

CHAPTER 1: Courtship

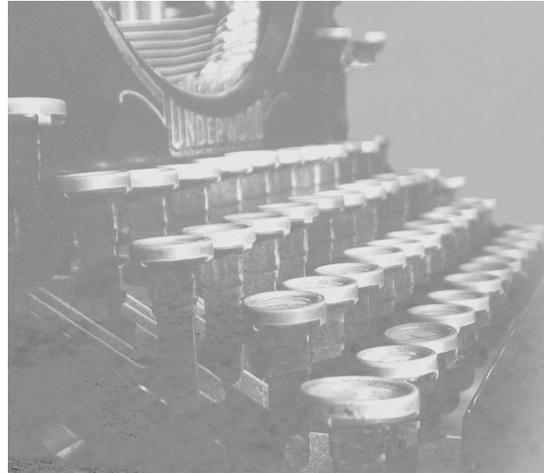
My Dear Comrades,

The topic of this Letter is admitted, on all hands to be an important and interesting one. I trust that you will agree with me in the propriety of its being considered under the head of "Religion for Every Day."

The Salvation Army must ever include among its Soldiers and adherents a large proportion of young people. It is, in fact, a great satisfaction to me that ours is a religion which attracts the young; and attracts them not by the gymnasium and the bicycle club and the sing-song, but by the joy and gladness of the service of Christ. Many of these young folks are unmarried, and many more are quite free from all engagements which look in that direction. It must, therefore, be very important that right views of Marriage, and of the steps which lead up to it should be entertained by them, while anyone can see how desirable it is that those Soldiers who are already married should be able rightly to instruct their children on the subject.

My ability to give counsel on the topic of Courtship will be admitted, by my own people, at least, and it is for them and their welfare that I am most concerned. My qualifications for giving advice are based:

1. On personal experience, which is, after all, in this matter, the safest teacher. I wasted some of my early days in trifling with this subject. In my sixteenth year, however, the Spirit of Divine Wisdom came into my heart, and certainly served me well, if in nothing else than in keeping me from the further evils to which such foolish conduct might so easily have led me.
2. While I learned something from the foolish Courtship, I was also privileged to have the experience of what might be truly termed a wise one. My Engagement with my dear Wife extended over three years; and the way in which she conducted herself in that intercourse was so pure and so beautiful as to give her a high place in my esteem and confidence as a Woman of God. She dealt with me, I must confess, as one who



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

was inspired; and, blessed as I was in those days, I can now see how much more profit and happiness I might have realised during that communion, had I played my own part more wisely.

3. Then, also, I have had considerable opportunities for observation, and have been consulted by many individuals, both old and young, on the subject, and this not only in virtue of my age, but of the prominent position I have been called to occupy.

During this time I have watched many young people make plenteous misery for those connected with them, spoil their own lives, and sacrifice possibilities of great usefulness by foolish or unsanctified Engagements. If the backsliders of the land, who have made shipwreck of faith by early, irregular, or Christ-less Courtships, were counted, I am convinced that the total would be a terrible figure. On the other hand, I have known many men and women whose holiness of character has been established, and whose opportunities for usefulness have been greatly increased, by wise and helpful Engagements. From my own experience and observation, therefore, I think I may claim to be able to advise my young Comrades on this subject.

In the first place, the question is very frequently decided before counsel is solicited; and even when the actual decision has not been made, the affections have become so far involved as to make advice practically useless. Perhaps, on no other matter do people so readily confound their feelings with their judgment; and we all know how very common it is for men and women to believe that course of action to be the right one which they feel a strong desire to take.

Still, the matter is fraught with consequences of the highest moment to my dear people, and it is laid upon my heart, therefore, to say what I can for their instruction and guidance. May God grant me His wisdom in the matter, and help them to understand and act on my advice.

1. And, first, I remark that it is according to God's order for young people to look forward to Marriage as a proper condition of life. And it is perfectly natural that they should do so. They can see and feel that they were created and fashioned in view of it, and they may, therefore, rightly conclude that it is desirable and honourable. And it is

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

especially so, if it can be entered upon lawfully and in harmony with the great consecration which every Salvationist, and every true Christian, has made, or will be quite willing to make. No man or woman need make any excuse for desiring Marriage, if the wish is truly subordinated to the determination to discharge the more important duties they owe to God and to those around them, and if entertained in submission to the dictates of Providence and the choice of the Divine will.

