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AN ORIGINAL YEAR

JEFFERSON



MANY A HOME WOULD BE
RE-CREATED MERELY BY
THE INTRODUCTION NOW
AND THEN AT A CRITICAL
MOMENT OF A SMILE



Class _____

Book _____

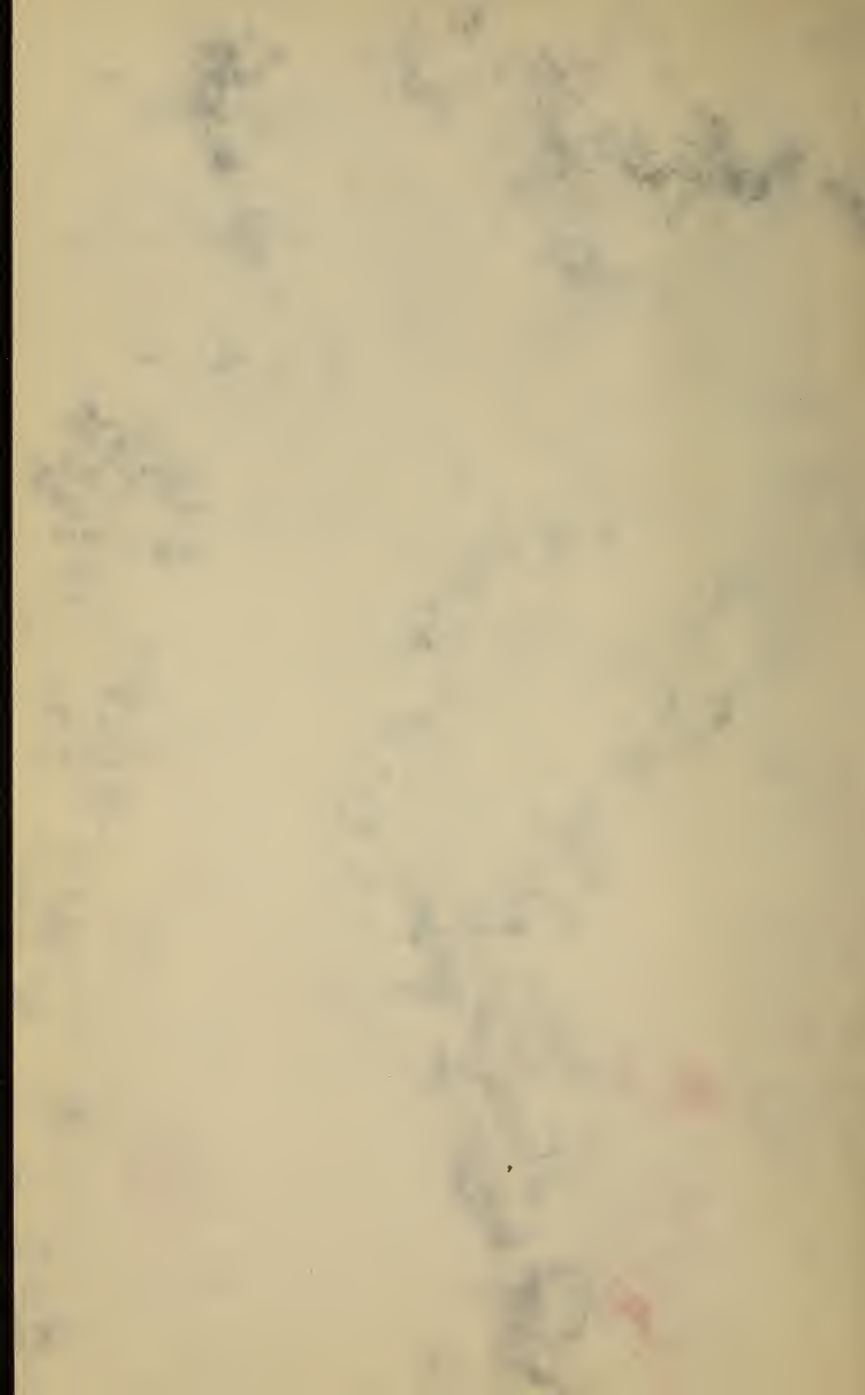
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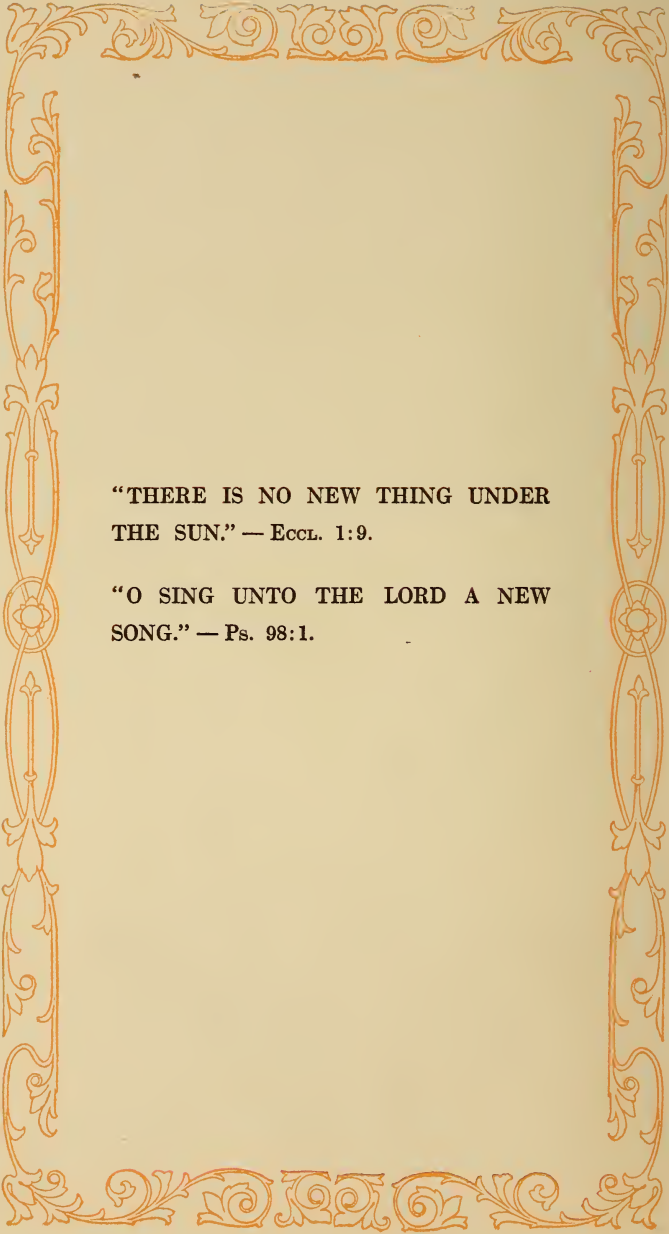
WITH ONLY ONE SWEEP OF
YOUR BRUSH YOU CAN
CHANGE THE COMPLEXION
OF A YEAR





