

A New Year's Wish

By Rev. S. G. Bland, D.D.

In the very midst of winter comes the summer of the heart. It is at Christmas time and the New Year, when winter's winds are keenest, that hearts grow mellow and the pleasant breezes of good will blow and the sunshine of kindness is warmest and brightest. The natural good will of the human heart, often repressed or chilled, breaks out in the universal greeting. We wish one another a happy New Year.

Perhaps we might abbreviate the greeting and be content to wish for others and to seek for ourselves simply a new year. Well if it be also happy but better, perhaps, that it be a new year than that it be a happy but old one.

In almost any sense of the word it is a gain that the year should be a new one. There is, perhaps, only one exception. The new year might unhappily be new in moral weakness and failure. But even in such case it would be only in appearance that it was new. Such melancholy changes are scarcely changes. They are merely revelations, the fungus growth outside the tree that tells of the decay within; the breaking out into overt action of impulses nourished in secret. "No one," observed the old Roman moralist, "becomes very bad all at once." So a year that might seem new in moral decline would after all be really and peculiarly an old year.

And, perhaps, in every other sense we may wisely wish for others and ourselves a new year, or if that unlimited wish be too heroic, all can at least meet hopefully and courageously whatever hardest and most painful of new experiences may be ordered and in many ways we may even seek earnestly to make the year a new one. Let us, at least, make sure of some new ideas.

Some one has bidden us reverence the grey-headed truths, but it is also to be borne in mind that old truths, like old bread, may grow stale. A steady diet of old truths makes the mind torpid, and the spirit cannot be alert and vigorous when the mind is half-asleep.

By a judicious selection of newspapers and periodicals, by some new books and some of the unquestionably and inexhaustibly great old ones, especially that venerated library which always seems to transcend whatever wisdom the world out of its hard struggle wins, we may make the coming year in a very deep and vital sense a new one.

Most people who start life in a small way hope to end in a large, and would count life a failure if they ended it in the poor little house in which their childhood was passed or in which they first started for themselves. Such an end might, or might not, be a sad thing, but it is infinitely sadder to end life in the same narrow habitation of thought in which we began. Larger and more costly houses may not be for us all, but all of us may year by year move into nobler and more spacious conceptions of life and God and our duty and the divinely ordered unfolding of things and the splendid possibilities of our humanity pressing on, however blindly and stumblingly, to an unknown but glorious goal.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, noting how the nautilus builds its spiral shell of chambers, each larger than the last, finds a parable:

"Build thee more stately mansions,
O my soul;
As the swift seasons roll,
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's
unresting sea."

It is indeed hardly a matter of choice with Canadians, as with nearly all the rest of the world, whether 1918 shall be a new year or not. The old habitations of human thought, political, social,

religious, are tottering and tumbling everywhere. All must build new ones or be homeless. Especially for Canadians does the election of 1917 definitely and deeply mark the beginning of a new era. Old prejudices, old limitations, must be laid aside or we shall be strangers and foreigners in the new Canada that is here.

Even more deeply than by new ideas is life renewed by new forms of service and self-sacrifice. None grow old so quickly as those absorbed in themselves. None find life so monotonous as those always looking after Number One. The most wearisome and unendurable prospect we could face, a prospect that would soon drive us into imbecility, would be a looking-glass. Lord Byron was not wholly an egotist, but throughout much of his strangely mingled career the ego had far too large a place in his cosmos, and it was the egotism which spoke when he confessed he had no conception of any kind of life which duration would not make tiresome.

Life is kept fresh and sweet by self-sacrifice for things felt to be worth while. When our daily tasks grow easy it is time to see if there are not more exacting duties calling us. There is a lurking danger in all habits, even in the good ones. When any good thing has become a habit it is no longer good enough. Life will always be setting for us, if we do not dodge them, tasks that call for a bolder faith, a more resolute purpose, a more self-forgetful love. We must welcome into our lives fresh forms of sympathy and service as we let into our houses in winter fresh air. Deeper than the renewal of thought and the renewal of action is the renewal of feeling.

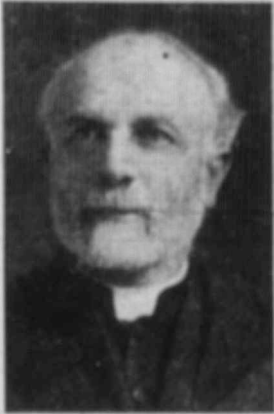
Nothing renews life so marvelously as a new affection or a deepening of an old. Let us be on the watch for new friendships, new devotions, new enthusiasms. If these cannot always be found there is always possible the effort to do fuller justice to the old and the familiar. Let us look into the faces of our best-known friends with new eyes. Let us seek to explore more fully their goodness, their grace, their worthiness, perhaps sometimes their need and the paths of their hurt or hampered lives. Is there anything that so blinds us as familiarity? In every tiniest village, in every home, there are new and lovely possibilities of fellowship as yet unrealized.

Central and vital in all forms of renewal is the opening of the heart more fully to God. God is the Eternal Surprise, the Inexhaustibly Unexpected. He must hate monotony and uniformity for there is none of these in His universe. The soul can never be fossilized that gives free play to the ever-quickening, ever-renewing Spirit of God.

MUSIC IN THE HOME

If every person in America and Canada could play some instrument or sing, how national character would be softened, our ideals strengthened and life as a whole brightened. It is not enough to hear somebody else play or sing, but to do a little one's self that emphasizes the beauty and value of music. Yet our children in the schools are taught a lengthy program of things for "brain development"—subjects many of which they quickly forget in later years, whereas their brains could be trained to be alert and "developed" just as easily through the study of music, which at the same time would be an art for constant companionship throughout life. There are signs that this fact is already being recognized in many places. Not only do nearly all progressive cities have provision for instruction in singing in the public schools, but school orchestras are increasing in number and excellence. All this is as it should be, and to extend the good work into more remote or less progressive communities is both the task and privilege of the earnest music teacher.

—George Hahn.



Dr. SALEM BLAND

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