

The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

COURAGE

From the "War Cry," May 23rd, 1885.

MY DEAR COMRADES,

I have been thinking about the difference existing amongst our Officers and Soldiers with respect to success. Some seem to go forward continually in the path of victory. They conquer themselves, they overcome the opposition of friends, they master the devil, and make enemies and circumstances alike bend and yield wherever they come. It would be very interesting to inquire as to the secret of the power which these conquerors appear to possess; and without going far, it is self-evident to all who observe them that courage, daring – that which is ordinarily called "pluck" is a very important element in this victorious character.

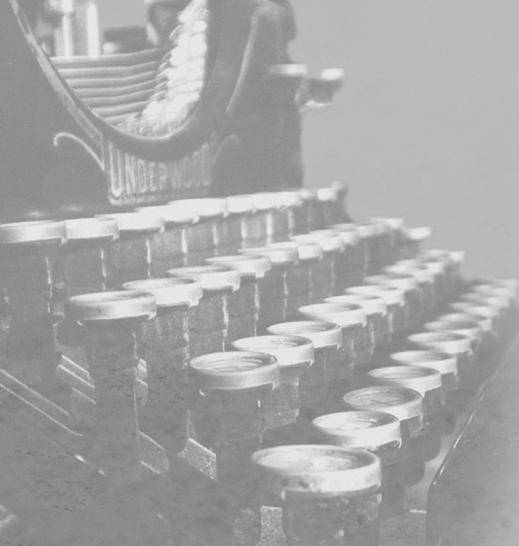
By "courage" I mean that quality which makes a man do the duty he sees before him, although the doing of it may be painful, and the consequences of doing it may be more painful still.

True courage is independent of argument. It does not need lectures or sermons to make it face danger in the performance of duty.

True courage does not think about self; it rises above self – tramples it beneath its feet. It does not even measure and inquire the value and worth of its object. Enough for it that there is duty to be done, difficulties to be overcome, burdens to be borne, and sufferings to be relieved; regardless of self, and in a measure regardless of its ability to accomplish the task it sets itself upon, it goes straight at it; "to do or die" – nay, "to do and die," if the doing cannot be done without dying – may be taken as its motto.

"That man is dying of a contagious fever!" Reckless of the risk, Courage goes to nurse him.

"That child is in the river!" Whose child it may be, Courage neither knows nor cares. Enough for it that it is a child, and though the water is deep and the current is strong, True Courage leaps to save.



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"That woman is in a burning building!" The firemen give her up; the stairs yield to the foot. True Courage, though it never saw her before, shuts its eyes to the risk, and its ears to the entreaties of those who would hold it back, and rushes into the blazing pile.

To save the besieged city True Courage, single and alone, mounts its camel, crosses the desert, and pours out its blood in the streets of Khartoum in the vain effort to rescue.

To say that courage is admired is a feeble expression. It is worshipped. Men write about it, medal it, reward it, nay, all but adore those who manifest any extraordinary measure of it. The ordinary run of men – rich and poor alike – governed by their own mean selfishness, demand to know before they make any sacrifice, what will be gained, or what will be lost – "Will it pay?" And feeling mean, as well they may, in their cold-blooded, cowardly selfishness, when they meet with the spirit that dares to risk itself in seeking any other end – whether good or evil – they fall down before it, and hang the representation of it upon their walls as a household god.

Now, my comrades, what a sphere does Christianity present for the display of this noble quality! And yet, perhaps, in proportion to its claims, there are few subjects that powerfully stir mankind, on which there is so little of it expended.

Heroism is, comparatively speaking, out of fashion here. In fact there is no call for it. The milk-and-water type of man, who neither creates enthusiasm nor rouses opposition, is a model leader of modern religion. Nothing is to be done that is contrary to the taste or liking of anybody else. The only mode of spreading Christianity which is acceptable and allowable is that which is agreeable to all concerned, and makes things pleasant to all around – saints and sinners alike.

What a contrast all this presents to the style of the first warriors of the Cross, and what one would imagine was required to subdue a rebel world to God! If there is such a thing as valour, or bravery, or daring, surely it is wanted in this great struggle; nay, it is impossible to carry on the war victoriously without it.