AN ORIGINAL YEAR





**“THERE IS NO NEW THING UNDER
THE SUN.” — EccL. 1:9.**

**“O SING UNTO THE LORD A NEW
SONG.” — Ps. 98:1.**

AN ORIGINAL YEAR

BY
CHARLES E. JEFFERSON, D.D.



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THE man who wrote Ecclesiastes begins his book in a terrible humor. He starts with an outburst like this: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What is the matter with the man? He is sick of the irritating repetitiousness and unending monotony of life. He is disgusted with the everlasting sameness of the world. Life, he says, is the same old thing over and over again. A generation comes and goes, still another generation comes and goes, and one supposes that there is going to be something new. But he finds himself mistaken. The earth abides. The world does not change, the framework is fixed, the stage is never altered, the scenery continues the same, the lights remain constant. The sun rises and sets, rises and sets, rises and sets. It is incapable of originality. The wind is called variable, but all its changes are within narrow limits.

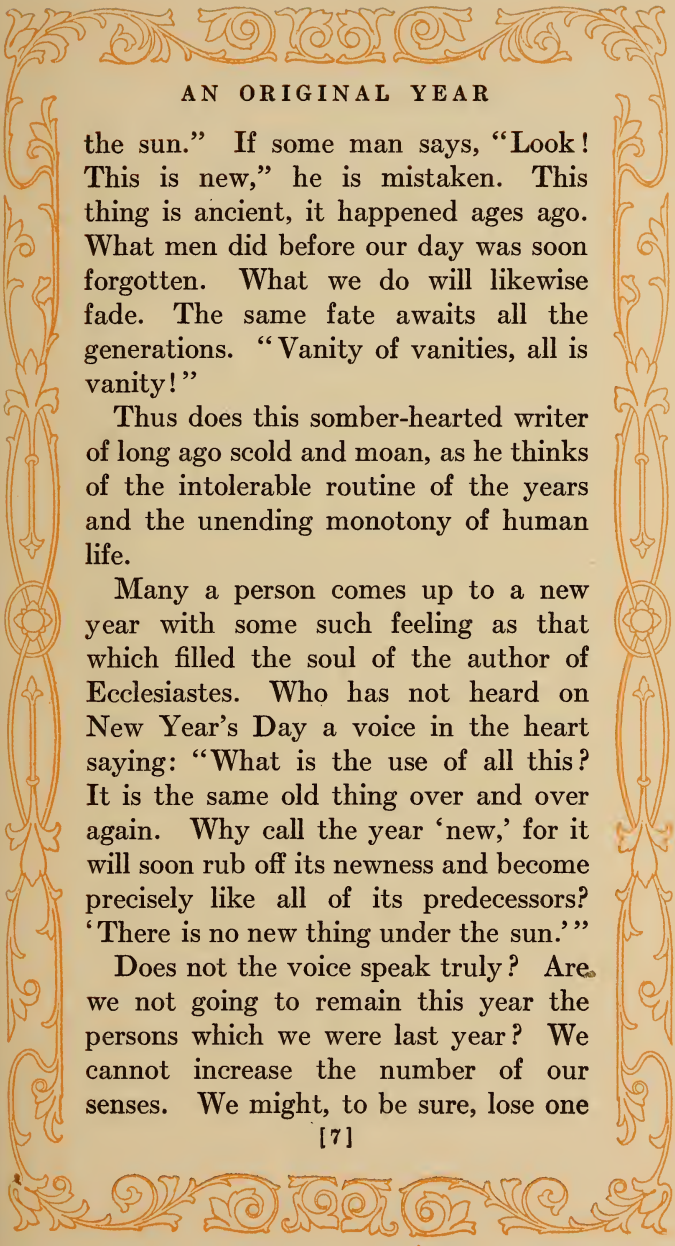


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It veers from the north to the south, but soon comes back to the north again. It is always blowing out of one of the same old quarters. It travels everlastingly round the same old circle.

The rivers flow into the sea. All of them do this, they keep doing it all the time—but what does it amount to? The sea is never full. The sea sends back the water to the hills, and the water flows to the sea again. The ancients supposed that the sea found its way back through subterranean channels, bubbling up in springs and descending in rivers to the sea again. We know that the sea goes into the clouds, falls upon hill and plain, and then runs to the ocean-bed again. But it is the same old circuit, whether you view it as an ancient or a modern.

Man stands upon the earth and watches all this, but his eye is never satisfied. He listens to the music, but his heart finds no rest. The thing which hath been is the thing which shall be, and the thing which hath been done is the thing which shall be done again. “There is no new thing under



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the sun." If some man says, "Look! This is new," he is mistaken. This thing is ancient, it happened ages ago. What men did before our day was soon forgotten. What we do will likewise fade. The same fate awaits all the generations. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"

Thus does this somber-hearted writer of long ago scold and moan, as he thinks of the intolerable routine of the years and the unending monotony of human life.

Many a person comes up to a new year with some such feeling as that which filled the soul of the author of Ecclesiastes. Who has not heard on New Year's Day a voice in the heart saying: "What is the use of all this? It is the same old thing over and over again. Why call the year 'new,' for it will soon rub off its newness and become precisely like all of its predecessors? 'There is no new thing under the sun.'"

