

The
William Booth
Collection

THE GENERAL'S LETTERS

CHRISTIAN FATALISM

From the "War Cry," June 6th, 1885

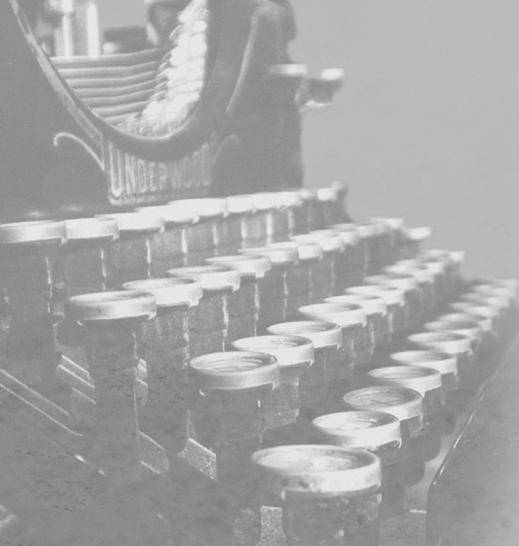
My DEAR COMRADES,

I have been thinking lately about the opinion which many Christian people seem to entertain that the existing condition of things, religiously, is according to the will of God, and that it cannot be altered or improved without the Divine interference, and that God does not interfere because He does not care much to have things different. This is "fatalism," and leaves the responsibility of the sin, and vice, and misery of mankind entirely with God. Wherever this spirit prevails, it must clip the wings of that energy so much needed in Salvation warfare. I fear lest any of you, my comrades, should catch this infection, and not only be thereby daunted in the discharge of our self-sacrificing duties, but excuse yourselves with the deceitful notion I have just mentioned.

Fatalism, as most of my comrades know, is one of the distinctive features of Mahomedanism, and, more or less, of every Asiatic religion. This has taught that every event in human life was an arrangement of the Providence of God, that whatever happened might be taken therefore as an expression of the Divine will, was consequently unavoidable, and that to fight against it was neither more nor less than flying in the face of the Almighty.

Now, while most Christians would deny this fatalism – this doctrine that teaches that whatever is to be, will be – in relation to the events of every day life, they would justify their conduct towards a dying world by the notion that the spiritual relations and rebellions and iniquities of man cannot be altered, that they must wait God's time and interference before anything remarkable can be done to improve things.

Now this doctrine that God has His own way in this world is one which I totally deny, as you will not need me to tell you. It may be true of hell, where God will no longer oppose the progress of evil; where sin, and the misery that ever follows in its train, will be permitted to have their own way. He will allow it to be so. He will not interfere. The Holy Ghost will no longer strive or oppose. Evil will reign supreme.



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God will have His own way in Heaven, where every orce-human, angelic, and divine will be godlike and pure and true. Whatever happens will be, nay, must be, the will of God, expressive of His pleasure, and therefore must be good.

But this cannot be true of earth, where, without controversy, active, voluntary agents fight against God – oppose His decrees and willingly and directly work poverty, crime, vice, misery, death, and perdition, and resolutely refuse to be turned away from the work they set themselves to do.

Nothing is more common than for God to be defeated. The devil conquers and reigns. In fact, a man must be absolutely spiritually blind who does not see that the devil is indeed and of a truth the Prince of this world. Don't we see every day – nay, every hour – how he and his servants plunder the poor, seduce the virtuous, deprave the little children, draw the righteous away from God, and in ten thousand forms pour their vile, burning, cruel, damnable lava of depravity and iniquity over the world?

No one can say that the Lord's will is done in this world. The contrary is evident to every eye. All Christians know what that will is, and yet this fatalism that we are describing not only assents to this hellish condition of things as a necessity, but with pious talk indirectly attributes all this to God, and makes it out to be a species of impiety to think otherwise, and regards it as showing wicked impatience to be restlessly fighting and resisting it with all possible might.

