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## **XIX. AN EPISTLE TO WOULD-BE GAMALIELS.**

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Especially Reverend Gentlemen.

In or about the year 1882, or at various dates earlier and later than that, your attention was directed to a number of people calling themselves "The Salvation Army," under the leadership of one "General Booth," and you thought it your duty to express your opinion with regard to their proceedings. You took professedly for your example upon that occasion a great doctor of Jewish law, named Gamaliel, and either making his very words your text, or saying that you would act in the spirit of them, you summed up your view of the duty of all whom you could influence towards the said Salvation Army in the recommendation, "Refrain from these men and let them alone."

Now I confess that at the time I was extremely astonished that anyone who professed to be a believer in Jesus Christ, should voluntarily place himself in the position taken up by this great Pharisee towards the first Apostles. I should have imagined that anyone believing in the teachings of Christ would have remembered that the great sin against which He threatened eternal indignation was that of refraining from and letting alone these very men when they were poor and strangers in need of friendly recognition, sympathy and help!

And, moreover, I wondered at the strange assumption of many of you in addressing to congregations or assemblies of ordinary citizens the words used by a member of a legally constituted council in speaking to those who, along with himself, were invested with legal authority. The question before the Council and Gamaliel was whether they should kill the men who first preached Christ in the streets and market-places, and the recommendation of the learned counsellor was that the men should be absolutely left at liberty to go on with their work; whereas in most cases you addressed the advice for which you wished to claim the sanction of his wisdom and authority to people who had no legal or other right to interfere with the action of any of their fellow citizens.



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When you told your convocations, your unions, your congregations, your committees, your public meetings or your private circles, to refrain from The Salvation Army men and let them alone the only proper meaning of your words was that they should not only omit illegally to assault, or improperly to slander the poor men and women whom many beat, stoned and kicked in your streets, but that they should altogether keep away from them, neither listening to their words nor lending them countenance or aid of any kind until it should be seen whether their work came to naught, or whether it succeeded.

In many cases your advice was just as influential with those whom you addressed as was that of Gamaliel with the Council. It is quite true he induced them to let the Apostles go without either killing or imprisoning them; but he failed to prevent them from going on beating and forbidding them "to speak in the name of Jesus." Many of your hearers did both these things also. In some cases you failed even to obtain so glorious a result as that, for those of your hearers who had the power either to send men to prison or to prevent their being sent there, understood your advice in such a way as to "refrain from" sitting on the Bench when a poor Salvationist was to be brought before it, or to "let them alone" with the option of paying a fine which it was well known they would not pay.

Had you been "bad in reputation among all the people," had your advice had weight with the nation generally, the result which many of you have hinted at as highly probable would no doubt have followed from it, and the work of The Salvation Army would have been brought to naught or overthrown. But happily you were, as a rule, entirely without influence of a religious kind with the masses of the people, who so far from refraining from The Army have continued to crowd around it, and have given it, heartily and generously, sympathy and support, which you and your hearers have refrained from doing.

But do not suppose for a moment that I write to accuse, reproach, or abuse you. I only recall these facts in order clearly to define the persons to whom I write, and by recalling your attention to the great blunder you made in the past, to assist and entreat you to repair that blunder before it be for ever too late. The Salvation Army having been born of God, and led and sustained by Him all along, cannot be overthrown, and is altogether independent of you. So far as in you lay, when it first burst upon public view in the society surrounding yourself, you prevented it from



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obtaining any assistance. That was perhaps a great blessing to it, for it might not have had so much help from God as it has received had the favoring smile of men been more generally granted to it. But now I beg you to look at its position in view of your own words, and then to ask yourselves what is your present duty with regard to it.

The advice of Gamaliel was that the Apostles should be allowed to go on peaching Christ without let or hindrance, since, he argued, it would in due time be seen whether they were persons giving themselves out to be somebody like Theudas and Judas, or whether they were workers together with God. Now if this was what you intended in your advice with regard to The Salvation Army, I will suppose even so short a time as four years ago, what do the facts show at the present moment?