Does not the voice speak truly? Are we not going to remain this year the persons which we were last year? We cannot increase the number of our senses. We might, to be sure, lose one



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of them, but we will not think of that possibility today. We shall possess simply the old faculties: memory, imagination, reason, judgment, conscience, and taste. We cannot add to the number. Of course we might lose one of them, but that is not an achievement which we shall think about just now. Our disposition will remain virtually what it has been. We shall have our jubilant days and our days of depression, our ugly moods and our moods of serenity and peace. Our temper will tug at the leash, and now and then will break loose as it always has, and as in all probability it always will. Can a man by making New Year's resolutions add a cubit to his physical or moral stature?

Not only shall we ourselves remain substantially what we have been, but we are going to do in the main the same old things which we have been doing for a long time. The boys and girls will go back to school. The mechanics will go again to their trades. The lawyers will go back to their clients, and look through the same old law books and search for the same old precedents,



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winning some cases and losing others. The doctors will go back to the sick-room, dealing with the same old diseases, some of their patients living and some of their patients dying. The merchants will go back to their merchandise, losing on some of their ventures and gaining on others, counting up their profits and losses at the end of the year. The stenographer will go back to her stenography, the bookkeeper to his bookkeeping, the banker to his money, the school teacher to her school, the housekeeper to her housekeeping, with its unending routine of worry and work. There is no new thing under the sun.

And shall we not have the same old experiences? We shall meet lovely people and people who are not so lovely. We shall laugh and cry, become fatigued and rested. We shall be bored. We shall have our perplexities and our anxieties, our interruptions and disappointments. We shall indulge in aspirations and undergo disillusionments. We shall make many resolutions and also break many. We shall build plans, and not all of them will be carried out.



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What new thing is there under the sun? One of the voices in the human heart is always ready to cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

But that is only one mood through which the soul sees the world. That is only one attitude toward human life. That is only one light under which to study the universe and the years. There are two voices in the Bible because there are two voices in the human soul. If there is a voice in the Bible which sobs, "There is no new thing under the sun," there is also a voice which exultingly cries, "O sing unto the Lord a new song." The routine of existence is always tempting man to say, "There is no new thing under the sun," but there is something in him which keeps shouting, "O sing unto the Lord a new song."

And what shall he sing about? "About something old," says the Bible. Whenever a Hebrew poet exhorts his countrymen to sing a new song, he asks them to sing about something that is ancient. It is an old theme, an old truth, an old mercy, a long-past deliverance, an ancient kindness of God.



