

CHAPTER 5: Let God Guide You

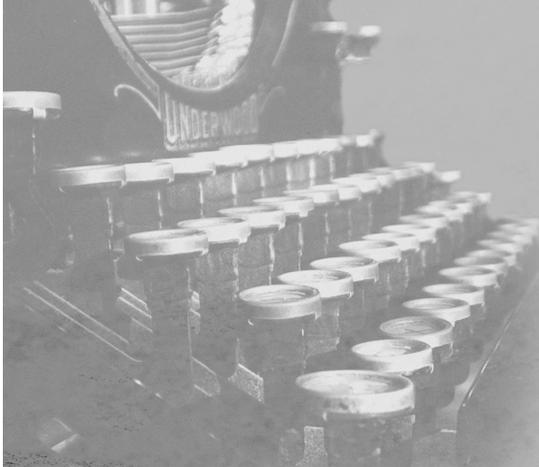
My Dear Comrades,

I fancy that I hear one of my readers, who has gone thus far with me on this subject, saying after reading my last Letter, "It is not difficult for The General, to describe the sort of husband or wife to be desired; but what I want to know is. Where is this ideal partner to be found? I would certainly like to make that discovery. If, General, you can show me where I can find my mate, or, failing to go so far as that – if you can describe the best method of discovering the individual, you will serve me well."

Now, that is, I admit, a difficult question with which to deal, and especially is it so in the case of a woman. Whether it be the outcome of a refined instinct, which seeks to screen her from the mortification of having her offer refused, or whether it be the continuance of a traditional custom, which originated in the former barbarous domination of the male sex, it is still the usage in civilised society for men to have the privilege of selection. The woman must wait until her hand and heart are sought; and if that solicitation is not forthcoming, she must conclude it to be the will of Divine Providence that she should not marry at all. However much she may desire to enter into the wedded state, or however strongly she may feel that some particular individual is suitable and necessary to her happiness, it would not be thought modest or becoming in her to make known her preferences.

"If man come not to gather,
The roses where they stand.
They fade among the foliage,
They cannot seek his hand."

This may, or may not, be all for the best, but it is the prevailing rule. I cannot alter it, and will not, therefore, waste time on its discussion. Notwithstanding anything I could say or do in the matter, it will still continue to be the privilege of the man to propose, and the part of the woman to say "Yea" or "Nay" to his request. And yet, while this is so in theory, I am inclined to think that not very many women suffer seriously from it in



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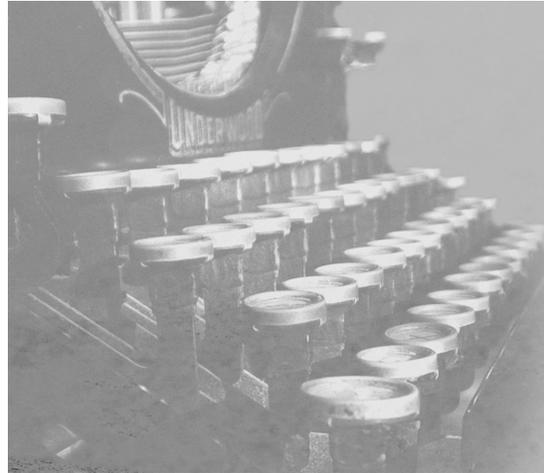
practice, seeing that Love is usually sufficiently ingenious and determined to find a method of making known its preferences to the individual it is disposed to honour.

In the matter of finding a mate, I should think that a woman is at a considerable advantage in The Salvation Army. It is true that her sphere of choice will be limited; but bearing in mind the character of the husband desired, and admitting that a bad husband is worse, by many degrees, than none at all, her opportunities of being well matched will be, at least, as numerous, and as favourable as those she will be likely to find outside its ranks.

But, I am asked to give some general rules for guidance in the matter of finding the right partner, and I begin by repeating the advice already given:

1. *Make your wish known to God, and rest in His direction.* He knows all you need, and has engaged to supply it. Leave yourself in His hands. What is faith for, if it is not for such a business as this? Marriage has more to do with the happiness, holiness, and usefulness of the ordinary run of people than any other thing that can happen to them apart from personal religion. It is, at least, one of the most important events in human history. It has been said, and that with truth, "Better never to have been born than to be miserably wed." Seeing, then, the importance of the transaction, can God do other than take a deep interest in it, on your behalf? Can He refuse to give the guidance of His Holy Spirit, with respect to all that concerns it, when that guidance is honestly sought?

