



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

SLANDER

From the "War Cry," August 29th, 1885

MY DEAR COMRADES,

One of the devil's choicest and most successful methods of destroying the influence of holy men, and thereby hindering the work of God, has, from the beginning, been by making false representations of their character and doings. No sooner has any servant of God started up with any extraordinary gifts, or any successful spiritual enterprise, than a multitude of voices are to be heard - some in hissing whispers, and some with brazen trumpets - pouring forth their misrepresentations and calumnies and detractions as so many reasons to show why these benefactors of the race are not to be heard, or regarded, or believed, or supported, or loved.

This sort of thing, my comrades, has, I am sure, tied the hands, broken the hearts, and shortened the lives of many of the choicest workers that ever God sent out into His vineyard, and has been the direct and indirect means of the damnation of multitudes of souls. Let us look at this sin. What is slander? It is the spreading of statements calculated to damage an individual for the mere gratification of personal spite or envy.

It is not necessary that the statements made by one individual regarding another should be untrue in order that they may slander him. In that case it would be lying, and although doubtless the great majority of slanderous statements are false, still a man can be a slanderer without being a liar.

A slander does not need to be stated in so many words. Many a man's character has been hopelessly damaged in the estimation of listeners by nods and hints and insinuations.

Some of the vilest slanders ever uttered have had some little portion of truth in them. There has been some foundation in fact for the statements that have destroyed a brother's peace, blackened his reputation, and crippled his power to save souls. The little truth there is connected with many a scandal serves it for wings, which carry it over land and sea.



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Slander is often mixed up with praise; that is, the slanderer pays a compliment in order to open the door for the introduction of his insinuations. For instance, he will say: "Captain – is an excellent man very good, but—" "Lieutenant – is very zealous, very earnest, very useful, but—" "The Salvation Army does a great deal of good amongst certain classes, but—" And then follow the misrepresentations, only to find a lodgment for which the compliments are uttered.

Slanders are often uttered with great professions of love and great protestations of regard for the interests of those the speakers are stabbing in the dark. "Oh," says the slanderer, how I do love them! "how I do admire the good points of their work! If it were not for certain little things about them, how I should delight in it!" And then he proceeds to pour out his poisonous venom.

Slanderers often pretend to do their dirty business in the interests of truth and righteousness. They are "actuated by a public spirit;" it is their "concern for the honour of their Master;" and so, with their tongues set on fire of hell, they administer the brimstone slanders in the treacle of sickly cant, and "for the good of the cause" they destroy the influence of those who are spending their life's-blood for its extension.

Slander is *cruel*. Usually, no wrong has been done the slanderer. Very often, on the contrary, the man who curses ought to bless.

Slander is a sign of *littleness*. Only narrow, mean souls will stoop to such ignoble business. The slanderer is usually despised by those who listen to him; even by those who encourage him and seem to be pleased with his vile insinuations.

Slander is often *its own punishment*: the good and useful at whose characters it is commonly aimed generally outlive this unscrupulous form of opposition, so that those who have sought to injure are in turn despised.

Why, my comrades, do those professing the love of Jesus Christ slander their brethren? I am afraid it is not very difficult to discover. The reasons lie on the surface. Doubtless one more fruitful source of slander than any other is envy. You will often remark that those who make it



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their business to speak against this work are those engaged in operations having a similar purpose. The success of The Army is objectionable to them; they are overshadowed, and, consequently, try to discount our work in the estimation of its friends by making it appear that there are certain disadvantages that outweigh in importance its undeniably substantial results.

Doubtless some people slander their fellows out of sheer selfishness. They cannot endure the thought of any one being more useful, or having more ability, being more beloved, than they are, or being useful or beloved at all. They want all the love and all the worship of their circle for themselves, and if they see any one else rising up, they at once set to work to pull them down.

No doubt the love of scandal, which is a sort of instinct in a certain class of minds is the cause of a great deal of slandering business. The demand creates the supply. The talker observes that nothing interests the hearer so much as dirty information, so he pours forth a flood of it in order to be thought a pleasant companion; and verily he has his reward!

There is no doubt that people enjoy slandering their fellows – especially if these latter have the reputation of being better than they are – from the mean consideration of the sins and shortcomings of which they themselves are guilty.

This sin of slander is awfully prevalent. There are few that are clear of it – few who are not at times overtaken by it. As a body, we of The Salvation Army suffer through it as does no other organization in existence. Our slanderers are legion. The vile, unjust, false – often so false as to be ridiculous – statements made respecting us constitute, next to the depravity of human nature, the highest and strongest barrier to our progress.

What is to be done with this spirit of slander? Oh that it could be killed! At present I suppose that is impossible. Still, something may be done in that direction. Take the following hints, my comrades, –



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1. The only true antidote is the Spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of love. He who can deliberately damage the character of a good man for personal considerations, how dwelleth the love of Christ in him? Anyway he is not mastered by it. Be filled with this spirit. Spread it abroad. Make everybody understand that the only religion of the Bible is that which thinks, speaks, and acts and dwells in love.
2. Refuse, yourselves, to listen to any who would speak evil of others. Not only make it a rule never to repeat evil yourselves, but decline to listen to it. If any person brings you any slanderous stories, tell them that it is your rule always to inform the slandered person of what is being said, in order that he may have an opportunity of defending himself.
3. Reprove these slandering people. Tell them plainly to their faces that that is not the spirit of Christ; that they are going direct in the teeth of the letter and spirit of the Bible.
4. If any evil thing or doing comes to your knowledge which in any way implicates any comrade, immediately do him the good turn of giving him an opportunity of making an explanation or defence, if he has, one to offer; and if it be such that concerns the interests of The Army and that you feel ought to be reported, inform the proper officer, but on no account spread the matter abroad.
5. Speak evil of no man yourselves. Except also absolutely compelled in the interests of The Army, for the salvation of souls, or the honour of God, avoid saying anything which is calculated to lower in the estimation of others any man or woman who professes to be the child and servant of God.

Believe me,

Yours in the love that thinketh no evil,

WILLIAM BOOTH
August 18th, 1885.