



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

MISERY-STRIPPERS

From the "War Cry," July 25th, 1885

MY DEAR COMRADES,

I commence my letter with the illustration which I used at Exeter Hall last Thursday evening. I said then that a member of Parliament in conversation with the Chief-of-Staff had been remarking how his heart was continually oppressed by a realization of the great sorrows of mankind; that a sense of the world's wretchedness was ever present with him, and that one leading reason why he loved the Salvation Army was that "*we stripped the people of their miseries.*"

I said then, and repeat it now, that I rather like this way of putting it, and that should our enemies wish to add another nickname to the almost countless number already given us, they might call us "Misery-strippers."

But, my comrades, the character of an article or an individual should answer to the term that describes it, and have we, as a people, any right to such a name. I think we have – nay, I am sure of it. Much has already been done to earn it among all classes and conditions of people.

The Salvation Army has, under God, removed far away from the hearts of many well-to-do people much misery, and brought much gladness in. In sending me the promise of £100 this last week, a gentleman writes that "although the amount is as much as he feels justified in promising just now, it does not represent in the least the large return of blessing that he and others of his family have received through The Army." If the well-to-do Christian people were to contribute to the needs of our movement anything proportionate to the happiness and joy it has brought them, we should have sufficient money to make at once an attack on many another portion of the world; but, alas! we may say in thousands of instances, "Were not ten cleansed; where are the nine?"

But, my comrades, it has been among the poor and the needy that the most marvellous triumphs in this Christ-like business of misery-stripping have been accomplished. In a letter last



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week in a local newspaper belonging to one of the large towns in the north of England, the writer says concerning that single Corps, "more than 900 homes have been made happy. More than 3,000 children are respectably dressed and fed who, if it had not been for The Salvation Army, would have been a nuisance to the town as well as to themselves."

Oh, if the crowds of desolate, friendless, hopeless people who have been stripped of their wretchedness in this War were marched out in line, what a procession that would be! If from every land and from the ships upon the sea, and from the Paradise above, there came forth the people whose miseries had been removed, whose lives had been changed, and whose blessedness had been secured, what an Army would stand forth! And if we could see them first as they used to be – with their miseries upon them; in their rags and poverty and hunger; with their hearts full of hatred and malice and murder, and their lives full of sin and vice and crime; with their mouths full of oaths and cursing and blasphemy; and then if by some marvellous transformation we could see them as they are today – clothed and in their right minds, filled with the peace that passeth all understanding, and rejoicing with the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, and given up to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ in the making of others as glad as they are themselves, what a sight that would be, my comrades !

But, thank God! it is all there; just as real and just as glorious, and just as wonderful an achievement in the way of misery-stripping accomplished by the power of God, through human means, as though we could see it right before our bodily eyes.

Something has been done then, my comrades, in the past to justify this name; but I want to know whether we can more extensively in the future succeed in the work of misery-stripping.

Is there any necessity for this business? Alas! alas! only too much. It seems to me that if the eye of benevolence would only look abroad over the earth, and keep on looking, the islands and continents and oceans of misery it would have to survey would be sufficient to make the heart of benevolence bleed to death.



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Take a glance, however. Look at the grinding slavery, the devastating famines, the bloody wars, the wholesale massacres and degraded savagery. Let the eye of pity look at home. Look at Christian England, with its drunkards and criminals, and the dense masses of people reduced to the extremest condition of poverty and vice. Take this London – this metropolis of civilization – as a sample city of the whole; with its 500,000 semi-paupers; its 60,000 families herded together in one room; its 50,000 harlots wandering about its streets, and all its other untold misery, both of the West End and of the East End, which these figures reveal.

Oh, my comrades, who can sum up the miseries of the rich and the miseries of the poor, the miseries of the men and the miseries of the women, the miseries of the children? What multitudes there are on whom the shadow of misery rests as soon as they come into the world, haunting them till they drop into a miserable grave! Oh, what Alpine mountains of misery are before us! And, my comrades, these miseries are but the black shadow projected from the eternal world, indicating the doleful, fathomless, shoreless miseries of that great ocean of misery which waits the lost in that world of despair.

My comrades, what a sphere of operations lies here before all who have any gift or capacity for this god-like employment of misery-stripping! What a challenge to the followers of Jesus Christ to gird up their loins and go in for this Divinely originated method of labour!

Here I want to ask a question which, day by day, presses heavily on my heart – more heavily, almost, let me say, than do the miseries of mankind themselves; “How is it possible for any child of God, who has the opportunity to choose the way in which he should spend his time – to fix his employment for this world – to select any other way than that of seeking to strip men of these miseries, and bring gladness to the heart of man?”

