



The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

"THEORETICAL RELIGION" – No. 2

WHO CARES?

From the "War Cry," June 20th, 1885.

MY DEAR COMRADES,

I must have another word on this topic. I concluded my last week's letter, you will remember, with the statement of some startling fads relative to the woe-begone condition of the people round about us, and by asking the question of the Christian world, and of you, my comrades of the Salvation Army – "Who cares?"

You have seen the question. Thousands of you have read and answered it. I am sure you have. I feel as though I had heard the response coming back from 100,000 hearts, like the sound of many waters,

"WE CARE!"

But, my comrades, is your care practical? Is it *sufficiently* practical? What comes of it? What is it going to make you do in the future?

Excuse me (I am sure you will), but I am tempted to doubt; I cannot help it. The religious atmosphere is so peopled with unrealities – with crowds whose words and prayers and hymns are so blankly and indecently contradicted by their lives, that just now I am all but afraid to believe anybody, even the Soldiers of the Salvation Army. I am tempted to doubt myself, so forgive me for pushing the question, and asking with respect even to the response of sympathy which has broken from your hearts – "What will come of it?"

Something must be done – more definite and determined, more desperate and divine, than anything hither to. Cannot we get within measurable distance of the example of our Master! - which is only saying in other words, cannot we reach a devotion that will truthfully answer to what we profess to believe about these perishing multitudes?



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Here, my comrades, there rises to my view a vision which came to my soul a few days ago when musing on this question, and which I cannot refrain from telling you.

I thought I saw a dark and stormy ocean. Over it the black clouds hung heavily, through which every now and then loud thunders rolled, and vivid lightnings flashed; and the winds moaned, and the waves rose and foamed and fretted and broke, and rose to foam and fret and break again.

In that ocean I thought I saw myriads of poor human beings plunging and floating and shouting and shrieking and cursing and struggling and drowning, and as they cursed and shrieked, they rose and shrieked they rose, and sank to rise no more.

And out of this dark angry ocean I saw a mighty rock rise up above the black clouds that overhung the stormy sea; and all round the base of this rock I saw a vast platform; and up on to this platform I saw with delight a number of the poor, struggling, drowning wretches continually climbing out of the angry ocean; and I saw that a number of those who were already safe on the platform helped these to reach the same place of safety.

On looking more particularly I found a number of those who had been rescued scheming and contriving by ladders and ropes and boats to deliver the poor stragglers out of this sea. Here and there were some who actually jumped in, regardless of all consequences, in their eagerness to save; and I hardly know which gladdened me most – the seeing of the poor people climb the rocks and reach the place of safety, or the devotion and self-sacrifice of those who only seemed to live to save them.

And as I looked I saw that the occupants of that platform were quite a mixed company. That is, they divided themselves into different sets, and were employed in quite different ways; but there were only a very few, comparatively, who seemed to make a business of getting the people out of the sea.



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THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

What puzzled me very much about the former was to observe that though all had been rescued at one time or another, from the ocean, nearly every one seemed to have forgotten all about it. Anyway, the memory of its darkness and danger no longer afflicted them; and what was equally strange and perplexing to me was that these people did not seem to have any care – that is any agonizing care – about the poor perishing ones who were struggling and drowning close by, many of whom were their own husbands and wives and mothers and sisters and children.

And this unconcern could not have been because they were ignorant of what was going on, because they lived right in sight of it all, and talked about it sometimes, and regularly went to hear lectures which described the awful state of things.

I have already said that the occupants of this platform were engaged in different pursuits.

Some were absorbed night and day in trading in order to make gain and store up their savings in boxes and by other means.

Many spent their time in amusing themselves with growing flowers on the side of the rock; others in painting pieces of cloth, or in performing music, or in dressing themselves up in different ways and walking about to be admired.

Some occupied themselves very much in eating and drinking, and others were greatly taken up with arguing about the poor drowning creatures in the sea, and what would become of them, or in going through rounds of curious religious ceremonies.

Some found a passage up the rock leading to a higher platform still, which was fairly above the black clouds that overhung the ocean, and from which they had a good view of the mainland, which was not very far away, and to which they expected to be taken off at some distant day. Here they passed their time in pleasant thoughts, congratulating themselves and each other on their good luck in being rescued from the stormy deep, and singing songs about the



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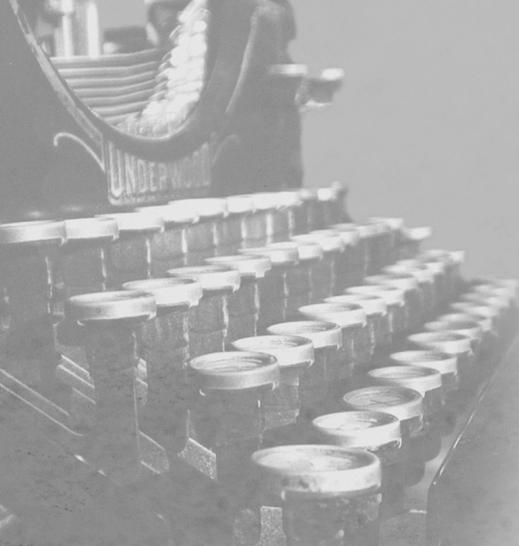
happiness they were to enjoy when they should be taken to the mainland that they imagined they could see just "over there."

