

The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

BACKSLIDERS II

From "War Cry," January 17th, 1885.

MY DEAR COMRADES,

Late one Sunday evening, soon after my own conversion, when but a lad of fifteen, I was passing a little chapel. Attracted by the sound of singing, I entered. The public service had closed and the prayer meeting had been concluded, but a group still lingered under the gallery. A backslider was on his knees. His comrades would not let him go nor give God up, and they were singing –

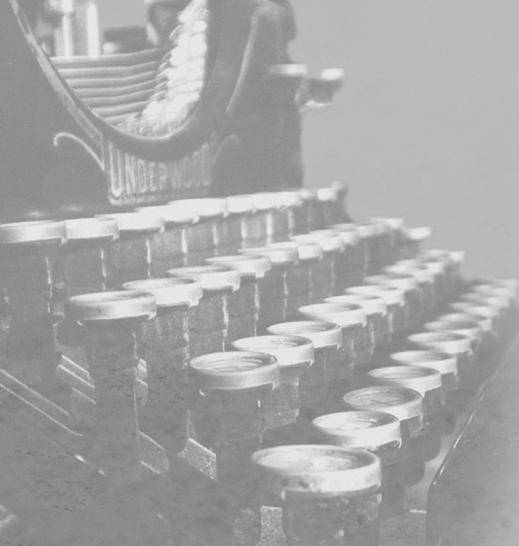
"Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
That drove Thee from my breast."

Over and over again the last lines were repeated. The tune was, "Auld Lang Syne." The backslider wept and prayed, and then the next verse was sung louder than ever –

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

On, on we all went – for we late comers had joined the band – and ultimately prayer and faith triumphed, and the backslider went free.

Forty years have passed since then, and over thousands of backsliders I have sung that or similar songs, and offered similar prayers, and seen similar restorations; and in 1885 I want the whole Salvation Army to take up the task and seek to bring home to the hearts and consciences of backsliders the guilt of leaving the Lord, trampling on His Blood, and get them to hasten home – not only for reconciliation, but to take part with us in this great War for the deliverance of the race.



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I promised in my last to say something in this letter one of the best methods of doing this. I can give little more of the race.

First. *Let those whose hearts are moved in this direction take the thing up as a definite duty.* Find out those who will join you. Tell your Captain how you feel, if you are not a Captain: if you are one, tell your Corps how you feel. Let others whose blood is fired and whose hearts are melted after the same fashion join hands with you. Make a Mount Carmel of some anteroom, or Barracks, or kitchen, and offer yourself up as a sacrifice, body, soul, and spirit, and believe and wait until you receive the holy Fire.

Second. Then go out, as we said in our last, into the wilderness and find the lost sheep. *Make a record of them.* Search the Rolls. Make an inquiry among the Soldiers. Go where they are. Call for them early and late. Bring them to the meetings. If they won't come, pray for them where they are. If they won't kneel and weep for them till they do. If they won't confess, confess for them until they confess for themselves. Tell God in private and in public how they have dishonoured His Name and disgraced His cause and made souls stumble over them into Hell. Keep on doing it, and you will soon have them at the mercy-seat crying,

"By all Thou hast done for my sake,
One drop of Thy Blood I implore;
Now, now let it touch me, and make
The sinner a sinner no more."

Third. *Have patience with them.* Perhaps no class of sinners under Heaven require more forbearance than do backsliders. We feel that they ought to come at the first call; rush to the mercy seat at the first invitation, accept Salvation at the first offer. Instead of that they often seem more reluctant and stupid than other sinners who know nothing about mercy. Is it not to be wondered at that they are so ignorant? But we have only to remember that the light that was in them has become darkness, and that the Master said in such a case, "How great is that darkness!" Backsliders will often be awfully hard. They have lost the heart of flesh, and they



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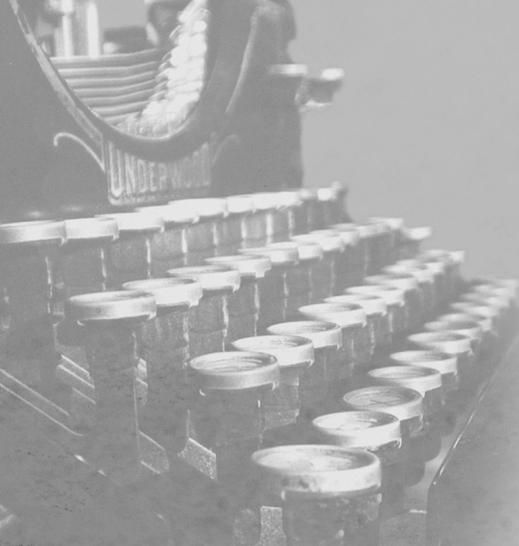
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have got the stony heart back again: the heart of stone that neither weeps nor feels at the story of the Cross or for the sorrows and perils of their own poor souls.

Fourth. *Backsliders need to be dealt with in great tenderness.* They know by experience what the spirit of Christianity is, and though all the love of God and the love of man may have gone from their hearts, the memory of it is still there, and they will be quick to perceive either its presence or its absence in those dealing with them. As a rule I should think that arguments showing the folly of such a sinful life, or the blessedness of a Divine one, are comparatively thrown away on backsliders. They know all about it as well as their teachers. There are very few of them that are really happy, no matter how they may whirl about in pleasure or be absorbed in worldly scheming and dreaming. And they know that the future is to them so black and doleful that they dare not look at it. They will admit all this. No one knows it better. Consequently, they can stand before miles of this sort of talk. I fancy sometimes it only hardens them. But when hearts full of love, and eyes full of tears, and lips that express real honest pity come across their path, the ice will thaw, their hearts will melt, love will creep in, and Christ will conquer.

