

# **THE BATTLE OF LIFE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649165292

The battle of life by Henry Van Dyke

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**HENRY VAN DYKE**

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**BY**

**HENRY VAN DYKE**

**NEW YORK  
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.  
PUBLISHERS**

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## THE BATTLE OF LIFE

Romans xii. 21: Overcome evil with good.

THE Battle of Life is an ancient phrase consecrated by use in Commencement Orations without number. Two modern expressions have taken their place beside it in our own day: the Strenuous Life, and the Simple Life.

Each of these phrases has its own significance and value. It is when they are overemphasized and driven to extremes that they lose their truth and become catch-words of folly. The simple life which blandly ignores all care and conflict, soon becomes flabby and invertebrate, sentimental, and gelati-

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nous. The strenuous life which does everything with set jaws and clenched fists and fierce effort, soon becomes strained and violent, a prolonged nervous spasm.

Somewhere between these two extremes must lie the golden mean: a life that has strength and simplicity, courage and calm, power and peace. But how can we find this golden line and live along it? Some truth there must be in the old phrase which speaks of life as a battle. No conflict, no character. Without strife, a weak life. But what is the real meaning of the battle? What is the vital issue at stake? What are the things worth fighting for? In what spirit, with what weapons, are we to take our part in the warfare?

There is an answer to these questions

in the text: *Overcome evil with good.* The man who knows this text by heart, knows the secret of a life that is both strenuous and simple. For here we find the three things that we need most: a call to the real battle of life; a plan for the right campaign; and a promise of final victory.

I. Every man, like the knight in the old legend, is born on a field of battle. But the warfare is not carnal, it is spiritual. Not the east against the west, the north against the south, the "Haves" against the "Have-nots"; but the evil against the good,—that is the real conflict of life.

The attempt to deny or ignore this conflict has been the stock in trade of every false doctrine that has befogged and bewildered the world since the

days of Eden. The fairy tale that the old serpent told to Eve is a poetic symbol of the lie fundamental, — the theory that sin does not mean death, because it has no real existence and makes no real difference. This ancient falsehood has an infinite wardrobe of disguises.

You will find it pranked out in philosophic garb in the doctrines of those who teach that all things are linked together by necessity of nature or Divine will, and that nothing could ever have happened otherwise than just as it has come to pass. Such a theory of the universe blots out all difference between good and evil except in name. It leaves the fence-posts standing, but it takes away the rails, and throws everything into one field of the inevitable.