And all this time the struggling, shrieking multitudes were floating about in the dark sea, quite nearby – quite near enough to have been pulled out; instead of which there they were, right in full view, perishing, not only one by one, but sinking down in shoals, every day in the dark and angry sea.

And as I looked, I found that the handful whom I had observed before oh, God! how I wished there had been a multitude of them! were still struggling with their rescue work. Indeed they seemed to do little else but fret and cry and toil and scheme for the perishing people. They gave themselves no rest, and sadly bothered everybody they could get at around them. In fact, they came to be voted a real nuisance by many quite benevolent and kind hearted people, and many who were very religious too. But still they went on; spending all they had and all they could get, in boats and rafts and drags and ropes, and every other imaginable thing they could invent for saving the poor, wretched, drowning people.

A few others did much the same at times, working hard in their way; but these people who attracted my attention made such a terrible business of it, and went at it with such fierceness and fury, that many even of those who were doing the same kind of thing were quite angry with them, and called them mad.

And then I saw something more wonderful still. I thought that the miseries and agonies and perils and blasphemies of these poor struggling people in this dark sea moved the pity of the great God in Heaven; moved it so much that He sent a Great Being to deliver them. And I thought that this Great Being whom Jehovah sent came straight from His Palace, right through the black clouds, and leaped right into the raging sea among the drowning, sinking people, and there I saw Him toiling to rescue them, with tears and cries, until the sweat of His great anguish ran down in Blood. And as He toiled and embraced the poor wretches, and tried to lift them on to the rock, He cried out continually to those already rescued – to those whom He had



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THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

helped up with His own bleeding hands – to come and help Him in the painful and laborious task.

And what seemed to me most passing strange was that those on the platform to whom He called, who heard His voice and felt they ought to obey it – at least, they said they did – those who loved Him much and wore in full sympathy with Him in the task He had undertaken – who worshipped Him, or professed to do – I saw that these were so taken up with their trades and professions and money-saving and pleasure and families and circles and religion and arguments about it, and preparations for going to the mainland, that they did not attend to the cry that came to them from Him out of the ocean. If they heard it they did not heed it. They did not care, and so the multitude went on struggling and shrieking and drowning in their darkness and anguish.

And then I thought I saw something that seemed to me the strangest of all that I saw in this strange vision. I saw that some of these people on the platform whom this wonderful Being wanted to come and help Him, heedless of His cries to them, were always praying and crying to Him to come to them.

Some wanted Him to come and stay with them and spend His time and strength in making them happier.

Others wanted Him to come and take away various doubts and misgivings they had respecting the truth of some letters which He had written them.

Some wanted Him to come and make them feel more secure on the rock – so secure that they would be quite sure they should never slip off again; while numbers of others wanted Him to make them feel quite certain that they would really get on to the mainland some day, because, as a matter of fact, it was well known that some had walked so carelessly as to miss their footing, and had got back into the stormy waters.



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THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

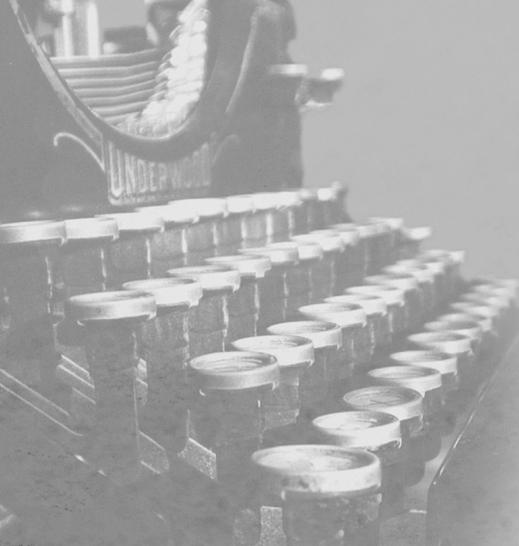
So these people used to meet and get as high up the rock as they could, and looking towards the mainland, where they thought the Great Being was, they would cry out, "Come to us! Come and help us!" And all this time He was down among the poor struggling, drowning creatures in the angry deep, with His arms around them, trying to drag them out, and looking up – oh, so longingly, but all in vain – to those on the rock, crying to them with His voice all hoarse with calling, "Come to Me! COME AND HELP ME!"