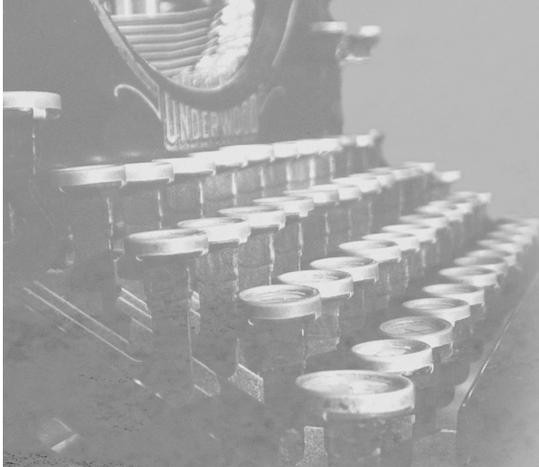
2. At the same time, the truth should be distinctly recognised, that a happy, holy, and useful life is possible for the individual who chooses to remain unmarried. This is important. Only let the contrary notion enter the head of any young person, and farewell to all real peace if Marriage should not be found convenient. If a suitable partner does not come along, they will fret and chafe, or perhaps enter upon some unsuitable union, thereby not only destroying their happiness for the time being, but probably wrecking their fortunes for eternity.

The recognition of the truth, that the highest and noblest ends of life can be reached in an unmarried state, will usually, if not always, be found essential to that condition of mind in which a wise selection of either husband or wife is not likely to be made.

It would be interesting to know how many miserable Marriages have taken place since the world began, through the notion so commonly held— especially on the part of women – that they cannot be happy unless they are married! As the result of this idea, it is often argued, "Here is an opportunity of making an Engagement; if I refuse this chance, I may never have another, and so I shall consign myself to a life of misery." So reasoning, multitudes of young people rush into unions which they spend the rest of their days in regretting, frequently seeing afterwards opportunities of Marriage which, had they only had faith and patience, would have given them all the advantages they desired, and lifelong happiness into the bargain.

3. Under some circumstances, an unmarried state is not only permissible and compatible with happiness and usefulness, but a stern duty. Some people ought not to marry. For instance:

(i) A single life may be rendered imperative from a due regard for the health of the



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

children that may be the outcome of the Marriage. It cannot be right for a man or a woman, with evident indications of consumption, or epilepsy, or lunacy, or some other grave form of disease, to enter into relations in which they will be very likely to bring children into the world only to suffer from similar maladies.

(ii) Marriage may be forbidden, out of regard for the temporal welfare of relatives and others. The circumstances of those whom God has made to be dependent on us may require services which we can only render in an unmarried state. For instance there may be a father, or a mother, or a number of orphaned brothers and sisters who need our help.

The possibility of rendering extraordinary services to mankind in a Single state, may amount also to a positive prohibition of Marriage. If it be right, nay, a positive duty, for a man, under certain circumstances, to lay down his life to save his fellows from shipwreck, fire, disease, or some other dire calamity – and no one will deny that – it may not only be desirable, but equally a stern duty for some men and women to live lives of celibacy, when they plainly see that, by so doing, they can render some remarkable benefit to their fellow-creatures.

(iii) Single life may be a duty when the ability to support the Marriage state is wanting. The conditions of married life are such, that the woman is frequently, nay, usually, deprived of the ability to earn a livelihood after Marriage. That responsibility, therefore, devolves upon the man. He is the head of the house, and on him the obligation of providing for the temporal needs of his wife and children must rest. If, therefore, he cannot see his way, and that very plainly, to support a wife and family, he must remain single until he has that ability.

But the woman has a joint responsibility on this question. She, too, must look ahead; and, unless the man who seeks her hand can show that he is able to support her, or is likely to be able to do so, she will be very foolish to allow herself to be persuaded into an engagement, much more to enter upon the Marriage state.