



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

"THEORETICAL RELIGION" – No. 3

HOW TO BE PRACTICAL

From the "War Cry," June 27th, 1885.

My Dear Comrades,

This topic is not exhausted. The interest I feel in it is far from having come to an end. If anything ever burnt itself into my soul, this subject has done. It has indeed set my heart on fire. I have realized to some extent the experience of the prophet in whose bones the word of God was as a fire. I want the flames to spread from Corps to Corps, from Officer to Officer, from Soldier to Soldier, until, like a great prairie conflagration, it spreads through The Army and sets the world in a blaze.

You will remember the vision of my last letter. You will not fully understand what follows unless you do. The pictures there drawn sets forth the condition of things. That picture represents what I understand the Bible to teach, and the millions of people around us are in the sea, with their drink, and their pleasure, and their dancing, and their music, and their business, and their anxieties, and their politics, and their troubles, and thousands of other things; ignorant – willfully ignorant in many cases: in other instances they know all about it. There they are, however, sweeping on an up, in their blasphemies and devilries, to the Throne of God.

What is our duty with respect to them? There can be no room for two opinions as to what we who are rescued ought to do. We have no need, my comrades, to hold consultations, councils, or conventions. We need no teaching from men, or revelation from Heaven, on the subject. Our work is as plain before us as work can possibly be set forth, and that is – TO GET THEM OUT!

There are only three courses possible for us.

I. *To believe one thing and practice another*; which is, I think, meanness itself. For people to profess all this--to say it at family prayers, at church or chapel, or in the Barracks; to get a living



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out of it; to cherish a hope because of it; and yet for their practice not to be according to it, seems to me EXECRABLE!

II. The second course open to us is to *give up the theory*. Say there is not hell; which means no punishment for sin; which means that there is no sin; which means that there is no God; which means atheism; for there can be no rational resting-place for candid minds between the two.

III. The only course left to us is to REDUCE OUR THEORY TO PRACTICE – to act as we profess to believe; to combine works with faith; and then, and not till then, will God and the angels believe in us. I say God--for Jehovah will not believe in our reality and sincerity until our conduct agrees with our belief. When that is the case, He will say of us as He did of Abraham, "Now I know that these people have honest hearts, and believe what they say they do."

Reduce your theory to practice; that is, make your practice harmonize with your theory. Nothing will do this but the actual rescue. If the people are perishing in the sea, if you have the power to rescue any or all of them – do it!

If you had been on that platform, and wanted to help those people in that sea, and set anybody to do it, and they reported to you that they had been looking at them, and giving them good advice; that they had made their condition more endurable; had got them rafts on which to float, and beds into their cabins; had stopped them from drinking, smoking, lusting, blaspheming, and many other evil things, and they expected you were going to be perfectly satisfied with their work, you would be very likely to stamp your foot, and lift up your voice and say, "That was not what I sent you to do! Nothing will satisfy me but getting the people out!"

Just so here I need make no application. Talking good things to the people, singing the songs, holding meetings, giving tracts, and all other schemes and contrivances, are only satisfactory as far as they get the people actually saved.



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But how is this to be done? How can we Salvation Soldiers be more practical? That is the question I am asking myself, my comrades. How? How? How? How? How can we get the people out? How can we get the people saved?

1. To be more practical, *every one of us should go at it*. This must be the business of the time. Every man and woman amongst us must be governed by the one idea--every heart moved by the same feeling. The word "Rescue" should be written in large letters on every brain.

"What? must we stop pleasure – business – science – art?" No, not exactly stop, but make all the business that is done, and all the profit of it, assist in sustaining this business. Let there be no mistake, the saving of the world must be the business of the saints. For all this I make no apology; the facts speak for themselves, gainsay them who will, and no one will dare to do so but sceptics and infidels.

2. Let us give ourselves up to a great deal more personal dealing. Supposing my picture had been a reality, and it had been on the platform, would not every one of you have turned to and done what you could with the drowning man that was nearest to you, with a rope or a plank, or a little boat, or anything with which you could have reached him? You would not have waited for a sergeant to order you about, or a captain to put you into a lifeboat crew. You would have reached down at once--leaned over, risked overbalancing yourself - got hold of the hand of some poor woman, or some man just sinking down, or some little helpless child, and you would have tugged and pulled and struggled and fought to get them out; and that one saved, you would then have gone in for another.

Do so here. Take hold of the first soul that comes in your path today – in the train – in the street – in business. Pull and struggle to get them saved. Never mind their being friendly or not – whether you succeed or not. Go on again with the next and the next. Do the work wisely, but keep on doing it.

On the very last Saturday one of our London sister Soldiers received at the gates of a prison a poor woman, only thirty-seven years of age, who had been on the streets since she was



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seventeen, and had been in prison 120 times! Our comrade was talking and praying and weeping with her nearly all the day, and the woman was praying and weeping for herself. Whether she is finally rescued or not, it was a good pull this Soldier made. There are plenty more in the water. Get them out!

Why cannot the women go into the street at midnight and take hold of their sisters? Why cannot the saved drunkards hunt up their old comrades? Why cannot we all hunt up somebody? Have a list, give every one a chance.

3. *To be more practical, we must make everything tend to success.* Value all work by that standard. If we march, we must pull somebody out with the march. If we have an open-air, we must get somebody convicted on the spot. If we have a meeting, get somebody pardoned, or convicted, or sanctified, or filled with the Soldier's spirit before it breaks up. If we have a tea meeting, we must get some one to drink of the "water of life" before it ends. What is the good of any amount of talking, or singing, or marching, or anything else of the kind, if no one is pulled out of the sea, or if no one is taught, and fired, and filled with a burning passion to pull somebody else out.

4. *To be more practical, we must have more sympathy* — more affection. We must have a real flesh-and-blood religion. The cold-bloodedness and heartlessness of a great deal of so-called Christianity has operated more against success than all other opposing forces put together. People who think our religion is a trade, or a form, or an outside thing, turn from us with contempt. If we want to win the world to God we must have something more tender, more human, more Christ-like. WE WANT MORE HEART.

Do you want to feel more, my comrades? Turn your eyes towards that sea. Hold them there. take the whole thing in. Ponder it well in your minds, and the slumbering fountains of feeling in your souls will be broken up; and when this is the case, you will go and work with a will to help God and us with the rescue.



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5. To be more practical, we must *watch more carefully over the souls we have rescued*. What could possibly be more unpractical than for a hunter to be at ever so much trouble to catch his game, and then to be so careless what is done with it that when he wants it for use he finds it has slipped away? What toiling and praying and weeping and labour there is to get the people out of the clutches of the devil, and out of the dark and gloomy sea of sin, and then how carelessly they are left on the bank in thousands of cases, all exposed to doubts and devils, and all the devices that can be contrived. Let us be practical by being as anxious to preserve as we are to acquire.

Lastly, *let us be desperate*. Nothing short of this will meet the circumstance of the case. The meek and mild methods which are skillfully shaped to please every one and hurt nobody's feelings will accomplish very little. Men and women who are always reminding you that "business must be attended to," "health must be considered," friends must be pleased, and the earthly interests of themselves and everybody about them must be looked after, will be of precious little service in the fight.

Every day it seems plainer to me that nothing tremendous will be accomplished till we have a force of people willing to dash pearls to atoms, trample on worldly pleasure, wealth, ease, reputation, and all else, and even life itself.

Then we shall have victories worthy of our cause and of our Master. Then will there be hope for the poor struggling multitude in that dark and stormy sea.

Believe me, my dear comrades,
One with you for death or victory,

WILLIAM BOOTH.
June 22nd, 1885.