Think of any one calling himself a child of God – a disciple of Jesus Christ – my comrades, who, with these mountains of misery full in view, could deliberately choose to spend his time, talents, and means in making money, seeking pleasure, courting fame, lying on a bed of ease, or walking about among flowers, instead of devoting himself and all his energies to the task of



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moving some of this temporal and eternal misery from the crushed hearts, bleeding themselves to death at his very doors!

My comrades, they say that Nero – one of the most cruel emperors that ever lived – fiddled while Home was burning. If this were true, it was an infernal piece of heartlessness. But, after all, can such conduct be said to be very many degrees worse than is that of the men and women who are spending their strength in gathering gold, satisfying curiosity, sipping pleasure, studying science, or anything else for mere gratification, when they ought to be consecrating their every power to the work of extinguishing the flame of this mighty conflagration of misery that is burning all around them?

But, my comrades, why write I thus to you? You are surrendered. You have given your bodies living sacrifices to the task. Whatever your occupation is, you are working in it for God. You are misery-strippers. To you I say, "Go on!"

But there must be in our ranks large numbers who are now only just feeling their way to the great work of life, and giving themselves up to it. To these let me say a word on this subject.

One great appalling discouragement lies across the path which leads on to the field of these misery-stripping operations. It has a voice, and it speaks thus: "This mountain is so vast, so broad, so high, and the labour you can put into it so trifling! What can so feeble an individual as you accomplish in the face of such granite difficulties?" That is a grave discouragement, my comrades. I think sometimes that it is the choicest weapon the devil has for the choicest spirits in the King's Army. He attacks them with it at the onset, and haunts them with its shadow all the way through the campaign – the vastness of the mountain of misery, the feebleness of the agencies at work to reduce it, and the smallness of the results achieved.

This is a sorrowful suggestion, truly; and to it you must reply, my comrade, that you will do your duty whether the results be small or great. If fifty poor wretches were struggling in the sea all round your ship, and you could only rescue one, and that one was only a poor boy, you would



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find, I think, unspeakable consolation afterwards – first, in having done your duty; and secondly, in the boy you had saved.

A gentleman wrote me the other day from this valley of the shadow of despair. His complaint was that he had laboured night and day on Salvation Army lines for years in the town where he lived, and was only able to lay his hands on some fifty souls whom he believed were truly saved.

My comrades, I hardly think he did well to complain. A celebrated man once said with the approbation of the world who heard him, that "the man who made two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, was a public benefactor." Judged on this principle, what shall we say of this friend, and what ought he to say to himself, who, having saved fifty souls from hell, must have thereby covered a multitude of sins, and thereby done an immeasurable amount of misery-stripping?

But there is another answer that can be made to this discouraging insinuation, and that is that none of us can tell what results will in the long run be brought out of our efforts by Jehovah. How little that boy thought who went out into the wilderness with his five barley loaves and few small fishes that the Master was going to feed those thousands and thousands of people with them! Come along, my brother and my sister, into this wilderness; come out among these multitudes of hungry, famishing souls. You may be but a lad or a lass, and your worldly goods and powers, may be correctly pictured forth by those small loaves and fishes. But whatever you possess, get it into the Master's hands. *Get yourself there*. And, thank God, He can make a little go a long way.

Anyhow, set to work. If much cannot be done individually, the workers must be multiplied. But do get at the business. While you wait and argue and prepare, the victims writhe and suffer and die. Take a few hints, my comrades.

1. The great fundamental principle of the Salvation Army must be acted upon by all who would be successful *misery-strippers*. Deliverance from misery means deliverance from sin. Peter was



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right when he told the Jews that the way to be blessed was to be turned away from iniquity. You must insist upon that, and make it known that there is no other way.

2. To strip *others* of their misery you must be stripped *yourself*. If you are sad, except it be for the sins and sorrows of others, you will not make much headway in making others glad.

3. Misery-strippers must be sufferers. If glad inside, they must have plenty of sorrow outside. They can only reach the wretched by going through the Garden, and by the Cross.

My comrades, dearer to my heart day by day, as the days roll on; dearer because I am convinced that you are coming more clearly to apprehend and more fully and self-sacrificingly to give yourselves to this blessed Christ-like work of misery-stripping, in whatever part of the world you may be pushing forwards this godlike business, take from your General words of good cheer!

I feel in my soul as no words can describe how dark and discouraging the fight is with many of your dear, precious, struggling hearts. But hold on. Your work is not in vain. Not a single effort is lost sight of. Hold on in the dark – in anguish – in pain – in loneliness – in desertion – in the very face of death hold on, though you have to struggle as it were at the very mouth of hell. I am satisfied that God is going to work mightily for and with us. Have patience. HOLD ON.

Your General, glorying in being allowed to have a hand in stripping the world of its miseries,

WILLIAM BOOTH.
July 20th, 1885.