EDITORIAL

A RULE OF LIFE

By George H. Malone.

Although every day is a new beginning, and so far as our personal experience is concerned a "new year" may start any time, there is something about the ending of December and the first week or so of January that makes even the careless thoughtful. The passing year has brought both joy and sorrow —what may not the next have in store? Where shall we be when the New Year bells fall on our ears again? Who will be with us? Shall we be ill or well? Disquieting questions that disturb our ease and make us inclined to fear.

We have blundered sorely, it may be, in the old year; some of its pages are blurred with regret, or the sombre stains of remorse. And no matter what happiness may have been ours, there is always something we did or left undone which saddens us as we remember. Shall we make the same blotted record? Our hearts grow chill, and we turn away, disheartened on the New Year's threshold.

This is quite the wrong spirit in which to face the battle that lies before us. It is right that we should look back to see where we failed, and how. But this once recognized, with our plea for forgiveness—a plea that will never be refused if we are truly sorry—we must lift up our hearts again and set out to slay our enemies. They are within us, not without. Inside our citadel dwells that evil tempter, that pride, that indolence, that greed or envy which tempts us to desert our colors—to think that the fight is hopeless. Each of us has his own special temptation, and, once we realize the form ours takes, the way lies straight before us.

It's the fashion to smile at New Year resolutions, so often made only to be broken; but they are a definite help if we make them firmly intending to keep them! They will only weaken us if we throw them to a troublesome conscience merely as a sop—something to keep it quiet for the time, until it goes to sleep again. Providing that they be suffificiently elastic to change their form when there is reasonable cause, rules fence in duties that might be neglected and keep them in the forefront of our minds. But to multiply rules is a big mistake, for there is one which faithfully kept, will make us both blessing and blessed.

The Rule of Love. Just loving our neighbors as we love ourselves; serving him, trusting him, hoping for him. Refraining even under grave provocation from saying what would sting if he said it to us; forgiving him as we would be forgiven; considering him as we would be considered; helping him when he needs it with the thoughtful delicacy which makes help acceptable instead of humbling; respecting his weakness, his prejudice, his infirmity; laughing with him instead of at him; and, should there come a time when sincerity demands, we should say what we know will not please him, taking care to blend truth with charity.

All the "little" rules we make for ourselves come into line with this one. The Rule of Order—or, how many New Years have we not begun with the resolution that we would not leave our things about, nor lose them, nor hide them away! For we cannot be untidy all to ourselves any more than we can be ill-tempered and not spoil someone else's pleasure; and nothing is more upsetting to already wearied brains than the fuss and worry of hunting for things which should be ready to hand.

And even if we often fail to keep, even fitfully, the golden rule which enjoins us to love others as ourselves, every effort we made in this direction brings its own reward, here and now. As we grow into the habit of thinking of people kindly we cease to be annoyed at their peculiarities, and create an atmosphere of good feeling in which they cease to be annoyed at ours. We must always remember that the bearing and forbearing is not needed on our side alone—as Thomas a Kempis said long ago, when we find our neighbor difficult to put up with, we may be sure that he finds it equally difficult to put up with us. There will always be need for self-control and patience; but when we reckon up gain and loss on the eve of 1929, in the measure we have kept the Rule of Love, so one will outweigh the other.

"We turn and look upon the valley of the past year," says Stopford Brooke. "There below are the spots stained by our evil and our fear. But as we look a glow of sunlight breaks upon the past, and in the sunshine is a soft rain falling from heaven. It washes away the stain, and from the purity of the upper sky a voice seems to descend and enter our sombered hearts. 'My child, go forward, abiding in faith, hope and love, for lo, I am with you alway' . . ."

May the New Year bring us all near each other as children of the same dear Father.

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