There is some difference, perhaps, between the Asiatic and Christian fatalism. By the former, unavoidable evils in temporal things are accepted. Men and women resign themselves to famine, poverty, plague, and death, these things being considered as messengers from God; whereas Christians will fight these evils, and move Heaven and earth in the attempt to avert them. But ask these same Christians to oppose spiritual evil and destruction in the same way, and they will feel and act quite differently. Thousands who would stand up and FIGHT A FEVER AMONGST THEIR CATTLE, scouting the idea that it was of God, routing out every cesspool and hot-bed of the disease, localising the malady, and stamping it out of existence, if asked to



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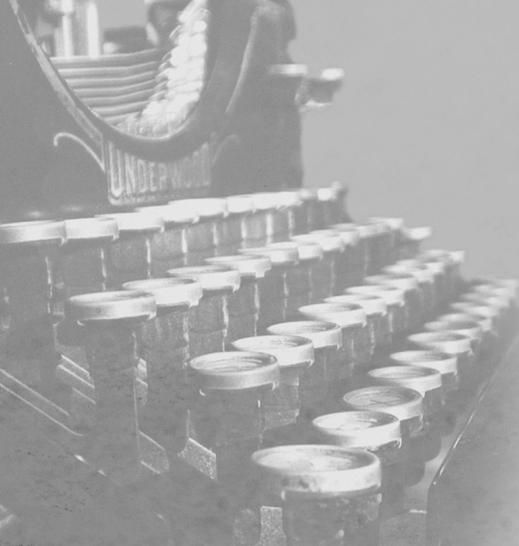
fight the deadly contagion of sin, to shut up the public houses, close the brothels, shield the little children, and use all means taught in the Bible, and suggested by the Holy Ghost, to clear the neighbourhood of sin, would be shocked at the very idea.

If they don't say that whatever is, is right in the way of iniquity, they will say practically, "What is must be. We must wait till God prepares the way, and opens the door." And when you push them up to doing something desperate and to keep on doing it till they have conquered, going through floods of opposition and difficulties in the fight, they will look upon you as fighting against Providence, and attempting the impossible.

My comrades, most of the existing conditions in the social, moral, political, and religious state of things are wrong and of the devil. God says so. The carnal mind – which is, without controversy, the mind of the majority – is at enmity with God. He is truth. The world crucified the Truth when He came in human form, and is ready and willing to crucify Him wherever He is represented. Let us acknowledge this and let us cease to say in any shape or form that the will of God is being done, except where men and women are being made right and good and holy. And more than this, where those who have been thus made right are not spending their whole strength in making other people right.

When we see a soul saved, let us recognise it as a victory on the part of God as far as that one soul goes; but if there is nobody saved, do not let us say in sanctimonious phraseology, that the Lord's will has been done and that things are all right.

If we cannot get money to carry on the War, or men to fight and die for Jesus Christ, or people who will be true to the Corps when they have enrolled themselves in the ranks and marched under the colours, do not let us say that it is not the Lord's will that we should have the money or find the men, or keep the Soldiers right and good. That is, if we fail in anything, it is not for us to say that our failure proves the Lord's will. It may just prove the contrary. God's will is always, and everywhere, that sin should be destroyed, that devils should be sent back to hell, and that all men should be saved. If we fail through the unfaithfulness of those about us, let us admit it, and that our failure is of the devil, and go to work and get things altered and mended.



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A good general in any human war would not say in an hour of defeat, "Providence is against me; this cowardice of my troops, or these unexpected manoeuvres of the enemy, or this breakdown in my supplies, proves that it is the Lord's will that the foe should be victorious, and take possession of these forts and cover our arms and country with disgrace. It is of no use my trying again. I will resign my commission and go home to my grateful country! "

No! ten thousand times no! Any general with a proper spirit – such a spirit as his grateful country would approve – would, while acknowledging – to himself, at least – his defeat to the fullest extent, at the same time start up with renewed energy, spend the night over his maps, make new plans, renew the fight again and again so long as he had a man to fight or a gun to fire, until he either conquered the enemy or lost the power to contend.

Just so with God's true generals and soldiers. Instead of excusing the losses they have had to suffer, by making them out to be part of the plan of God, they will admit the too evident truth that God has again been defeated by the devil as He was in Eden and in Palestine, and as He has been too often since. But such a general will encourage himself in the assurance that, nevertheless, God is with him, and that victory must in the long run be on his side; anyway, he will fight on while the power of fighting is left.

My comrades, if we conquer it is through the power of the great Jehovah, and if we are defeated it is in company with Him; moreover, defeat must, in the very nature of things, be only temporary. Our hope, our strength, our everything is in keeping on fighting. Yours in for victory,

WILLIAM BOOTH.
June 1st, 1885.