



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

THE IMPROVEMENT OF GIFTS.

From the "War Cry," March 21st, 1885.

MY DEAR COMRADES,

In my last letter I referred to the desire existing in many hearts for the acquisition of those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit which were evidently possessed by the first Apostles of our Lord, and which afterwards for a considerable period were exercised in the early Church. While admitting the value of these extraordinary powers, I reminded you that the craving for those gifts might lead to the under estimation of those powers and abilities already possessed, insisting that these were of infinite value, and urging their cultivation to the utmost.

I want to return to this subject and to press home upon you its consideration in the most serious manner. In doing this, need I call your attention to the great truth which lies at the foundation of all real service for the Master; admitted by almost every professed follower of His, and yet so commonly forgotten and neglected in practice, viz., that every gift we possess ordinary or extraordinary of body or mind or soul, comes directly from God, belongs to Him, and is only entrusted to us that we may therewith promote His glory and the accomplishment of His purposes towards mankind.

People go to religious meetings and talk about all they have belonging to God, and of being under the most solemn obligation to use it in His interests, and then go straight to their shops and warehouses and homes, and think and act in the most opposite manner. They reckon in their hearts and say by their conduct, "My time, my abilities, my goods are my own, to do with as I like, to use as seems most likely to promote my own gratification." Now this is directly in opposition to the principle we have just observed. You are a steward, and your gifts belong to your Master, and you are to use them as He wishes, and if you do not, He will reckon with you at last. But you, my comrades, honestly want to do this. Let me help you; and here I note:

1. You must know you have a gift before you can use it. Every man is a genius in some direction. There is some speciality in which he excels those about him. There is a pearl of great price in his soul somewhere. But he must find it out, or it will be in danger of dying with him. No doubt



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The Army has helped thousands to discover and employ gifts for the Master which they never dreamt they possessed. At the same time, I am afraid it fails with thousands of others; they live and die with abilities which, had they been discovered, might have been the means of saving multitudes.

My comrades, examine yourselves. Shake the napkin at every corner. Pray about it. Ask God to show you where any special capacity may lie. Try your hand. How can you tell until you do? You may have the power of speech, so as to be able to hake the souls of men, and yet never know it unless you push yourself to the front, and have a turn in the ring or on the platform. You may have a soul for music, but how can you find out if you never pick up an instrument? You may be able to control and plan and lead men up to victory, but how can you know it if you hang back from taking charge of a Brigade? You may have the ability to administer and govern the army affairs of a nation, but if you shrink even from making the plans for a bombardment, or the visitation of a district, who is ever to find it out?

Again, I say, look yourself up. Put yourself into circumstances in which you are likely to discover for yourself, and in which others can help you to find out what gifts you do possess.

But the main purpose which I wish to impress upon you in this letter is to urge the improvement – on behalf of God and the Salvation of the world – of those capacities which soldiers know they do possess, but upon which they are apt to set but little value, or to reckon that if they are of worth they have no bearing upon the kingdom of God. Let me note two or three.

There is the gift and opportunity possessed by many of *making money*. They have the knack of getting wealth, and the providence of God has placed them in a most favourable groove for exercising that gift. They say, "What am I to do? See in what a beautiful way I'm placed for making money!" The answer is plain enough. If they can save more souls by going to be an Officer, they must go. But suppose they settle that they are not called to this. What are they to do with this gift? We say, Let them lay themselves out as much FOR GOD AND THE KINGDOM in making money as they would have done had they gone out as Officers.



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Let them make money – make it honorably – make it on principles consistent with the welfare of their fellow-men, and with it let them help to roll salvation along. There cannot be any two opinions about this in any man who is prepared to hold on to the principles of the New Testament. A man has no more right to make money to promote his own ease, feed his own pride, or gratify his own ambition, than a man has to preach or pray or procession in order to get a living or swell himself in pomp and pride and show before his fellow-men. If any soldier has the money-making gift, let him consecrate it conscientiously. Let him set an example to money-makers round about him, and the cause of salvation will no longer have to mourn over its inability to compass mankind for want of money.