I am a great believer in the old saying that "Marriages are made in Heaven"; that is, the good ones are; for, alas I judging by their character and results, many unions must have been concocted in Hell. It is easy for some of us to believe that the good ones have been planned by the Angels, if not by the Divine Being Himself. I think mine was. If any event in my history was "ear-marked" by His blessed fingers, I think it must have been my Marriage. I was not seeking it. All my plans of life looked in another direction. The day I met my Beloved was the very day on which, freed from the cares of business, I was set at liberty to devote my whole being to the work of saving souls. For eight long years I had been coveting this opportunity, and now that the desired hour had come, I did not want any other passion, pursuit, or purpose, to divert my energies



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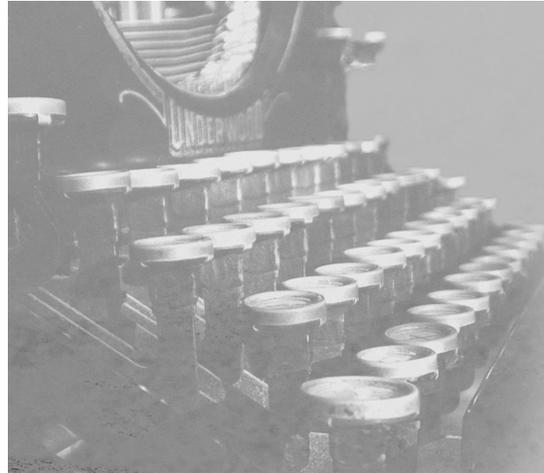
LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

from making the most of it. I was anxious to employ every moment in attaining the qualifications that would fit me for the life of Christ-like labour that had at length opened before me; and now, here was a kind of rival affection knocking at the door of my heart. I did not want an engagement.

Besides this, I had, at that moment, no immediate prospect in view of "acquiring the means" to support Marriage, and an engagement without such prospect, appeared to me then, as it does now, to be a great folly. It must be so, I argued over and over again. I did not want to marry – indeed, I cared then very little whether I ever married at all, and, at the moment, I could have given up and forfeited every such prospect without a groan. I wanted to be a successful Soul-winner; and this new, prospective experience would, I thought, have interfered with my purpose; and so I fought the idea of an engagement, and a hundred times I bade the intruding affection to be gone.

But the affection obeyed me not. It seemed to have descended from Heaven, declaring that it had not come to destroy, but to fulfill my sanctified covetousness; and then, my Beloved, with her quick insight, seeing into my position, had grace and sense enough to become one with me, at once, in my holy ambition. She could wait, and if necessary she would wait, not years only; but, if the hour in which we could be united in harmony with that heavenly ambition came not, she could wait for ever. Thus it seemed evident that my union was ordered of the Lord; and, in the light of the events that have followed, who will say that it was not?

2. *The cultivation of those qualities which are most attractive to God, and most approved by sensible people, will be likely to bring the right partner to your side.* If you want to win a light-headed, frivolous, worldly, half-saved person, you can do nothing better calculated to attain success than to display those qualities yourself. If you wish to marry in Laodicea, you had better settle at once in that city. But if you want a solid, sensible, holy, devoted partner, then the possession and manifestation of the qualities you seek in another will be most likely to secure for you the gratification of your desire. The Bible speaks of "the beauty of Holiness"; and there is nothing so attractive to a good Salvationist as the truthfulness, meekness, kindness, and devotion, which that term describes. Exhibit them.



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3. *Possess your soul in patience.* Do not be in a hurry. Oh, how many there are who find it difficult to exercise that virtue when they come to deal practically with this question! What fools people make of themselves by their unseemly and ridiculous haste! And yet, how often have I seen the proverb fulfilled with respect to it, "All things come to them that wait." "If you run after happiness," we say and know, "she will flee from you." If you show yourself independent of her chains by abiding in the path of duty and obedience, happiness will surely follow, and overtake you too. This I have often observed to be true, with respect to the seeking of wives and husbands. Good men are afraid of loud, bold, and man-like women who are ever pushing themselves upon their notice, and in their timidity leave them severely alone; while the man who goes wife-hunting, of set purpose, will frequently pass by the very woman he needs, and fasten on the one he ought to have studiously avoided.

But, after all, there is much mystery in this business, and some things that have pained me not a little. I cannot understand why one is taken, and another left. There is one thing I do know, however, which seems to throw some little light upon the question, and that is the accepted fact, that this life is not only a battle-field on which we have to wrest the prey from the teeth of the mighty, but a school in which the soul has to be disciplined for future happiness and nobler toil. The progress that some will make in this disciplinary process will doubtless be greater, thereby enabling them to bring more glory to the great Master, who Himself trod the unmarried path, than would have been the case had they been married. Let them, therefore, abide in the calling in which they are called; and with joy accept their lot as the appointment of their God.