

CHAPTER 11: Begin Married Life Aright

My Dear Comrades,

Before I proceed to deal with the relations that ought to exist between husbands and wives, it seems to be desirable that I should say something more particularly as to the feelings and motives which ought to influence men and women on the threshold of their union.

I do not think much consideration will be required, to show that a mutual agreement on certain leading questions is intimately connected with a happy Marriage, if not absolutely essential to it ; and, although I have already mentioned some of the matters to which I am now about to refer, I believe it will be found useful to consider them again, and that a little more fully. The first thing I mention carries in its train almost all that follow:

1. Those resolved to unite their lives in Marriage should do so as avowed Salvationists. They should honourably intend to live, and love, and work together as such. They should remember that their happiness will depend on what they are, and not on the things they may acquire. There is no power in changed circumstances to alter character; the changed circumstances may be friendly to such alterations, but nothing more. If the character of the newly-married couple hindered their happiness while single, it is in vain to expect anything better simply because they are married. If the man was selfish and impatient, or if the woman was pettish, vain, or frivolous, the same qualities will manifest themselves before the Wedding-day is over, or at least very soon after. It is absolutely necessary to their happiness, therefore, that the parties should agree in the frankest and most thorough-going fashion to live and die Salvation Soldiers.

2. They should resolve beforehand, that their wedded life shall be governed by strictly Salvation principles. There can be no success in any kind of work without some sort of a standard by which to measure it. Without such a standard how can a man know what to aim at? – or how can he rightly judge how far he has succeeded in



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

attaining his end when his work is done? The Salvationist will find his standard of life in the Orders and Regulations. They will tell him what he is to do, and how he is to do it, under almost every conceivable circumstance into which he can come – the married life included. When he is in any difficulty as to their interpretation, he can fall back upon his Commanding Officer for the necessary counsel.

Now, I say to those who are about to marry – “To enter into this condition of life without any other guidance than that of your own feelings, or of the opinions of other people, or of any circumstances that may occur, is like going to sea without a chart, and will be pretty sure to land you, and your family – if you have one – in controversy and confusion, if nothing worse. But you must not do that. You have no need to. The Orders and Regulations, based as they are upon the Bible and the experience of multitudes who have been situated just as you are, constitute your chart. There they are, ready to your hand; work by them, and, with the blessing of God, all will be well.”

3. Those who are proposing to unite in setting up a home should agree as to the principles on which they propose that home shall be conducted. Do not say that the matters I am about to enumerate are too trifling to trouble about. They are, in reality, so important that the neglect of them has been found to mar the peace of innumerable homes, and wreck the fortunes of married couples without number, filling their whole lives with discontent and torment. If you refuse to regard them you may suffer also. I say, then:

(i) Decide together that you will conduct your home on the principles of rigid economy – economy, not meanness. Nothing is more hateful to God or more repulsive to men than the skin-flint, parsimonious soul which grudges every bit of bread it cuts off the loaf, and is ever scheming and dodging to keep all it gets. Remember the words of Solomon, “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.” But true economy is the friend of thrift and comfort. Make it a rule of your life. If you have much of this world's goods, practise frugality, in order that you may have the greater ability to help the cause of your Saviour and the needs of Lazarus, who will not be far from your door, and because God hates waste, and, sooner or later, will punish it. If you have little, do the same, that some crumbs from your table may find their way to



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

brighten the sad lot of some around you, and that you may, at least, do your share in helping forward the Kingdom of Christ.

Besides this, there are many benefits flowing from the practice of economy that will help to strengthen what is good in your own character, and which will be useful in teaching your children the virtues of self-control, and self-denial, and other valuable qualities.

This counsel applies to the kind of house in which you commence life together, the furniture you use, the clothes you wear; in fact, to everything on which you spend your money.

(ii) Resolve together that there shall be no debt. "Owe no man anything." There are exceptions to all rules, and I suppose to this one also; but those exceptions should be few and far between. After the doctrine of No Sin, I do not think that many things will have more to do with happy days, contented minds, and peaceful nights, than the determined adherence to this rule – No Debt. I recommend you to resolve that you will pinch and scrape and do any other thing, however humble it may appear, before going into debt. I speak on this matter as to a wise man and a wise woman. Judge ye of the wisdom of what I say.

4. Resolve that a settled portion of all your income shall go directly into the Lord's Exchequer. I do not say how much that portion should be, but you should read and pray and agree about the matter, so that there will be no occasion for controversy about it afterwards. I know that you may say in answer to this, that you cannot tell what your income and expenditure will be. This is very true; but the probability is, that God will make His liberality to you depend on your generous care of His cause. This has been His usage with His people, and it has been so for generations gone by. Why should He not deal after the same fashion with you? Therefore, start fair by deciding that you will give Him at least a share of what He gives to you. I do not see how anyone can do less than Jacob did, and give God one-tenth of all they receive.

