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Chapter VII

TEMPTATIONS

The Salvation Army Officer really presents a distinct type of Christian character. There are, of course, many variations of individual qualities, but on the whole there is a very distinct family or group, a connected whole controlled in the main by influences and principles which make it what it is - something apart. Whether we approve it or not, whether or not it has the inherent force necessary to reproduce itself, whether or not it will outlive the disappointments and certain failures which are perhaps the severest tests of spiritual vitality, one thing is certain, it is a fact. It is with us; and in studying it, from whatever point of view we do so, it is evident that, like all forms of life, it has its own special and peculiar trials.

Men and women of pronounced character and genuine goodness will not, in any walk of life, escape temptation. It is not only inevitable, but it is well that this should be so. A man's temptations reveal him to himself as he really is, and often open his eyes to weaknesses or dangers in his own nature, as well as to deeps in the grace of God, of which otherwise he had never dreamed. It is by temptation we come to those great conflicts that make equally for human nobleness and for true faith. The Apostle was in harmony with the highest wisdom when he wrote: 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.'

And if this be true as to temptation generally, it is none the less so with reference to those special temptations and 'fiery trials' which belong to the difficult positions in which many of our Officers stand. They are not only tried in common with all who love and serve God, but they must meet many temptations that are peculiar to their circumstances. That some fail in the day of testing, and that others fall by the way, only makes more glorious the grace of God in the large majority who press on in the fight. This slight attempt to tell a little of their life-work will be sadly deficient unless I include reference both to those who thus overcome, and to those who, alas! having put their hand to the plough, have looked back. Both are ours, for —

We are much bound to them that do succeed;



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But in a more pathetic sense are bound
To such as fail.

I
An Easier Path

The temptation which is perhaps most frequently presented to our Officers is to take an easier path.

They are generally more or less attractive personalities. They make friends both outside and inside our ranks, who value them highly for their work's sake, and often feel for them a strong personal regard. That feeling leads to deep sympathy with them in the difficulties and discouragements of their work, and in the trials and hardships which are, perhaps, inseparable from it. By degrees, many such friends come to look upon them as sufferers beyond what is reasonable, and, when this is the case, become a constant source of temptation, prompting them to call in question the wisdom of their way of poverty and obedience, to doubt the Lord's dealings with them, and to seek an easy path.

In times of depression and difficulty, or when an Officer is tried by the discipline of The Army, or when he feels rightly or wrongly — that, owing to some personal difference with a superior he is not for the moment getting fair play, there is nearly always some 'Christian' friend to advise him to leave his post, and generally to afford him the opportunity to go into 'Christian work' in some other direction, and that at a salary larger than he is getting in The Army. This is not, perhaps, quite the best place to refer to the subject, but I cannot refrain from saying that the extent to which our Officers in every part of the world are invited with offers of gold to leave The Army, and go to serve the churches and missions, has long been a deep pain and astonishment to us.

But that is only one of the forms in which the temptation to seek an easy path is presented. Many Officers' former employers keep open doors for them to positions of trust and comparative comfort, and in times of weariness and sickness repeat their invitation. Mistaken friends offer them employment and salaries, shares in business, the charge of private missions, the post of



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companion, and a hundred other 'good things'. The advice to accept such proposals is generally based upon some specious theory or other. 'The Army,' say some, 'does not fully appreciate you'; or 'it is not quite what it was when you came into it'; or 'your health is failing, you ought to think of your own future'; or 'there are other spheres of labour in which you may be very useful'; or 'your gifts are worthy of a wider field,' and so forth.

These are the testings which help to keep alive the spirit of consecration without which the Army Officer ceases to be an Officer in anything but name. It is not easy, in the nature of things, to speak of individual cases in this connexion; but here let me quote from the letter of a Captain bearing on this matter, and which illustrates in one view what I wish to convey: —

'After thirteen years' service in The Army, and many very trying and hard-fought experiences, I lately passed through a testing time. My wife was far from well, and I was for the first time, I think I must say, discouraged. Some things had not turned out as I expected, and it seemed as though I was come to a standstill.'

'Just then Mr. — an old friend of ours, wrote to me, and said he had a small farm he could let me have. I grew up on a farm, and I knew something about it. My friend, who was a well-to-do Christian man, said he thought we should do well, and pressed me to take it. He said we should have a lot of opportunity for doing good among the people in the villages round, and he believed it was the Lord's will.'