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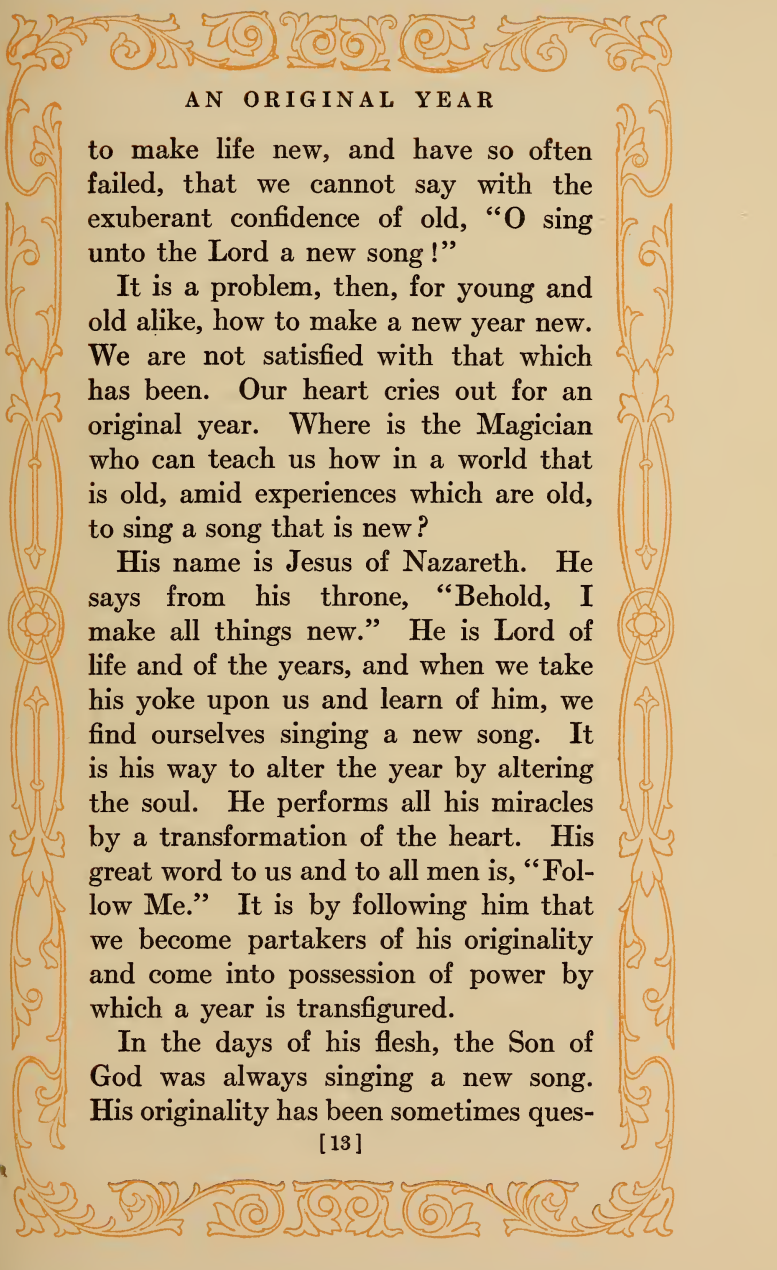
Men are urged to come to the old subjects with a freshened interest and a deeper insight and a greater capacity for appreciation. And so out of the old universe with its old processes and phenomena, its old forces and developments, its old tragedies and coronations, there is to come a song that is new. It is possible to bring out of the heart a groan or a carol, a sigh or a song, a whimper or an anthem. Man can say, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. There is no new thing under the sun," or he can sing a new song. And this is the wonderful thing about the Bible, that the voices of triumph and victory in it little by little gain the mastery over the voices of weariness and despair. The voices that cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," become fainter and fainter, and the voices that shout, "O sing unto the Lord a new song," become louder and clearer, until by and by, when we reach the end of the last book in the New Testament, all the voices of disgust are completely swallowed up in the swelling strains of the song that is new.

Unhappy indeed is the man who does



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not on every New Year's Day hear a voice within him calling, "O sing unto the Lord a new song." No matter what the past year may have been, no matter how heavy its burdens, or vexatious its disappointments, or humiliating its defeats, or piercing its sorrows, every heart — unless dead — dares on the first day of January to expect that the coming year will be a better and a brighter one than the year which has preceded it. When we say to our friends, "I wish you a happy New Year," we are only wishing for them what we covet for ourselves. We hope that the coming year will be really new. No year in all our life has been quite satisfactory. Every one of them has fallen short of our glowing expectations. There is none of them without a blot, no, not one. If our sun is in the West, it may be that the years have grown monotonous, and life is tending to become flat and stale. We have seen all there is to be seen, we have enjoyed all there is to be enjoyed, and we are ready to exclaim with the Hebrew writer, "There is no new thing under the sun." We have tried so often



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to make life new, and have so often failed, that we cannot say with the exuberant confidence of old, "O sing unto the Lord a new song!"

It is a problem, then, for young and old alike, how to make a new year new. We are not satisfied with that which has been. Our heart cries out for an original year. Where is the Magician who can teach us how in a world that is old, amid experiences which are old, to sing a song that is new?

His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He says from his throne, "Behold, I make all things new." He is Lord of life and of the years, and when we take his yoke upon us and learn of him, we find ourselves singing a new song. It is his way to alter the year by altering the soul. He performs all his miracles by a transformation of the heart. His great word to us and to all men is, "Follow Me." It is by following him that we become partakers of his originality and come into possession of power by which a year is transfigured.

In the days of his flesh, the Son of God was always singing a new song. His originality has been sometimes ques-



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tioned only because certain of the wise and prudent do not know what originality is. He made all things in his day and generation new, not by changing the framework of the world, nor by making use of ideas and words never heard before, but by bringing to every situation the freshness of a soul completely filled with God. Let us note a few of the ways in which he made old things new.

