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SERGEANT-MAJOR DO-YOUR-BEST
OF DARKINGTON NO.1

CHAPTER VIII: SARAH TALKS STRAIGHT ABOUT THE CHILDREN

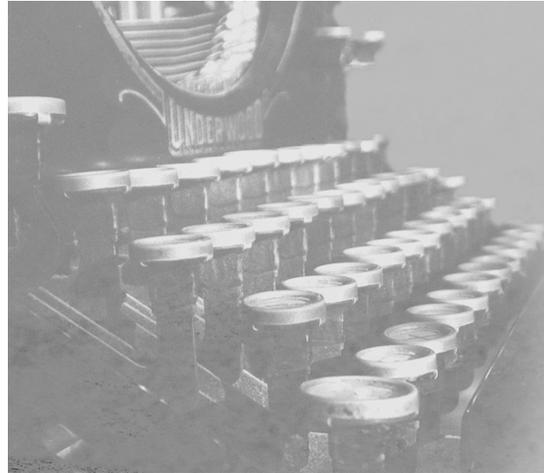
Now, there's one thing that I do think our Sarah is a trifle too anxious about, and that is over making the children into Officers.

I am a Salvationist myself, and my salvation is of the "Blood-and-Fire" sort, or else I should not do for the Sergeant-Major of the first Corps of the important town of Darkington. Still, you can carry even important things a little too far, for Sarah, you see, will not be content with the children being saved and getting to Heaven; she wants them all to be Officers, and that is rather a high target to aim at.

She says to me: "Why not, Sergeant-Major? Can anybody tell me why they shouldn't be? They are all healthy and strong, and have got the perfect use of their faculties. Is there anything half so important they can do in the world? They belong to Jesus Christ; I have heard you say so yourself, and The General says Officers of the right sort are the great need of The Army; and why should not my children be the right sort? And why shouldn't they go to help the dear Lord? And they shall, if I can rule; and I am going to rule, if I can!" And then she gets excited about it, and really does harass me not a little on the subject every now and then.

You see, the first three came into the world in a bit of a hurry, and grew up to be pretty big children, and did mostly as they liked – worse luck! – before their father and mother were converted; and Tom, the eldest, when he was about fourteen, went off to America with a neighbour, who took a great fancy to him, and promised to look after him, and nothing else would satisfy the boy; and though his mother was dead set against it, he teased me until I consented; and off he went; and then Sarah so abused me about it that I repented, and had a week's drinking over it, which ended, strange to say, in my getting beautifully saved.

Bless the Lord for that! My Heavenly Father knows how to bring good out of evil. But then his mother has never stopped fretting about Tom going away. She often cries



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herself to sleep at nights, thinking about his poor soul, and telling God that He must save him.

And then, unfortunately, instead of getting good news about the boy, it comes worse and worse. He does not write very often himself now, and he never answers my questions about Salvation, nor replies to his mother's broken-hearted letters. But the neighbour who took him out has fallen in with The Salvation Army over there, and got saved – bless the Lord! – and he sends us news every now and then about Tom.

But I am sorry to say that it is only bad news – not about his work, for he has got a good job, and has a chance of making a lot of money, they say. You see, he is a clever young fellow – I think sometimes the cleverest of our flock – and that helps to make his mother more vexed about him. For, she says: "Only think what a thing it would be if the devil was to get the cleverest in the family to spend his life in making a fortune and go to Hell at last, when he might be winning souls, and end up in Heaven! No," she says, "The Army ought to have him for Jesus Christ, and it shall do, if I can shape it!"

But, I was saying, it seems as how as Tom has got into bad company, does a little betting, and takes nips of brandy, and cocktails, and such things. Now, I don't know what cocktails are, except it is that they stir the spirits they drink with feathers of some sort. Anyway, from the latest accounts, poor Tom is going down the broad road, and that at a pretty round pace.

Now, when I had read the last letter over to Sarah, and she was crying over it fit to break her heart, I felt I must say something to comfort her, and so I says: "Sarah, ought we to be surprised at this? Isn't it all through my example? What did he see in his father – and, as far as that goes, in his mother, as well – to lead to anything different?" – for we both lived very far away from God. "What else could we expect?"

And you should have seen her! – All at once she wiped her tears away with her apron. She always has a nice clean apron on, no matter what work she is doing. Well, she wiped her tears away, and her eyes flashed fire, and she turned on me furious-like, and she says: –



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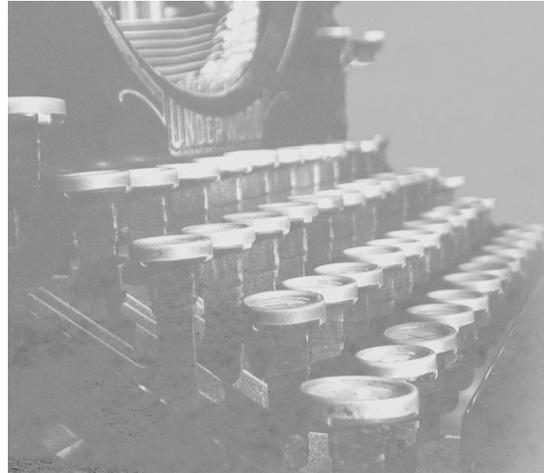
"What can I expect, Sergeant-Major? Why, I'll tell you what I expect – I expect that God is going to convert the boy. That is what I expect. Nothing else will do for his mother, whether it does for his father or not.

