and confusion, but to give an account with joy, and not with grief. God help us! Amen!