And, first of all, let me tell you that if you assume to advise others how they should treat the men of The Salvation Army, or if you are in a position in which it is natural and proper that others should look to you for good counsel as to their conduct on any public matter, then it is your duty in the first place to learn from those men themselves what is their purpose and what they teach. How few of you have ever done this you well know; but I leave the past, and I urge you, as you value your own souls, to do now what you have refrained from doing so long. If you will not go to these poor men and women where they are, invite at least one of them — I will not ask you to invite a dozen — to come and stand before you and explain why they speak in the name of Jesus, and what they say. One such interview will do more to raise you to the level at least of the great Jew whose counsel you have so travestied and whose name you have so degraded by connecting it with your conduct, than anything else I can imagine.

But supposing that you either will not or cannot take as much trouble to acquaint yourself with The Salvation Army as the greatest men in Jerusalem did to learn the facts about the Apostles, I will ask you at least to consider solemnly the following facts: —

Five years ago, when the advice to refrain from The Salvation Army, and let it alone, first began to be given by influential men, that Army consisted of 251 Corps, under the command of 533 poor men and women, who were as destitute of money, friends, and learning as the Apostles, and who were beaten, spoken against, and despised almost as generally as they were. The



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counsel which those men and women received from their General and his wife, and from one another, was that they should go on witnessing for Jesus, out of doors and indoors, in season and out of season, by speech and song, by dress, flag, music, printing, and in every possible way to the utmost of their power. The work to which they were counselled to devote their lives has been carried on daily since then without any material change, and has neither been overthrown nor come to naught. On the contrary, it has been so blessed and owned by God Himself that today this Salvation Army has 1,552 Corps instead of 251, and 3,600 Officers instead of 533.

This enormous multiplication of the work has not been produced by some sudden and extraordinary events. It has all come about by steadfast perseverance in doing, saying, and suffering exactly what the 533 were doing, saying, and suffering five years ago. Now I demand of you to answer in your own hearts, even if you will not dare to answer more publicly, the question which you yourselves raised when you told the people to wait and see whether this work were of God or whether it were of man.

The great Gamaliel, when he made his famous pronouncement with regard to the Apostles, had probably only heard of them for a few weeks at most, and, so far from wishing meanly to wait until he saw them succeed or otherwise, before pronouncing for or against them, he really stood up as their protector in a moment of terrible danger, and argued — not that they were to be judged absolutely by their success in gathering or keeping a crowd of persons under their influence, but that this would effectually prove whether they were honest men or impostors, as to which he really might not at that time have had much opportunity to judge. He may, for aught we know, only have heard of them as men who had set the whole city in an uproar, who had actually led others jumping and shouting in the Temple itself, and who were a curious mixture of all classes. If he had been told of the real character of Ananias and Sapphira, and other men and women who had taken "a very prominent part" in the services, he might very reasonably have had serious doubts as to their moral character. But he had independence of mind enough to proclaim before their infuriated enemies that they might after all be men of God, and that those who in any way opposed them might be opposing Him. His argument was that, even supposing them to be impostors, it was entirely unnecessary to take legal action against them, seeing that their human schemes and works would inevitably, in that case, come to naught, if they were simply let alone.



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Now, I am willing to stand firmly by these great principles of eternal truth. Had the leader of The Salvation Army been a self-seeking man, "giving himself out to be somebody," or had this spirit been prevalent to any great extent in the Officers under his command, then unquestionably this work and counsel would long ago have come to naught.

Even if no Salvation Officer or Soldier had ever been prosecuted, imprisoned, beaten, stoned or kicked; even had no Corps been turned out of its meeting place, and driven forth or hounded about from street to street by mobs; even had no slanderous reports been spread against The Army by press and pulpit, by infidel and Christian; even had The Army enjoyed plenty of funds instead of being strained at Headquarters, and at every point from day to day to pay its way; even had no great law-suits been brought against it or its leaders, and no great attacks been made on their reputation by false brethren or others, I say that even then the mere wear and weight of the every-day struggle to put away sin, and drag sinners from the seat of the ungodly to the penitent-form, would have so utterly wearied out, sickened and exhausted The General and all his helpers that this counsel and work would have come to naught in the completest sense long ago.