2. Suppose a man is by nature an *artist*. He can sketch: he can make pictures full of life and naturalness and beauty. What is he to do with it? Neglect it? By no means. Draw and engrave and paint in order to make a fame or a fortune? Certainly not. Well, what is he to do? Consecrate his gift. This is an age of pictures. Men have not only been amused but taught by them in all ages of the world. They strike and impress and teach perhaps more than letterpress. What follows? Let us have them for the Kingdom of God. Put the blessedness of salvation, the cursedness of sin, the glory of heaven, and the dreadfulness of hell in living forms and shapes before men. Let us have "Salvation Graphics" in every land to equal or excel any thing that the world can produce. Why not? The artist's genius must be sleeping in the breasts of numbers of our soldiers. Find it out, my comrades. Wake it up. Put it on the altar. Jesus Christ shall have the best of everything. I hope to see a daily illustrated Salvation War Cry on my table every morning before I die.

3. Again, there is the gift of *constructiveness* – that which makes men architects and engineers; the gift which enables men to tunnel the Alps, cable the Atlantic, rear cathedrals, build the ships, and do other wonderful things. These gifts are amongst us. Let them be found out. To what service so noble, so beneficent and enduring can they be consecrated as that of helping on the Salvation of the world? Do you say that we have no use for them? Well, we shall have. Let them be got ready. Meanwhile, let us learn to erect Barracks still better adapted for our purposes at even cheaper rates.



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4. Again, there is the gift of acquiring foreign *languages*. How easy it is for one man or one woman to learn a language compared with the labour it costs another! One can accomplish more in twelve months than another will in a life-time. It seems to come to them naturally. Bring this gift also to the Master. Count it your call for the foreign field. Ask for a post of difficulty in this respect, and go not only to speak, but to translate into heathen tongues the literature of salvation.

5. There is the gift of *music*. What a glorious talent this is! We are only just listening to the echoes of the coming burst of the heavenly music which is about to fill and flood the world – which shall so mightily help to sweep it into the Kingdom of God by the charm of its magical power! Oh, my comrades, if you have a soul tuned to harmonious sounds, cultivate the gift – not to please yourself, or fill your own pocket – but to arouse those about you on the way to damnation; not merely to lull to sleep the evil passions of men for a season, but to snare them for the Saviour – to chain them to His feet – to hold them spell-bound, gazing at His face as He hangs upon the Cross – to force the knowledge of salvation into their minds, and compel them, as it were, to come into the kingdom, and prepare for the last, great, grand Hallelujah Chorus of the skies.

Lastly, my comrades, there is the gift I referred to at the close of my last letter, that gift of gifts – the capacity to love. This gift we all have in common, and no soldier knows to what extent it can be increased by cultivation. But here, perhaps, some excel others. They can love; but oh, how commonly the precious passion is undervalued wasted. How they spend it on trifling objects. You will find them lavishing this treasure on plants and pictures and money and dogs and birds and other inferior things; things that it would not be wrong, perhaps, to love in a purer sphere, but which, considering the state of things, seems to involve a serious waste of that precious gift.

My comrades, I hope better things of you, but if this should fall into the hands of any who are thus expending this choice gift of God, let me invite them to a more wise and Christ-like expenditure. Come and love poor sinners. Love the souls of the men and women who are walking past your doors down to despair. Listen to the tramp of the multitudes, who are



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marching day by day steadily to damnation. And from the necessary concerns of life bring all the sympathies you have to spare, and let them out upon the masses.

Come and love the souls of the children trained in sin: the souls of poor fallen women as they wander about the streets. Come and love the souls of the prisoners whom salvation can rescue for both worlds. Come and love the souls of the perishing everywhere. More than ever come and love your comrades and stand by them in every hour of need. Come and love the Saviour with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength, and in loving, the power to love shall increase, your heart shall grow bigger, and the sweep of the Divine passion shall carry onwards with it a multitude up to the Throne of your Saviour, from whose bosom it takes its rise. Cultivate the best gift, my comrades,

Yours in the front line of the advance,

WILLIAM BOOTH.

March 16th, 1885.