'I must say I was sorely tempted to leave the Work. I had been at one or two hard Corps, and was fairly run down. I saw that I should get a quiet life, free, to a large extent, from anxiety, and amidst nice surroundings. But I prayed. For three weeks I was in darkness, and then one night I saw the Lord's way for me was still the way of the Cross. He spoke to me. I realized that He would never have left the life of cross-bearing and loss for the easy path, and I made up my mind that I would not.'

And now let me refer to the other side of the picture. Those who listen to the Tempter and go out from us — I rejoice that they are so few - usually wake up to deplore their terrible mistake.



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From such an one I received some time ago the following, written expressly for circulation among those similarly tempted. The writer was at one time a most useful Officer, and fought bravely against bitter persecution for many years: —

'It is as a burden on my soul that I should write you my experience.'

'For over ten years I fought under the Flag as an Officer, bright, blessed years from the beginning to the end; and, in spite of felt natural incapacity and weakness, through the power of God they were successful, victorious years.'

'Was I not enabled through Divine Grace to march through difficulties, to leap over walls, to slaughter spiritual foes, and to defy Hell's hosts? Yea, doubtless! and with the same Grace, had I held fast to God and to the spirit and principles of The Army, I could have gone on conquering and to conquer. Had I but kept the childlike spirit, and remained wholly abandoned to God and The War, all would have been well; but with deepest sorrow of heart and with shame, I confess that in an hour of temptation I yielded.'

'Little by little, not all at once, God became second; His Kingdom and interests were no longer first in my thoughts. I still loved Him, and I did not intend to deny Him, but the enemy of my soul fanned the little flame of self-love which I had allowed to be lighted, and soon, Ah! so soon! the brightness of the presence of Jesus departed, and although I tried and tried hard to serve Him for a time, and to feel and act as before, it was no use; the Holy Spirit departed, and left a poor deserted, darkened soul. And how great that darkness! Sick at heart! Weary! Tempted! Faltering! Failing! Condemned! Regretful! Sorrowful! Well-nigh shipwrecked and lost! What an experience after years of heavenly peace and sunshine! Was it never to end, the consequences of my sin, the punishment which seemed often more than I could bear!'

"NO"! said the destroyer, and it seemed to me in the darkness as if the fiends echoed the words, and clapped over my downfall. "Down! You must go," and down into months of despair I went, when "the heavens were as brass," and it was as if there was no God; nearly losing all hope,



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nearly becoming a castaway. Was I to lose all as a result of my unfaithfulness to God and my vows? I felt I deserved it.

'Thank God, I am fighting once more under the dear old Flag, this time as a Soldier, but Oh! so thankful to take my place anyhow and anywhere in the ranks, and among the people whom I had chosen, and whom I love.'

The following private letter also bears on this matter. It is from a once promising Officer to an old comrade: —

'I am in the deepest despair. I left the ranks to get a position where I could show off my talents, and for my own glory. I had been a faithful Officer at one time, and God used me to save many souls, then I got some small appointments one after another. This hurt my pride, I forgot my Lord, and I wrote a stiff letter to the D.O., saying I would not stay if I had such difficult concerns. I heard just then of a place where I could do mission work, getting good pay and living in a very nice house. I applied, was accepted on trial, and resigned. I got on well for a time in the Mission, but whenever I heard the drum or saw an Army march I felt my very heart on fire, I longed to be back. Then I seemed to lose the power to speak in Meetings that I once had, every word seemed to fall flat. I had to give up, weak in body and soul. Now I feel I am lost. I am in sorrow and bitterness, but I cannot call on the name of the Lord, for I am a deserter. Pray for me.'

Great indeed must be the burden of any who help one of these little ones to offend. Better a thousand times to encourage men to be faithful to their consecration to Christ and their first love for souls, even though their path must needs be a thorny one, than to make it easy to 'become a castaway.'

II

Love Stronger than Love

It is, however, to the unmarried women-Officers that the suggestion to walk in an easier path is perhaps most readily and attractively presented. Those women are worthy successors of the



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Apostles. Their devotion to the interests of others, their kindness, their patient toil, their enduring zeal, their humble following in the footsteps of their Master, have done much to make The Salvation Army what it is. Amongst them are many of the noblest characters and of the fairest and sweetest of the Lord's saints. What more natural than that they should be sought in marriage by the good and true who cross their path?