He had a genius for putting together things which had drifted apart. He converted two old things into a new thing by linking them together. He showed wonderful originality by the way in which he brought together truths which had become separated. For instance, when he was asked to pick out the great commandment, he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." The first part of this commandment he found in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the second part he found in the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus. The love of God and the love of man had both been demanded



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of the Israelitish people, but the two duties had been allowed to drift apart. The leaders of Israel had not seen their vital connection and had made ineffectual efforts to link them together. The worship of God had been kept in one place and the service of man had been kept in another place, and the result was moral disaster and spiritual shipwreck. Jesus picked up the fragments of the one great commandment and put them together. By doing this he lifted to a new level the religious history of the world.

In the same manner we can make a year original by putting together things which we have allowed to fall asunder. For instance, business and religion, how easily they drift apart. Religion belongs to Sunday, business belongs to Monday. It is comfortable to have them thus. To keep Sunday and Monday together is a difficult and embarrassing task. How different life would be to many of us if we made a serious effort to keep Sunday and Monday together. The world would become new to us if we should really try to make religion our business and busi-



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ness our religion. They are certainly like unto one another. The one is the love of God and the other is the love of man, and the tragedy of the Christian world is that so many Christians do not consider religion a matter of business, nor do they look upon business as a part of religion.

Jesus made all things new by shifting the emphasis. This is a thing which all of us can do. God has placed it within our power to determine upon what point the emphasis shall be placed. In the first century, the Jews were placing tremendous emphasis on ritual. Jesus lifted it from ritual and let it fall on character. The Jews laid the chief stress on the outside. Jesus laid the primary stress on the inside. The Jewish church magnified sacrifice until it dwarfed everything else. Jesus lifted up mercy until everybody could see it. Simply by a shifting of the emphasis he brought a fresh vision to Palestine.

Where are you putting the emphasis? If you only shift it to the point selected by Jesus, you will alter the tone and trend of your life. Everything depends upon the point of em-



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phasis. The meaning of a sentence hangs upon the word which you make emphatic. If you say, "I would not do that"—you mean one thing. If you say, "I would not do *that*"—you mean another thing. In the first case, you are comparing yourself with somebody else; in the second case, you are comparing a certain act with another act. How have you been pronouncing the words "I and others"? Some of you have been saying, no doubt, "I and others." If you would only transfer the emphasis and say, "I and *others*," you would sing a new song.

How easy it is to put emphasis on externalities! Nowhere is it so easy to do this as in large cities. The constant tendency is to pay attention to the surface, to glorify the exterior. We are tempted to concentrate attention upon dress and house, upon knives and forks, and spoons and napkins. Many of us could change the whole tenor of our life by simply carrying the emphasis to the interior, laying it upon disposition and attitude, upon feeling and thought. The Italians have always lived out of doors, and so Italian art for a long

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time lived and moved and had its being in that atmosphere. But when art became acclimated in Holland, art became a different thing. The Dutch artists began to paint interiors. The Dutch kitchens became on canvas as interesting and as beautiful as the loveliest of Italian landscapes, and the old Dutch wives were fully as picturesque and fascinating as the Italian madonnas. You could make a great change in your life if you would remove the emphasis from the exterior to the interior, if you passed from out of doors into the temple of the soul.

Everything depends upon the virtue which you emphasize, the grace to which you give first place. Voice teachers have great difficulty sometimes with their pupils in getting them to bring out certain vowel tones. For tones have a strange fashion of slipping back into the throat. It is only when the tone is brought well to the front of the mouth that it obtains vibrancy and becomes capable of taking on emotional color. Sometimes it is necessary for a pupil to practise many months in order to bring out one particular, refractory



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tone. As with tones so with virtues and graces, they have a fashion of slipping back into the throat of the soul, losing brilliance and beauty. What Christian grace have you allowed to slip back out of sight? What Christian virtue have you permitted to sink down into a subordinate place? It may be that your whole home life would be revolutionized if you would bring out into first place a Christian grace which you have disparaged and neglected. You might make the year original simply by placing fresh emphasis upon one word in life's vocabulary which you have been slurring.

