



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

THE RISKS

From the "War Cry," December 20th, 1884

MY DEAR COMRADES,

I was not able to say all I wanted last week on the subject of that and my former letter – namely, the supply of Officers to carry on the War. Those who have read my letters will remember that I alluded first to the expectations that I cherish in the little Soldiers coming in shoals to the help of the Lord; but feeling that there must needs be some time before this supply would be available, I turned to the crowds of unsaved young men and women waiting to be pressed into The Army, and capable of being almost immediately trained for the Service.

And then my eye fell upon a multitude more, already saved, enrolled, and one might almost say, to a very large extent, trained and ready for the fight. I allude to the Soldiers in our own ranks whom God is wanting to lead forth as His sanctified hosts to the battle.

In this letter let me speak to these. If you are qualified for this business, I want you to set your affairs in order. Bid farewell to your loved ones. Separate yourselves from all worldly pursuits. Come out and place yourselves, with every power you possess for doing or suffering, at the Master's feet. Why should the War suffer? Why should the enemy triumph? Why should the battle languish for want of leaders when you are the very people – possess the very gifts – have been saved for the very purpose of carrying it on? We need not wait for the little ones growing up, nor for the wicked ones to be converted; you are grown up, and you are converted, and you are to hand. Wo cannot, must not, will not wait.

"Be patient," do you say? "Wait the Lord's time?" This is the Lord's time; why should I wait? There is a sanctified anger because it is just, and there is a sanctified impatience because it is born of benevolence. How can we wait and see the people die, and see the generation sweep off before our eyes into eternal woe, that might be rescued – that might be saved?



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Have not I said that the eyes of numbers were turned to us from all parts of the world? Within the last few weeks, in addition to the countries we already occupy, we have had earnest entreaties to send Officers to Spain and Germany and China and Norway and Assam and St. Helena and Egypt and Singapore, and I know not where else; and, as I said before, one of the main hindrances in complying with these Macedonian cries is the want of men to send.

But this is a very important business. Are all to become officers? Yes, all who are adapted for it. We go on the lines of adaptation. If you are cut out for being an Officer, an Officer you must be, and an Officer you will be, or it will be so much the worse for you both here and hereafter. And here let me remark that it is a very serious matter – as thousands can testify – for any man or woman to allow any consideration of gain or pleasure or friendship to turn them aside from treading that track of labour which God gives them to understand in their hearts as being most likely to glorify Him and save men. If God sets before you an open door through which you know there is an entrance to a career of usefulness, enter it; though in doing so you turn your back on fame and friends and fortune. I would not like to be in any man's shoes – or any woman's either – who, when the two courses lay before them, chose that which led to worldly ease and enjoyment in preference to the suffering track which if followed meant the Salvation of men.

"But what is to become of business?" said a lady at the breakfast-table when I expressed the wish that I could have her five sons for Officers. "The business of the world, you mean, I presume. Oh, let the business of the world take care of itself," I replied. "My business is to get the world saved; if this involves the standing still of the looms and the shutting up of the factories, and the staying of the sailing of the ships, let them all stand still. When we have got everybody converted they can go on again, and we shall be able to keep things going then by working half time and have the rest to spend in loving one another and worshipping God."

"But how are they all to be supported?" the lady asked. "Oh, we make War support War," I replied. "We will quarter them on the enemy." We have gone on that principle in The Army, and practice has justified it in the past and will justify it in the future. And if the sinners cannot



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support the War, the saints must help them. If a nation be thoroughly roused to any tremendous struggle, fighting for its own existence, part of its inhabitants will go forth to the field, part nurse and care for the wounded, part make the ammunition and the weapons, and the remainder till the fields to support the whole. When God's people wake up to the importance of this great War, and go forth to engage in it after this fashion, the millennium will not be very far away.

But I am wandering. Officers I am after, and I want those Soldiers whose names are already on our Rolls, who are qualified for the task, to look themselves up, and if qualified, to send in their names at once.