But instead of coming to naught it has come to an International Congress in which working people of no less than eighteen countries and colonies of the world will come together, representing tens of thousands like themselves, who are possessed with the old apostolic idea and purpose of witnessing before the whole world to Jesus as a Prince and a Saviour, who gives repentance and forgiveness.

Oh, that I could search you out to a man and woman, and confront you with those witnesses who within the last five years have seen certainly not less than 250,000 poor sinners in broken-hearted penitence come out in the presence of multitudes of others publicly to confess their sins and to seek forgiveness! Oh, that I could place you before those companies, whether large or small, to whom you have either spoken or written about "refraining from" The Salvation Army and letting them alone; and that I could constrain you in the presence of these great undeniable facts to answer: whether this work be of God, or whether it be of men! But no, I cannot reach you, I can hardly hope that these words will come before the eyes of many of you, for as a rule, you have been determined that whatever others may do, you at least will "refrain from these men, and let



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them alone." You would not be seen near one of their meeting places, and no publication of theirs shall, if you can help it, ever be seen in your dwelling!

But to such of you as may read these lines I do say, in no bitterness, but in earnest desire that you may do what is right, remember, I entreat you, that the day is coming when with Gamaliel and all his fellow-counsellors, and with the saved drunkards and harlots from every nation, who are assuredly entering into the Kingdom of God, you and I must stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ. When that day comes shall it be said that you refrained from these men and let them alone, or that as soon as they came, strangers to your town or village, you took them in; that when they were without means to buy food you freely entertained them; that when their uniforms were worn out with work for God you paid for clothing for them; that when they were sick or in prison you knew enough about them to be at once aware of it, and cared enough about it to go and see them? Which shall it be?

I have seen some of these men and women, even in this great London, without a building to meet in, and without a home to go to, while churches and chapels, schoolrooms, mansions, warehouses, and cottages stood empty by the hundreds, which but for advice such as yours might have been opened to the "strangers," who only asked for the privilege of renting some of them in order to gather the lost ones in; and the same sad sight has been witnessed in cities, towns, and villages all round the world. I have seen poor men and women who had given up freely some rest day, after a hard week of toil in the workshop or factory, spending their last pennies to get a little needed refreshment between services in full view of thousands of comfortable homes, where but for advice such as yours they would surely have been warmed and fed for their work's sake. I have seen these men and women turn out in the severest wintry weather in thin, worn-out garments, while probably all the rest of those who professed to be witnesses for Christ in the town were sheltering by the fire, well clad and warm. How many thousands of these would surely have been moved by pity to give of their abundance to their poorer brethren but for such advice as yours! I have seen these men, ay, even their chiefs, sick in body and sick at heart, under the crushing burden of slander, misrepresentation, and contempt, added to the every-day labor and suffering they had undertaken for others, when they might have been cheered, encouraged, and helped by persons of influence who knew they were right, but who, under the influence of your counsel, resolved to let them alone.



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I have seen men and women who, for preaching Jesus in your streets, have been sent to prison, and who were neither visited in any way by you when there, nor recognised, except it were in scorn, praising God that they had been counted worthy to suffer for His sake. You, and only too many who have listened to you, have refrained from them, and let them alone; but I charge you before God that you beware how you continue in such a course!

"Ye cannot overthrow" the counsel or the work of these men. "When you stand up or sit down in your splendid places of worship they will still be preaching the Gospel to the poor in some back slum or attic or "Glory-Shop." While you write and read your cold-blooded essays upon them they will be writing, with tears and cries upon the heart of God and His poor outcasts, records that will last for ever. While you ride out in splendour to your assemblies, to your money-making and your pleasuring, these poor men and women will be trudging on, through mud and rain, through ice and snow, or it may be over burning sands or pavements, to carry glad tidings to sad, sinful hearts that you have left to perish. When you lie down to rest and to dream of your own advancement, in the world or the church, these men and women will still be fighting on somewhere for the salvation of the poor.

For this work is of God, born in His Fatherly heart, bursting out, by no human scheme, in Heavenly power and beauty under the influence of His Holy Spirit upon simple hearts in every nation, sustained and carried forward, in spite of every difficulty, by His Almighty power. Ye cannot overthrow it; but beware, I say again, ye counsellors of indifference and of selfishness, beware! "lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.