What aim have you been placing first? Men do not differ so much from one another in the number and character of the things which they desire, as in the order in which they seek them. Character is determined, not by the number of things we seek, but by the thing we seek first. It is not the number of things one believes in, but the order in which one ranks them, that determines the effect they have upon one's life. Every one, for instance, believes in God. But the question is,



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How do you believe in him? Where do you place your belief — in the fore-front or in the rear of your concern? Where do you keep your belief in immortality — at the bottom of your mind or at the top? Where do you place Christ? Do you make him one of many, or do you crown him Lord of all? What place does the kingdom hold in your prayers and endeavors? "Seek ye first the kingdom," says the Lord of life, and if you do not throw the emphasis upon the adverb you fail to catch his meaning. All Christians seek the Kingdom, but not all of them seek it first. To keep first things first and second things second — this is the secret of a happy year.

Or you can make the year original by adding a little something. It is not necessary to add much. "O the little more, and how much it is!" says Browning. Just a little is sometimes sufficient to bring about amazing changes. Jesus added a single word to his vocabulary which made him different from all the teachers that preceded him. He always called God, "Father." To be sure the word had



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been used before his day. The writer of the One Hundred and Third Psalm had used it, and so had the writer of Ecclesiasticus, and so had the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon. But those writers did not use it in the way in which Jesus used it. He spoke it with a different accent. He uttered it with a warmer tone of affection. He slipped it into places in which it had never been known before. For instance, in his dying hour he quoted one of the Psalms. One line of that psalm runs thus, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus changed the whole psalm by introducing one additional word. He cried, "*Father*, into thy hands I commend my spirit." So different was Jesus' use of the word "Father" from its use by any other religious teacher that Paul defines God as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus gave men a new conception of God by the introduction of that word, "Father." Great changes are often wrought by additions apparently slight. You have seen an artist with one stroke of his brush alter completely the expression of the portrait he was painting.



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With only one sweep of your brush you can change the complexion of a year. You can change it by simply introducing some beautiful thing that has not been there before.

Sam Jones was one of the most attractive of evangelists. People who read reports of his sermons in the papers were usually disgusted with him. They could not understand how a man using such language could ever induce self-respecting people to listen to him. But when those critics once heard him preach, their opposition, in most cases, departed. It vanished under the magic of the preacher's manner. When he said an especially harsh thing he introduced it with a smile. He said once to a Boston congregation: "You cultured Bostonians do not like my language, but all I have to say is that I always come down to the level of the people whom I am talking to." No one was offended, because his tone had a pleasant face. He would sometimes pick out a man in his audience and say, "You old scoundrel, you know you are lying." But the old scoundrel never left the church until after the benedic-



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tion was pronounced, because Sam Jones said such things with an intonation that had affection in it. The manager of a well-known restaurant in New York city says that whenever he criticizes his employees, he does it in French. He has found by experience that he can say things in French with less danger of irritating than he can say the same things either in English or in German. There are more smiles in the French language than in any other. It has a velvety touch. When one finds fault in French, the sharp edge of the censure is dulled by the velvet of the language. Now there are different kinds of English. There is an English whose words are mixed with smiles, and there is another English whose words are soaked in frowns. Some women have no end of trouble with their servants. They seldom can live with one more than a few months at the longest. In some cases, no doubt, the blame is with the servants — it would be impossible for anybody to live with them; in other cases the fault is with the mistress. She does not know how to smile when she criticizes. She censures

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with a face that is like a thunder-cloud and in language that lacerates and stirs up the devil in the servant. Not a few women would have far less friction in their housekeeping if in dealing with their servants they would put an occasional pinch of sugar into their speech. Many a home would be re-created merely by the introduction now and then at a critical moment of a smile.