5. Resolve that your home shall be conducted on the principles of righteousness. You know what they are: truth, honesty, purity, industry, kindness, and the kindred



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

virtues flowing out of them. Go down before God, and tell Him that not only will you practise these principles, but that no one who abides under your roof shall violate them, if you can prevent it.

6. Agree, also, that the worship of God shall be regularly and openly conducted in your home. I set up a family altar on the first day of my wedded life. That altar has been maintained in all the changes of dwellings through which I have passed, from that day to this, whether in company with the partner who shared it with me on that sacred evening, or since she passed away from the worship of earth to the worship of Heaven.

7. There should be an agreement as to the treatment of relatives on both sides. That is rather a difficult subject, and may seem outside the range of my present purpose; but I regard it as a matter of considerable importance. I have reason to know, from personal observation, that the married life of many husbands and wives is cursed from its commencement by the domineering interference of their relations.

Take, for instance, the miseries caused in many households by the influence of unwise mothers – either of one party or the other. So promotive of unhappiness, discontent, and division does this often become, that it leads to the gravest misunderstandings in the home, and to the most intense ill-feeling towards the poor mothers, who, in thousands of instances, think they are doing good service to their sons and daughters by their advice and assistance!

I have only the kindest feeling for the mother-in-law. Nothing seems more natural than that she should be interested in the welfare of the husband and wife to whom she stands so nearly related. I have had much personal experience on the subject in my own family, and never, in one single instance, was the help and counsel received by myself and my Wife from our dear mothers other than beneficial, and thrice welcome into the bargain. I would not have the kindness or attentions of the mother-in-law abated – no, not one single jot.

But I say to mothers-in-law, and to relatives in general, beware of doing anything, or exerting any influence, that is likely to destroy, in any measure, the happiness of those



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

who are dear to you. Do not, on any account, push your well-intentioned advice, or enforce your proffered assistance upon either relative or friends if it is likely to create division between them. Better stand clear, and leave them alone altogether, than be a cause of contention between them.

And, anyway, I recommend that all newly-married couples should agree together, that no one shall interfere with the loving confidence existing between them. The two are to be one. "Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder" – whether a relative or anybody else. In the ordinary matters of daily life, I am quite sure that it will be more for your personal happiness and future welfare, that you should make mistakes and remain united, than that you should avoid them if that can only be done at the risk of division. "United you stand, divided you fall."

Am I asked what kind of treatment should be given to ungodly relatives? Get them converted. Indeed, nothing can relieve you from the obligation under which you are laid to do what in you lies to attain that blessed end. And though you may not always be successful in your efforts, if you deal faithfully with your unsaved relations, they will not give you very much trouble – anyway, not beyond seeking your assistance in their temporal difficulties.

8. You should agree beforehand to train your children, if God should give you a family, for Him and for The Army. I write, as I have said before, to my own people, and to them I say, that it is of the utmost importance that you should have a clear understanding, that the children, many or few, shall be brought up as out-and-out servants of God.

9. Lastly, I insist that you should have a fair and square understanding before Marriage, as to the future public work to be done by both parties. I am afraid that in some homes there is a considerable difference of opinion and feeling between the husband and the wife on this subject.

Sometimes, it will involve the question whether the woman shall work publicly at all. Certainly, when husbands belong to the churches around us, there can be no doubt that this query will arise. And, to the shame of some Salvationists, I am afraid that the



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

promise of the wife to cease publicly pleading the cause of her Master has actually been made a condition of Marriage, and to the still greater shame of some Salvationist women, they have consented to it themselves.

To prevent anything of this kind, I urge that there should be a distinct agreement, beforehand, as to the continuance of the wife's opportunity to engage in public work for her Lord. This should apply to the character of any particular work that may be in contemplation at the time, and to all that God may require in the future.

After the engagement that terminated in my Marriage, I was strangely led into the work of an Evangelist, I travelled from town to town, preaching with remarkable success. But this seemed to necessitate correspondingly long absences from home, and that sort of life was one that my intended Wife felt that she could not endure, and therefore was not called upon to suffer. But she looked at it for a little while, prayed about it, and came to the conclusion that she had no right to put the personal satisfaction she would derive from my company in the way of my usefulness. She gave me up to it, therefore, and agreed that if, after Marriage, it proved to be the will of God that three-fourths or more of my time should be spent away from home, she would not oppose it. Circumstances arose, however, which rendered it unnecessary for her to make this sacrifice, as the remarkable gifts she afterwards developed made it very desirable for her to travel with me. Still, she had most distinctly given me to understand beforehand, that she was ready and willing to fall in with the will of God in the matter, though it involved a very real sacrifice to her.

Anyway, and under all circumstances, there should be a perfect agreement before going to the altar, on everything that may interfere with the unity and happiness, holiness and usefulness of married life. Better love and live apart if you cannot agree, than marry and live together and wrangle ever afterwards!