But marriage, except it be to Officers, will generally greatly diminish, if it does not altogether eclipse, their opportunity for such service as that to which they were called as Officers. For that reason The Army in ordinary circumstances discourages the marriage of its women-Officers to those who are not Officers. For the same reason hundreds of our devoted women refuse opportunities of settling down in comfortable homes, with every prospect of the highest earthly happiness, in order that they may continue their work of love for the perishing souls around them.

As an illustration of the spirit in which they make this sacrifice, let me quote the following extracts, which I have altered slightly to avoid undue publicity. The writer is a young woman of no great prominence amongst us — just one of toiling multitudes of Officers who rejoice in the honour of being soul-winners and leaders under the Flag of The Salvation Army: —

'Dearest Annie,

'You know what I told you about the Fruit and Flowers that were always being left, with no name, at the Quarters for me. And you remember I told you what I thought. Well, it was just as I fancied. I must write to you about it. I want your advice and prayers.'

'Mr. — came yesterday afternoon. I was in and could not help seeing him, although I have been trying not to. You can guess what he wanted to say. And he said it — beautifully, and made me feel very unhappy.'

'He told me he had cared for me ever since I went to him and asked his help over that bother we had. He said he used his influence and got the case through for us, not so much for The Army — although you know he has long been a good friend — but mostly for my sake. He said he



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could not expect me to say "Yes," knowing him so little, but would I give him the chance to prove his love and teach me to love him back. Of course, you will guess, I answered "No." I could not leave the Work-I love it too well!

'Then he said how hard a Field Officer's life was for a woman — and it often is, you and I both know — and how many years I had been in it, and he spoke of the difficulties in this Corps, and no one knows this and the constant burden and strain better than I do.'

'Then he asked me if I would consent at the end of another year to become engaged to him. He would leave me in my work, undisturbed for that time. He did not want to hinder or stop my usefulness; and said, in fact, by his side, with influence and an open house, and perfect liberty to do as I liked, I should be more useful. In short, Annie, he spoke in a most earnest and beautiful way — so considerate and so kind, until I hardly knew how I felt — but I did not give in!

'I don't think I was tempted to. I thanked him for the honour he had done me and for his goodness, but I said I loved my position as an Officer, and valued it too dearly to make it possible for me to say "Yes." He felt it very much, I could see, and would not take a final decision, but begged me to think it over and weigh it well, and he trusted he would have a more satisfactory answer later.'

'Well, I have weighed it up and thought it over, and you can guess a little of how I feel. Of course I cannot deny that there is a good deal in what he says. I fear I shan't last out many more years; and think what it would be to lean on some one you admired and respected, and to have no anxiety. You know how I should love a home of my own, and I know I could manage it well, and I think if I got to know him better I should learn to care for him too. I was thinking it over all last night.'

'But then, suppose I said "Yes," and had a few years down here of married life, with all he could give me — would it make up for all the opportunities I should have missed in my work? How should I feel if, for my own comfort and happiness, I gave up reaching the hundreds of sinners



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God now helps me to touch? No, Annie, I could not do it — without the certainty of God's smile there would be no joy in life for me!

'I am not going to tell my own people. You know, of course, what they would say; and there is one part of me that sides with them, because, however independent and wrapped up in her work a woman may be, well — every woman loves to be loved!'

'But I cannot say "Yes" — it cost me too much to come into the Work! God Himself called me, and I am not free to stir until He gives me leave! And I value the Work too highly to leave it for my own comfort. The chance of reaching lost souls — of seeing them step into new life — the joy of watching them grow into different beings, until their faces change! I could not do it!'

'Lieutenant thinks with me. I have told her all. We have prayed and thought and talked long over it, as you will know, and now I want you to write and tell me your feelings. ...'