A New England essayist has recently published an interesting paper which he entitles, "Carlyle's Laugh." Many of us have long been prejudiced against Carlyle, largely by the things which we have read about him. We have settled down in the belief that he was a cross-grained old curmudgeon, sour and dyspeptic, altogether unreasonable, a scold and tyrant with whom it was impossible for anybody to live. We get this impression, not only from what certain writers have written about him, but also from language which he himself published. But those who knew Carlyle best never got that impression of him. The men who sat with him before the fire in the little home in Chelsea, smoking and talking until midnight, did



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not go away feeling that Carlyle was incorrigibly pessimistic and disgustingly sour. They went away with an impression quite different, because they heard him laugh. He had a wonderfully hearty laugh, and after his terrible tirades against humanity, he would open his big Scotch throat and let out a stream of Scotch laughter which dissipated all the gloom. It is wonderful how a burst of laughter can clear the air. Why do you not introduce a laugh now and then when the storm clouds gather and your world becomes suddenly dark? The next time you break forth into fierce denunciation over some miscreant in particular, or over degenerate humanity in general, why not close your denunciation with a hearty laugh? It would add to the originality of your year.

Or if you do not introduce a smile or a laugh, then possibly you might introduce a bit of fire. John Wesley made the eighteenth century new by adding to its life a little heat. When one reads his sermons, one is surprised that sermons such as those should have produced such tremendous effects. They



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seem so simple, and on the whole so commonplace. They say only things that had been said a thousand times before, and one is puzzled to account for their far-reaching influence. Certainly Wesley was not original if judged by his language or by his doctrine — and yet he was one of the mightiest men that has ever lived. How did he produce his effect? Not by dramatic art or by elocution or by rhetoric or by emotional appeals or by thunder. This little preacher spoke in quiet tones, he was never noisy, his touch was gentle, his eloquence was of the subdued order. How can you account then for his miracles? He performed his wonders by the introduction of a little fire. One evening he went to hear a Moravian preacher unfold one of St. Paul's letters, and while he was listening, he felt his heart "strangely warmed." From that time onward, he put into every sermon a coal of fire, and the fire which he kindled throughout England became a great conflagration which is burning today around the world. Wesley has exerted a mightier influence over the Christian church than any man since



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Martin Luther. He did it all by means of fire.

If you should get close enough to God to have your heart "strangely warmed," strange things and wonderful might happen within a year. The fire, once kindled, would pass into your prayers and escape into your work, piercing the central places of your home and church and business, and in the flame many of the flimsy trappings of your life would be consumed, and many an obstacle to larger living would be burned away, and thus by fire the year would be cleansed and glorified.

It is characteristic of the most original men in the world's history that they have all dealt entirely with material that was old. The greatest of the composers have invented no new tones. The most illustrious of the painters have invented no new colors. The mightiest of the poets have coined no new words. Genius, when most original, expresses itself in material which is old. Shakespeare, the most original of English poets, made free use of material collected by his predecessors and con-



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temporaries. The plots of his dramas were, in many cases, taken bodily from the poets and chroniclers of earlier days. He did not deem it worth his while to invent new characters or devise new situations. He used old material, but he compelled it to sing a new song. Ralph Waldo Emerson was an indefatigable reader, and he culled from the masters the choicest of their gems. There are those who dispute his claim to originality, but his fame is secure. Who can read his essays and poems without confessing that, though this man is opulent in quotations, he nevertheless sings a new song. Jesus was the most original of all religious teachers, but he used both the language and the conceptions of the men that preceded him. If you study what we call the Lord's Prayer you will not find a solitary petition that is new. Each one of them had been prayed thousands of times before Jesus came. Or if you take his beatitudes, there is no one of them new. They had all been uttered by prophetic voices long before his day. His great phrase, "the kingdom of God," he received from the lips of



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others. But there is no doubt that Jesus sang a new song. He was a New Man. He was the Man from heaven. He made use of the old material in such a way that he changed the world by it forever.

O sing then unto the Lord a new song. The material with which you are going to work this year is old, the world in which you will live is old, the heavens under which you will walk are old, the temptations and problems and difficulties which you will meet are all old, but it is nevertheless possible to sing a new song. If you ever find yourself saying, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, — there is no new thing under the sun," check yourself with the exhortation, "O my soul, sing unto the Lord a new song!" Bring to the old work a deeper insight, and to the old relationships a finer fidelity, and to the old tasks a nobler spirit, and the year upon which you are entering will not be like any of its predecessors. It will be an original year. It will be a "happy new year." It is true that there is no new thing under the sun. But it is possible, by God's grace, for there to be a



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new man, and wherever there is a new man, the world hears, in the midst of its old noises and discords, a song that is new.




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