And then I understood it all. It was plain enough. That sea was the ocean of life – the sea of real, actual, human existence. That lightning was the gleaming of piercing truth coming from Jehovah's Throne. That thunder was the distant echoing of the wrath of God. Those multitudes of people shrieking, struggling, agonising in that stormy sea, were the thousands and thousands and thousands of poor harlots and harlot-makers, of drunkards and drunkard-makers, of thieves and liars, and blasphemers and ungodly people of every kindred and nation and tongue.

Oh, what a black sea is there! and, oh, what multitudes of rich and poor, ignorant and educated, and yet all alike in one thing – all sinners before God, held by, and holding on to, some iniquity, fascinated by some idol, the slaves to some devilish lust, and ruled by some fiend from the bottomless pit!

"All alike in one thing"? Nay, in two things – not only the same in their wickedness, but unless rescued, alike in their sinking, sinking, sinking, down, down, down to the same Hell.

And that great sheltering rock was Calvary, and the people on it were those who had been rescued, and the way they employed their energies and gifts and time set forth the occupations of those who profess to be rescued from sin and hell, and to be the servants of God. And the handful of fierce, determined saviours were Salvation Soldiers, and a few others who shared the same spirit. And that mighty Being was the Son of God, "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever," who is still struggling to save the dying multitudes about us from the terrible doom of damnation, and whose voice can be heard above the music and machinery and hue-and-cry of life calling on the rescued to come and help Him to save the world.



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My comrades, you are rescued from the waters; you are on the rock. He is in the dark sea, calling on you to come to Him and help Him. Will you go?

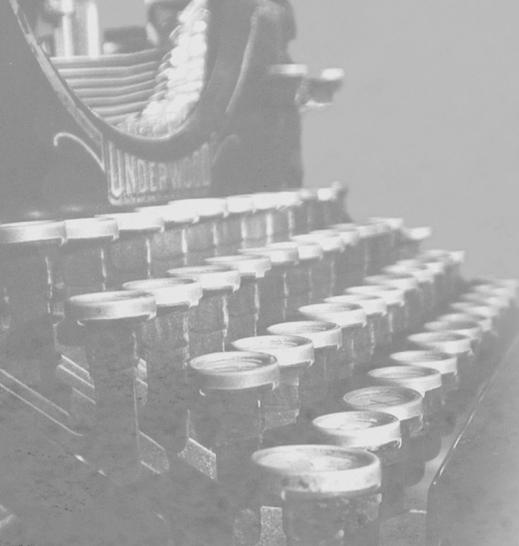
Look for yourselves. The surging sea of perishing souls rolls up to the very spot on which you stand. This is no vision or imagination I speak of now. It is as real as the Bible; as real as the Christ who hung upon the Cross! as real as the Judgment Day will be, and as real as the Heaven and Hell that will follow it.

Look! Don't be deluded by appearances – men and things are not what they seem. My vision was only a fiction, but the reality is far more harrowing than any fiction can possibly be. All who are not on the Rock are in the Sea. Look at them from the standpoint of the Great White Throne, and what a sight you have! That is matter of fact enough, and it is also matter of fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is in the midst of this dying multitude, struggling to save them. And it is also matter of fact that He is calling on YOU to jump into the sea – to go right away to His side and help Him in the struggle.

Will you jump? That is, my comrades, will you go to His feet, and place yourself absolutely at His disposal?

A Soldier came to me the other day, saying that for some time she had been giving Him profession and prayers and money, and now she wanted to give Him her body. She wanted to go right into the fight. In other words, she wanted to jump. As when a man from the bank sees another struggling in the water, lays aside those outer garments that would hinder his efforts, and jumps in to the rescue; so will you who still linger on the bank thinking and singing and praying about the poor struggling souls, lay aside your shame, your pride, your care about other people's opinions, your love of ease and all the selfish loves that have hindered you so long, and jump to the rescue of this multitude of dying souls.

Does the surging sea look dark and dangerous? Unquestionably it is so. There is no doubt that the leap, for you as for every one who takes it, means distress and scorn and suffering. For you



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it may mean more than this. It may mean death. He who calls to you from the sea, however, knows what it will mean; and knowing it, He still beckons you and bids you come.

You must do it. You cannot hold back. You have enjoyed yourself in religion long enough. You have had pleasant feelings, pleasant songs, pleasant meetings, pleasant prospects. There has been much of human happiness, much clapping of hands and firing of volleys – very much of Heaven on earth.

Now, then, go to God, and tell Him you are prepared to turn your back upon it all, and that you are willing to spend the rest of your days grappling with these perishing multitudes.

You MUST do it. You must go down among the perishing crowds. Your happiness now consists in sharing their misery; your ease in sharing their pain; your crown in bearing their cross; and your heaven in going to the very jaws of hell to rescue them.

I say no more; but yet I will speak again more particularly how this rescue business can be carried on, but must wait till next week.

Your affectionate General,

WILLIAM BOOTH.
June 15th, 1885.