Such refusals are not made without real sorrow. The human heart is no less tender and no less truly appreciative of the deepest joys of life because it is sanctified and consecrated to the service of Christ. But it is in the suffering and sacrifice of those renewed separations from human loves that many Officers give the highest proofs that the Divine Love is shed abroad in their hearts. Many of them stand out before us in all the attractive beauty of utterly consecrated lives. I do not pretend that the single life is in itself either more or less favourable than the married to doing the will of God, but I do say that many of our unmarried men and women give a striking witness — a witness which has its own place — that

Thou, Lord, alone art all Thy children need,
And there is none beside;
From Thee the streams of blessedness proceed,
In Thee the blessed abide.
Fountain of Life and all-abounding Grace,
Our Source, our Centre, and our Dwelling-Place.



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III Settling Down

Sad as it must ever be to see a chosen vessel of grace removed from its appointed place, I feel that it is better for some to leave 'The Army than to settle down' in it. One of the most subtle temptations which assail many Officers is thus to settle down to the mechanical discharge of a round of duties, to remain content with something less than the complete consecration of every power and every moment to the service of souls. I am afraid that some among us do fall into this snare. I do not know exactly how it comes about, but there is the fact. We are only human after all, and at times we grow inexpressibly tired and sick at heart. The monotony of things, the hideous reality of sin and of the vast under-world of suffering and misery which is everywhere the outcome of it, seem overwhelming, and seem like to overwhelm us. It is then that fears arise about the future — our health, our loved ones, our prospects. Doubt drives out our courage and maims our zeal.

The skill which comes of experience and success is often a friend to this foe. The ability to get on without the daily dependence upon God, the knowledge of 'The Army system', and the increase in gifts which generally follows the employment of such gifts as we possess, together with the sufficient supply of temporal needs, all favour the growth of self-esteem and self-satisfaction, and at last of that self-love which quickly paralyses the spirit of the Cross.

Officers who thus decline have often lost much of the spirit of prayer. I met lately with a striking example of this, which I will mention here. In an interview with a former Officer, who was seeking my aid in deep sorrow, and when referring to past happiness and usefulness in our ranks, I put the question: 'How do you account for your backsliding?' I received the following in reply: —

'When I came into 'The Army' I had a dear friend. We were Soldiers of the same Corps. We entered the Training College together, and when we did so we solemnly covenanted with each other, and with the Lord, to spend the first hour of every day before Him, no matter what changes might come. For ten years I kept that covenant. They were years of unbroken victory in my soul, and of



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much joy and success in my work. I was then in an important post, and my daily business greatly increased. I toiled early and late. At last I thought, "Well — I am older and stronger now. I will reduce that hour to half an hour." I did so, and presently to a quarter of an hour. From that time I began to lose ground, and went on losing till weakness and unfaithfulness overtook me, and I left The Army to repent doing so for ever.'

One of the worst features of this declension is that it is seldom realized by those who suffer from it. Hence the importance of every Officer being watched over by another, as by one who must render an account. Such watching is included in our system, and to the sincere souls — who fall back into this wretched mediocrity of religious experience — the care of their 'overseers,' as the Apostle called them, is the welcome Providence which recovers them for the Kingdom. To those who are not true, that oversight leads to their withdrawal from the service. We say plainly to an Officer who thus grows cold, who ceases to display the fervour of his first love, as well as to those who neglect their work: 'You have missed your way; this is not your vocation; we deplore your loss, but we cannot continue you in the service of the Temple simply to assure you a piece of bread; nor can we regard the sheep as existing merely to provide for a shepherd. You must return to the daily labour which may be convenient.'

Naturally, this sometimes causes trouble. In the heat of disappointment, and under the trying conditions of uncertain employment which are often involved, some who were once with us speak evil about The Army; but the main fact of the situation is that they went out from us because they had ceased to be of us. We will not allow The Army to become an agency for fostering idle priests, nor will we suffer the whole body of devoted men and women working under our Colours to be misrepresented to the world through the selfishness, incapacity, or wrongdoing of a few.

And perhaps even those who stand by the Flag have something to learn from the failures of these others. 'Mankind,' says some one, 'is helped in its progress almost as much by the study of imperfection as by the contemplation of perfection.' When we see that some who have been so good, so true, so devoted, have had their weaknesses and terrible trials and falls, we are not



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only cautioned to take heed to ourselves lest we also fall, but we are encouraged in our hours of trial and sore temptation to make another struggle and yet another to reach the ideals of loyalty and faithfulness to duty and to God, the loss of which, we see, is the greatest loss of all.