



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

WATCH!

From the "War Cry," December 20th, 1884

MY DEAR COMRADES,

When this letter falls into your hands, Christmas will be at hand. Although it will not bring with it the holiday-making, and festivity, and gaiety, and worldly excitement to you that it will to the unconverted, unchanged multitude around you, still to many Soldiers there will be a loosening of the ordinary routine of life, and a change of circumstances and surroundings that will make it very desirable that every care should be taken lest there should be any stepping over the line of separation from the world and the things of the world, or any slackening of the fall, whole-hearted surrender of the soul to the service of God, and of mankind. Suffer me, my comrades, to urge you to extra care in the hour of extra danger. Watch! Again I say unto you in the words of the Master – Watch!

At this Christmas time, when the whole Christian world ought to be with the wise men of the East at the feet of Him who, eight hundred years ago, came to live and die to save it, offering their wealth and their worship, or else kneeling at the feet of the unsaved part of it, and begging all to accept their King, it is given up to a carnival of gluttony, debauchery, and pleasure; to making this solemn occasion for the love of God and the service of man into an opportunity for the piling up of sin, the treasuring up of wrath, and the damnation of men. So are God's good gifts perverted; so are blessings turned to curses; so do men open wide the doors by which the ocean of the Divine fury may be invited to pour in upon them, and the holy, patient, long-suffering Spirit of God is driven from them far away.

An old writer says that sin and sadness drive the Holy Spirit away. It is no doubt true; for when we read that the Children of Israel were discouraged by reason of the difficulties of the way, we soon after read that they murmured, and that their murmurings so grieved God, that the fiery flying serpents were sent to punish them, by reason of which plague "much people" perished.



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But if sadness combined with sin quenches the Spirit of God, and opens the sluices of His indignation, what shall we say of sin and merriment? Oh, what a cry will go up this Christmas time! Oh, what sin there will be – what secret sin! What blaspheming! What open, shameless, barefaced iniquity will be perpetrated amidst the dances and shoutings, and music and laughter! Oh, in the ears of devils, and angels, and God, what a ghastly meaning – retrospective and prospective – there must be couched beneath the words, "A merry Christmas"!

But I am wandering. I started to write a caution, and I find myself led off into a condemnation. I must come back, and have just a plain word or two with you, my brother Soldiers, concerning the coming Christmas time.

With some of you this is your first Christmas in Christ. For the years gone by your Christmases have been Christless, but now Christ has come into your soul. He has been born again in your heart; the angels sang at His advent, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Love now reigns, and with love, joy and gladness. You love God, and God loves you back again; and you love men whether they love you back again or not: in a measure you live in Heaven, and Heaven lives in you.

I write to beg of you to take care of your Heaven. Oh, alas! alas! as thousands have proved, the heaven of loving God with all the heart, and the heaven such a love brings is more easily lost than found again. What multitudes there are today who say, with bitterness inexpressible,

"What rapturous hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill!"

I do not want you to lose the treasure, my comrades, of this unutterably sweet sense of God's favour; and therefore you must watch. The devil, as a roaring lion, still goes about seeking whom he may devour; and sometimes, and perhaps quite as often – in the Salvation Army at any rate – he goes about transformed into an angel of light. Look him up. There is no need for



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you to be deceived. If you walk obediently, you shall have the Holy Ghost; and if you have the Spirit – the *holy* anointing – you will be able to discern the spirits, whether they are good or evil, and you shall know the evil one, who he is, however he may come disguised. But this means trouble and care. It was while the husbandman was asleep that the devil sowed the tares and spoiled his crop, and gave him endless trouble. So keep awake, my brother, my sister; keep awake – wide awake – keep a strict look out! Watch!

Watch in times of known danger. You know the people who are most likely to influence you for evil, and you know the circumstances in which you are in the greatest danger of going astray. Watch when you are in those circumstances, and keep out of that company, except you go into it to do the people good. Anyhow, keep your eyes open when you are thrown with men and women, and in circumstances and amid surroundings where you are likely to be led astray.

Every Soldier knows what sin does most easily beset him. Don't trifle with that sin.

I believe in the Almighty power of God, not only to save but to keep, and I am sure that no temptation, as well as no affliction, can happen to you without God making a way to escape, so that you should be able to overcome it; nay, more, making it work together for your good.

But mind, it must happen to you lawfully. David prayed to be kept from presumptuous sins. I suppose he meant from walking recklessly and conceitedly into the jaws of temptation; believing that, should he thus willingly expose himself to the enemy, God would not come out of His way to prevent his being devoured.

Oh, what thousands have gone down into the jaws of destruction by such folly!

Beware! When the devil tempted the Lord Jesus to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple, presuming on the promised protection of His Father, Christ promptly told him that he was not to tempt the Lord his God, teaching us that though we may calculate on the protection of the Almighty in any and every danger that we may meet with in the path of duty, we must not expect it out of the path of obedience.



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If a man has been a drunkard, or an adulterer, or a devotee to pleasure of any kind, let him keep away from the people and the places where the temptation may rouse the appetites which, mastered, are learning to obey. Touch not, taste not, handle not. You shall be stronger by-and-by. "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). Meanwhile, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17,18).

And yet, my comrades, this Christmas time and all other times, while bestowing some care upon yourselves, you must be, not almost, but altogether, given up to taking care of other people. In saving others, I do not think there is much danger of losing yourselves.

So push on and push out in every direction. Go to the very mouth of Hell, if that be possible – and I believe it is possible – to rescue your former comrades in sin; the people with whom you have travelled far on the road to destruction.

Don't be afraid. Struggle with them. Display your ingenuity. Put your arms round them. Pull them out of the fire. Quench the burning brands in the Saviour's blood. But while loving their souls, you must hate their sins, and specially beware of the sin that does most easily beset you.

Farewell!

Yours faithfully in the War,

WILLIAM BOOTH.