"Haven't I repented for him, and cried myself to sleep nights without number, and prayed for his salvation every day since God converted my poor soul? – And does not our Captain say that if we believe with all our hearts God will give us the things for which we ask? – And if that comes true of strangers in the Hall, won't it come true of our own flesh and blood? Yes, I believe that God is going to convert Tom, and make an Officer of him. Of course I do. I can't be happy in England now, with Tom serving the devil in America; and how could I be happy in Heaven with my poor Tom in Hell, especially when I should be thinking all the time that it was through his mother's example before she was converted, and her neglect of his soul after she was saved?

"No; I tell you, Sergeant-Major, that it is all very well for fathers to be faint-hearted about the salvation of their children, but a mother what feels her responsibility is different. She will be resolved to have her children saved, whether they will or no; and I am going to have Tom saved if I have to go to America on purpose. I am a very bad sailor, and never expected to come on shore alive when I went on the sea in that sailing-boat that was like a big washing-tub, with a sheet hung on a clothes' prop and stuck in the middle of it. It was when I went with the Corps on that excursion to Whitepool; it was the only time I ever was on the water in my life, and I vowed a solemn vow that day that if the Lord would let me get safe to land once more, so as I might see your face and the children before I died, that I would never fly in the face of Providence again by going off dry land!

"But Tom's soul must be saved, and if it is necessary, and the Lord will excuse me breaking my promise, I'll face the dangers of the stormy seas once more to get him converted and made into an Officer; for I believe that is what he was born for; and I don't mean Providence to be bested by the devil if I can help it!"

Now, I have had many talks with Sarah since that day, and tried hard to comfort her, for she is, like Hannah, a woman of a sorrowful spirit, and it's all about Tom, and the



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news we get doesn't grow any better.

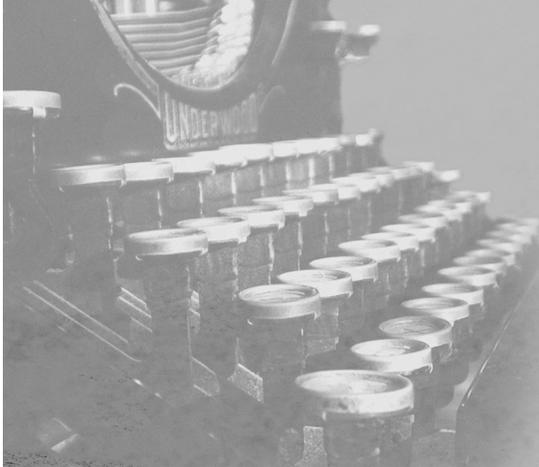
"Sarah," says I to her one of these nights, after I had come in from the Outpost, where we got a big drunkard saved, and I was in good spirits: "Sarah," says I, "you must not distress yourself like this; you must have faith in God, and hope for the best."

"Yes, Sergeant-Major," she says, "it's all very well for fathers to comfort themselves, and take it easy, and hope for the best, as you say; but they have not eyes to see what is coming on the souls of their children like mothers have, if you don't do all you can to keep it off." And I knew what she meant. It was a hint that I ought to go to America to try and get Tom saved, which she had been on about once or twice before.

Then I says to her: "Sarah, is not this ingratitude for all the goodness of God to you? And isn't it like flying in the face of your Heavenly Father, and being ungrateful in forgetting all His wonderful goodness to your other children? Have you not got three of them saved, and aren't they the best children in the world, and don't they love their mother? And is not Jack a Captain just gone to his first Corps? And is not Sarah a lieutenant? And is not Mary a Corps Cadet? And are you not full of hope that Benjamin, the baby, is going to grow up to be a child of the living God and be an Officer? "

Now, I meant all this for the best, and I thought that what I brought in about the baby becoming an Officer would have pleased her; and it seemed to me that it was nearly as nice a little speech as the Captain could have made. But you should have seen the look she gave me I

"Sergeant-Major," she said, "do you know what you are talking about? I don't think you do. Is that the proper talk for the man that holds your office? Do you think your baby" – (she always calls it my baby when she talks to me serious about it) – "Sergeant-Major," she says, "do you think that your baby is a child of the devil, and that he has to grow up before he can get into the arms of his Saviour? No, you don't; and if you do, I don't! I believe what our Captain says, that the promise of salvation is to us and to our children, and that I have received salvation not only for myself but for



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Benjamin; and I believe that if he is taken away while he is a baby he will be taken to Christ's bosom; and if he lives and I nurse him for God, which I am going to do, he will grow up to be an Officer. That's what I believe; and didn't you kneel down beside me, before the child had been in the world many hours, and did we not give him to God, together, to be an Officer?

"Did you believe God took him, or didn't you? That's what I want to know. Well, whether his father believed or not, his mother did; and when the Captain came in the first time, and called him the 'Little Corporal,' I said to myself: 'Yes, Captain, that's it; he has started early with his promotion, and his mother will hold him up to it until he is an Officer.'"

Hallelujah! Here is a letter just in from Tom. He has been caught by The Army, and got gloriously saved, and tells his mother that, if he can make himself worthy of it, he means to throw up every other chance in life for the best of all— to be an Officer! So Sarah has got her own way after all.