



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

NEUTRALITY

From the "War Cry," May 2nd, 1885.

MY DEAR COMRADES,

The anxiety about the threatened war continues; the nations are moved, governments are concerned, and the peoples are troubled. Public opinion is constantly changing; preparations for the wholesale destruction of human beings are hurried forward, and there is an indefinite and strong undercurrent of feeling almost universally prevalent, that events of the greatest moment, having the most intimate connection with the well being of the world, are at hand.

Meanwhile the question of neutrality has come to the front; nation after nation is declaring its intention of being strictly neutral; that is, should the war take place, the Governments of the different countries round are intimating that they will not take any part in the contest. Russia and England are to be left to fight it out to the bitter end, without any interference. Victory is to be with the strongest nation, and might not right is to win.

This is the principle, my comrades, on which the kingdoms of this world usually determine their quarrels.

I need not say that the wars of the beasts of the field and the savages of the forest are conducted substantially after the same fashion. For disputes to be settled according to the rightness and reasonableness of things we must wait, I suppose, until the Prince of Peace, at the head of some great Salvation Army, has overcome the devil, conquered and taken possession of the world, abolished this inhuman and fiendish system of wholesale murder, and so ushered in the millennium.

Meanwhile, however, we must attend to our own War, whatever other quarrels are in progress. Alas! alas!! our forces are not very numerous; but, thank God, there are a few on the side of righteousness and truth and Jehovah. A few who are out-and-out, who fly their colours, own their Master, carry on the War seven days a week, and who are not ashamed to speak up for



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God in any company. We are of this number, my comrades. With us war has been declared; war to the knife; war open and avowed, come what may!

On the other side is a heavy force who hate God and all His servants, and are given up to the practice of all manner of iniquity.

But round about in every direction is a great multitude who say they are neutral. They take no public part in the contest. If they do not cry, "Away with Him! crucify Him!" they do not interfere for His rescue; they leave things to take their course, feel no interest in the fight, and do not care who wins or who loses.

Anyway, my comrades, what multitudes there are who deal thus with The Salvation Army; numbers of whom profess to be on the Lord's side. They say they are sorry that after the lapse of eighteen hundred years Jesus Christ has still so few followers, that the name of God is everywhere blasphemed; that infidelity is rapidly spreading; that the masses of the most pronounced Christian countries are alienated from Christianity; that the Churches are unspiritual, and cold, and luxurious, and heedless of the dreadful state of things so prevalent; that drunkenness, and dishonesty, and uncleanness, and vice of every kind are increasing, and, in short, that everywhere mighty forces are at work, almost unimpeded, undermining the very foundations of society. And yet, when The Salvation Army enters the field, goes straight to the classes about whose condition these people are so concerned, applies to them the remedy of which they most loudly boast; namely, the Salvation of God, and reaps a success unequalled for generations gone by, these friends of God stand by neutral.

How is this? we say. Here are drunkards saved, whoremongers reclaimed, harlots restored, and large numbers of the worst and vilest renegades of society made not only into honest and hardworking citizens, but devout and devoted saints; and when angels and devils expect to see these people, who pray and long for the coming of the Kingdom of God, rush to help these "Red Cross Knights" with sympathy and cooperation of every kind, they stand by coolly looking on. *They are neutral.*



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It is not their concern, they say; it has not been originated by their Church, perhaps it ought to have been, and they would have done the same; nay, a much better work, and done it in a much less objectionable way. They would have carried on the war, gained the same results, or greater; but it should have been done so as not to offend the refined, cultured, and respectable portions of society. So, as the manner of the War has not pleased them, they have an excuse for being neutral.

They are neutral in society. When discussions run high in the railway carriage, round the table, in the committee-room, or elsewhere, they listen to the misrepresentations and objections, and although they may, in the way of defence, occasionally raise a feeble voice, they do not take sides. They wish it to be understood that they do not belong to The Army, and do not approve of a very great deal that is done by it; still they will add that no doubt there has been some good done, but as there is so much about it that is objectionable, they are compelled to stand aloof – they are neutral.