But at this point a Soldier asks, "How am I to know whether I am qualified, and whether God wants me for this position?" Go down before God, and tell Him that you are willing to go; then you shall have those words verified in your experience, "If any man will do My will, he shall know of the doctrine." Consecration honestly made to go if wanted, will bring the answer back from Heaven into your own heart.

"Can't do it?" "Have not the gifts?" "Wanting in courage and power of speech, and ever so many other kinds of power?" How do you know? Have you tried? Give yourself a chance. Get on to Outpost duty. Do something in your own streets. Shake the napkin. You do not know what talents you do possess. If you have not got courage to shake it yourself, go to your Captain and tell him he can do what he likes with you.

You can only find out what your gifts really are in the actual War, and so settle the matter for ever beyond controversy; and do not go to the end of your days thinking that you may have missed your calling.

"Afraid of the consequences?" Ah! we are coming to it now; perhaps you cannot face a life of poverty, persecution, or hardship in general. Could do anything in your own town, but could not leave father or mother!



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And yet you sing,

"Anywhere with Jesus, "

and shout,

"If the Cross we boldly bear,
Then a crown we shall wear,"

and intend to present yourself some day at the gates of Gold as a true follower of Him who "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich."

Again I say, Look yourself up, my comrade. Say, "Ought I to go? How will the considerations that keep me back, that hinder me even allowing myself to fairly look the work in the face, appear in the light of a dying hour, or the glare of the Great White Throne?"

"Want to make the best of life," do you? "Have a good opening for business?" "A good prospect for getting comfortably settled? a track to fortune?" Do you say you have your foot on the first round of the ladder leading to fame and fortune, otherwise you would follow Him? I might reply to you with His words, "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." But I will argue with you for a moment on your own grounds. You are in for doing the best you can for yourself. I will take you on these lines; hear me. Is it riches you want? See here, my brother, my sister, you can have thousands of souls; there is a value for your labour. Weigh them over against your gold and your silver and your precious stones. Tell me, What are sovereigns to souls? You need not stop till you are dying, or till you face the Throne; you have light and knowledge enough now. Go into your inner chamber and settle it which way the riches lie.

Are you carried away with ambition, the admiration of your fellows? Go in for the admiration of yourself. Face and force a career that will win for you your own everlasting respect, and, if that is not enough, aim at having said of you what was said of John, "He was great in the sight of the Lord."



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Pleasure? A life of pleasure? Ask the fire-escape man if he ever has any thrill of delight equal to that he is privileged to have now and then when he fights his way through the blinding smoke and rescues the people ready to perish and carries them in his arms safely down the ladder and hands them over to their waiting, shivering friends at its foot.

Risks, partings, separations, hardships, possibilities of being rejected, sent home, wounded, killed. Well, I won't say a word to lessen them. I will tell you a story. I read in a newspaper last week that the frost had already set in with unwonted severity in some parts of Hungary. A man with his young wife and child set off on a sleigh from a village in the forest to a neighbouring town. When they had got well on their journey into the midst of the woods a pack of wolves scented them and came howling on their track. As the ferocious animals reached the sleigh the horses took fright and galloped off. The woman, paralyzed with fear, let the child fall from her arms. The man threw the reins on the lap of his wife and sprang to the rescue of the child into the midst of the wolves. The father and child were torn to pieces, and the horses petrified the inhabitants of the town as they rushed into it dragging after them the sleigh burdened with the frozen bodies of the mother and a child born during the terrible journey.

There were risks to that father – terrible risks; risks in cold blood difficult for us to estimate. But he saw not the risks, nor stayed for them. He might have saved himself, but he wanted to save his child, and he leaped to almost certain death in the hope of accomplishing it. That was Christ's fashion. It has been the fashion followed by thousands of His followers. Perhaps it is the fashion to which He is drawing you. There are the people dying! The wolves of Hell are round them, preying on them, dragging them away to perdition! They are dying and being damned wholesale, and you stand there talking about risks. God forgive you! He will if you will do your duty, and so will

Yours faithfully in the War,

WILLIAM BOOTH.