Fifth. *In dealing with backsliders there must be clean hands.* Perhaps no class of sinners are more apt to justify themselves in their rebellion against God by pleading the inconsistency of those who profess to be His servants than this. It is of very little use those approaching them on the subject whose lives are not in harmony with their creed. At the same time, I don't see how any backslider could stand before the persistent efforts of a holy man – a real saint. I suppose this would be very largely applicable to all classes of sinners. No doubt all that I am saying in this letter would, but there is a sense in which it is especially applicable to backsliders.

Sixth. In dealing with this class *it should always be borne in mind that they are especially in danger of desponding* with respect to the possibility of their own restoration. They failed before. The devil tells them they will fail again, and they are tempted to wait for some circumstances that they fancy will be more favourable. You must beat them out of all this. Make them see that their backsliding is the result of their wickedness, not their misfortune; that a fuller consecration will bring more power. Drive them up to trying again.



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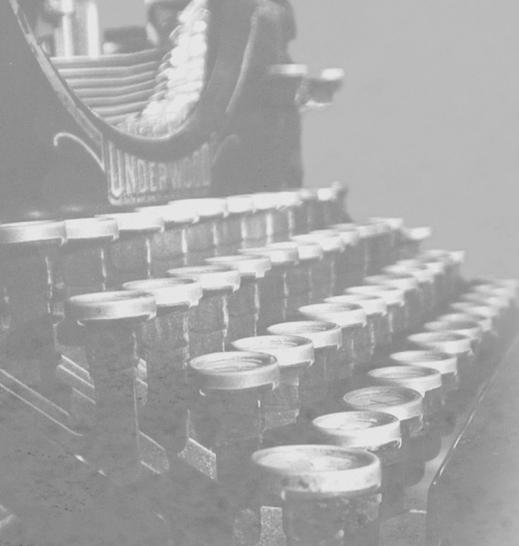
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Happy enthusiasm is often very powerful with back-sliders. The happiness of saints reminds them of happy days gone by, brings back the memory of the blessedness they once enjoyed. They see what they have lost, and long for it to be restored. At such times, if determined attacks are made, they are very likely to succeed. I have found in multitudes of instances, at the tail-end of meetings, when all the saints have been rejoicing over the sinners that have been saved, that backsliders who have stood out so far against all the powerful influence of the meeting have given up and come out, broken down, to the mercy-seat. Holy joy is a mighty power in dealing with backsliders.

Seventh. In dealing with this class you must always remember *what vast numbers there are who pass for backsliders, but who have never been regenerated*, – never really known the power and joy of a real Salvation. Find this out on your first attack. If they have never been properly saved, you have a mighty plea to urge on them. You can then show them that they fell because they were trying to keep the holy laws of God with unholy hearts, and show them that if they get properly saved they will have a power they never had before to fight the world, overcome the flesh, and resist the devil.

Eighth. *Backsliders are often open to feel the importance of the example they are setting to those about them.* I have often broken a father's heart by showing him that he has been leading his children direct to Hell. A mother who has once loved God and loved soul can be pierced to the quick with the thought, urged lovingly and forcibly upon her, that she is making a straight track for her children's feet down to perdition. Set before a man who knows that he has been reckoned a saint in his neighbourhood that he is now influencing those same people against Christ and in favour of their damnation, and I don't see how he can ever be happy any more till he gets converted and comes out before them in his old character. Drive this in upon backsliders.

Ninth. *You can always assume that backsliders know all you say to be God Almighty's solemn truth.* Never argue or quibble with them. Never hear a backslider bring his infidel arguments



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out. If he begins to spread them before you, tell him plainly to his face that he knows they are all rubbish and twaddle, and that there is nobody in his parish who knows it better than he does. Infidelity – with backsliders at any rate – is a thing of the head rather than the heart. We can hardly allow that with them it is a thing even of the head.

Tenth. In dealing with backslider's, *you can always be encouraged by the thought that when they are restored, they may make most valuable Soldiers.* Some of the noblest saints God has ever had have been restored wanderers.

Eleventh. Again, in following backsliders, *let all Soldiers encourage themselves that they are doing a work which is especially pleasing to God.* Had we not the assurance I referred to in my last letter, and statements to the same effect, of which there are a great number in the Bible, we should know that God must care more for those who have once loved Him, and whom He once called His own, than for strangers.

Can any of us lose anything or any being that we specially value and not want to have restored to us that special treasure? If a mother loses a child, though she may afterwards possess many more children, all through her life she wonders where that wanderer is gone, and longs to have him once more restored to her heart. We are made in the image of God. He has lost His children. He sent His Son to seek them. He wants us to take up the search. He is willing to save the Gentile among the nations, but no one can question that He would be specially pleased to save the Jew. He is no respecter of persons. Any sinner is welcome to his fold But He specially longs and is specially pleased to receive again the poor backslider. Let us go and fetch him to his Father and his Father's house. Let us compel him to come home.

Set yourselves, my comrades, to the business, and your own instincts, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost, will make you successful in carrying it out.

Believe me,
Yours for the Salvation of the lost,
WILLIAM BOOTH.