In the streets, when the Skeletons rave and fight defenseless women, and men who will not retaliate from principle; when foul and false and filthy epithets are hurled at the pure and devoted followers of Jesus Christ, these neutrals have not a word to say in their defence; and although many of them are in authority, and could stay the ribald and cruel tide of persecution, if they really wished to do so, they say it is not their business, they are not against The Army, but they are not for it, they are neutrals. In short, in newspapers, congresses, conferences, councils – amongst the highest and amongst the lowest – this class abounds. They are silent. They pass by on the other side. They don't interfere. True, there are a few here and there who boldly speak out, but these, when they do speak on behalf of our struggling bands, usually taint and nullify what would otherwise be noble words, by adding that after all it must be understood that they do not altogether side with the movement. They are neutral or nearly so.

It is the same in other things. These same people want to do good with their money. They have abundance of it; some of them have more than they know what to do with, and they will tell you that it is all the Lord's. They say they are anxious to invest it in that way which will best help His Kingdom, and be likely to make the largest number of men and women good and



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comfortable in this life, and happy in that which is to come – specially the former. But when you bring them statements and statistics proving that this can most effectually be done by helping The Army, they shake their heads again; and as they consign, all unread, your marvellous statements and carefully compiled statistics to the waste-paper basket, they will remark something about being modest in your estimate of your work, which we might be if it was our own, AND NOT THE WORK OF GOD; and then they will add that no doubt much good is being done by the movement, and no doubt it is much in need of help, but they cannot assist it, as they have not yet made up their minds whether it is of God or not – they are neutral.

And so we are left staggering beneath the weight of this burden, which increases daily, whether we will or no. True, a handful fights manfully by our side and shares our cross, but the multitude of religionists leave us, as they left the Master 1800 years ago, to fight and agonise and die, as He did, so far as they care, in this struggle to win the world for God.

"There are excuses," some one will say, "for this standing aloof." Perhaps so. What are they? We boldly say that there is only one that can in any way be considered justifiable, and that is that The Army is not understood. Why, then, don't the neutrals come and see for themselves? Do you say they will come; but while they linger thousands are dying, and the grandest opportunity of the 19th century is being allowed to slip away only half dealt with. I repeat what I have said many times before, that I am certain that no man with a human heart in his bosom, that cares for the sorrows and sins of mankind, and who believes in Jesus Christ as a Savior from sin and sorrow, can rightly know The Salvation Army and not love it and do his uttermost to help it.

My comrades, I was intending in this letter to say that, however others may fail in this respect, there must be no shadow of neutrality with us. We must speak out and act in accordance with our speaking more plainly and desperately than ever against all manner of wickedness, and in self-sacrificing efforts to save souls. I wanted to urge this upon you, but my paper is full. Meanwhile, let us pray for the neutrals. God bless them.



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Leaving the question of their neutrality towards the Salvation Army, and through it to the perishing multitudes all around them, another question crops up: What will become of religious neutrals in the world to come?

Neutrality in the Judgment Day will be impossible. Character and condition will be open and avowed there before the eyes of the universe. Concealment of our relations to God and righteousness will be impracticable in front of the great White Throne.

There will be no neutrality in Heaven. No Salvationism will be too bold, or loud, or public in that land. Not only will everybody there take sides with the King, but be proud of it, and want a trumpet whose tones will fill the universe to acknowledge it.

Neutrality will be impossible in hell. All excuses and reasons for the concealment of the real feelings of men towards God and His people will have vanished there.

My comrades, thank God for the boldness which He has given to so many amongst us, in the confession of Him, and His Truth, and His people in this world.

May that boldness be increased, and the numbers of those who experience it be multiplied.

Believe me, yours out-and-out in the War,

WILLIAM BOOTH.

April 17th, 1885.

N.B. - The threatened war with Russia was averted. None of those who knew anything of the earnest, passionate, believing, and long-continued prayer which was made throughout the country in response to the General's appeal were surprised. Alike in great cities and in remote villages, in the great congregations and in many a tiny cottage-meeting, godly men and women poured out their souls before the King of kings, crying that the wrath of men might be restrained, the impending calamity prevented. - [Ed. *War Cry*.]