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We want a courage that will acknowledge Christ – the Christ of the New Testament – the Christ that was down upon shams and hypocrisies, and luxuries and selfishness; the Christ of the Cross – the Christ who is coming again to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. We want a courage that will look the world – that hates Him still, and would crucify Him again – in the face, and say fearlessly, “I am on His side, and I glory in it, and I will make you come over to Him if I can.”

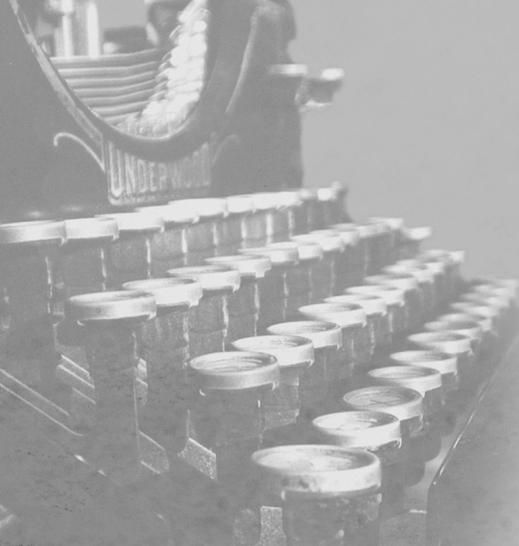
We want a courage that will confess Salvation when there is any to confess. If God has spoken to a soul, if He has given an inspiration, a forgiveness, an adoption, an inheritance, surely that is cowardice that would keep that soul from telling it forth for the benefit of the impoverished world about him. If in your secret heart, my comrade, God has put any good thing, the knowledge of which may stimulate the desire of others, get on the housetop and tell it to the world.

We want courage to denounce iniquity, to call things by their right names. Having convictions of right and wrong, let us plainly tell them forth, whether we please or whether we displease. We will not do it in order to create pain, but surely if God has shown us right from wrong, we should imitate Him and show it to others.

We want the courage to warn the people of the wrath and ruin that are coming upon all evil-doers. We know that in our houses, and streets, and towns, the people are on their way to be damned – going at express speed to the left hand of the bar of God. Why don't we make them understand it? Why don't we say it plainly, and repeat it, and repeat it, and repeat it again, until they say it to themselves, and wake up their slumbering souls and escape for their lives?

In short, my comrades, we want the courage of our convictions. We want pluck and daring that cannot be abashed; that can stand up against the influence of a world in arms, face public opinion, and risk everything to gain our holy ends.

We have a measure of this courage. Let us seek more. It is, no doubt, the gift of God. Physical courage, the bull-dog ferocity that distinguishes men from their fellows as being peculiarly



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courageous is often a physical thing born in a man, concerning which he has no choice, and for which he really deserves no credit, either with God or man. But this courage, which is of a far higher order, and leading to far more glorious ends, is often realized and manifested by naturally delicate, timid souls – men and women who by nature would shrink from danger, but who by grace can face with unflinching calmness men and devils leagued in furious opposition.

There is plenty of this God-given quality in the Divine storehouse, my comrades. God gives it abundantly to those who seek. Brows of brass are in the promise. Marvellous examples are before us. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and cry to God to multiply such heroes. We want many things, but such fearless, daring souls are needed most of all.

Courage, my comrades, pluck – daring – heroism, or whatever name this spirit may be known by, isn't only a gift, but a growth: Cultivate it. You will be astonished how it comes by practice. Commence the exercise by doing the most unpleasant duty that lies the nearest you. If you have not done so, put on the uniform. Go and stand in the ring. Ask to be allowed to carry the colours in the march. Stand in your street and cry out that the Judgment Day is coming. Talk to your neighbour about being ready to die. Do something that will look like what we have sung so much about. Stand up for God, and the spirit of the ancient prophets and the holy martyrs will come upon you and grow within you, and men will mention your name when they want to encourage their timid comrades and train their children to fight for the living God.

Your affectionate General,

WILLIAM BOOTH
May 18th, 1885.