

CHAPTER 2: Engagements

My Dear Comrades,

Some of my readers may, I fancy, take exception to the advice given on one matter in my last Letter. They will ask where my faith in Divine Providence comes in, if young people are to wait for a settled income before they make a Marriage engagement.

To this I reply, that a reasonable precaution in this direction is necessary, and is in no way antagonistic to true faith. Extraordinary cases may justify some exception to this rule; but, in a general way, I think the course I prescribed in that Letter ought to be followed. Far be it from me to advise anyone to leave God out of their calculations on such an important subject; but I do think that, until there is a probability of being able to support the Marriage state, young people should exercise a little patience before entering upon those preliminaries which are so surely calculated to lead up to it. Again I say that there will, doubtless, be exceptions; but that is the rule I lay down.

I must also mention another class of considerations, which not only seem to justify some men and women remaining unmarried, but constitute the highest possible reasons for their doing so; namely, the advantages which often accrue to the Kingdom of God.

There has been a great deal of controversy on this question, and much misery, I have no doubt, has resulted from the mistaken judgments which have been formed, and the unnatural regulations which have been framed with respect to it. In trying to discover how we ought to deal with it, our first enquiry must be. What does the Bible say? I answer that the injunctions of that Book harmonise on this subject with those of common sense, and with the varying circumstances in which men and women find themselves placed.

1. The Bible nowhere absolutely commends the unmarried state, apart from some peculiar circumstances, or some particular benefit likely to be conferred by it upon society. There is not a passage in the Scriptures that, rightly interpreted, can be taken



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to commend – much less to command – a state of celibacy – that is, an unmarried life – such as, for example, is at present approved and maintained for Priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Whether persons should marry or not, is left as a purely voluntary matter which they, the individuals concerned, must decide for themselves; and in doing so they must enquire for the will of God, consider their own highest interests, and consult the claims of the world around them.

2. There is no teaching, either on the part of Christ or His Apostles, which affirms that any special spiritual virtue exists in connection with the un-married state. All that is said with respect to the subject, by the Bible, from beginning to end, proceeds on the assumption that Marriage is of God's arrangement, and when expedient, is lawful and honourable in all. Indeed, to some temperaments, and with some individuals, the Apostle Paul admits, that it will be easier to live a holy and a useful life married than single.

3. At the same time, the Scriptures do say, and reason endorses them to the full, that circumstances may transpire in the prosecution of the Salvation War, and that conditions may be reached in the history of the individual Soldiers engaged in it, that not only render it lawful and desirable, but absolutely necessary, to abstain from Marriage. For instance:

(i) This will be the case in times of persecution. Banishments, martyrdoms, imprisonments, tortures, and the like, entail less suffering, if endured by single men and women, than by married people, seeing that, in the latter case, the distress has to be shared by wives and husbands, and perhaps by children.

(ii) A single state leaves the soul that can heartily embrace it less burdened with care and anxiety, and consequently, affords more leisure for Prayer and Worship and for Communion with God, and affords greater opportunities for blessing and benefiting mankind.

(iii) A single state usually affords greater freedom and independence of action for public labour and service, for travelling to and fro in the world, and generally for attending to the business of the Kingdom. Especially is this the case on the part of

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women, whether Soldiers or Officers. A woman has, as a rule, ten times more freedom and opportunity for fighting for God and winning souls, when single, than she will have when married. Every woman ought to consider this well, and make up her mind on the subject, before she consents to an engagement.

When convinced as to the wisdom and desirability of Marriage, and when the inducements to form an engagement arise, several considerations should be taken into account. These appear to be so momentous, and to have so important a bearing upon grave consequences in the future, that I must refer to them in detail.

1. *Courtship should be looked upon as a very serious business.* Never regard it as a subject for jesting or trifling with. Remember that no single act of life will be found so fruitful of either happiness or misery as the step you are contemplating.
2. *Honestly seek for the guidance of God,* and ask that His wisdom may direct your judgment and bring you to a right decision, fully resolved that whatever He may reveal as being best for you and the Kingdom, you will do, at all costs and consequences.
3. *Be resolved to be guided in your decision by your judgment and conscience* rather than by your feelings merely, or your impulses, or interests. You are a reasonable being; act as one.
4. *On no account undertake any Courtship except with a view to Marriage.* Do not allow yourself to be led into anything of the kind under any pretence whatever, until you have reason to believe that Marriage to the person with whom you are associating will be both possible and desirable.
5. *Beware of Flirting.* By that, I mean every form of intercourse and familiarity, between men and women, which can be interpreted to indicate more than pure and honest friendship, when there is no real intention of such intercourse leading to Marriage.
6. *Guard against early Engagements.* Salvationists, whatever their sex, or station, or however young they may be in years, have usually some serious business in hand, or

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they ought to have. While I admit that there may be exceptions to the rule, I think I should be disposed to say, that early Engagements are an unmixed evil. Many objections can, with justice, be brought against them. Take the following: –

(i) With rare exceptions such Engagements are made before the parties are old enough to know what is involved in the Marriage relation, or what qualities are required by each partner in the other. This ignorance, consequently, disqualifies them for making a choice likely to ensure the approval and secure the happiness of later years.

(ii) Early Engagements ordinarily take the attention of those who enter upon them from more important things. They lead to a sad waste of valuable time, thereby involving the irreparable loss of opportunities for improvement, both in Officers and Soldiers, which, all taken together, is seriously damaging to The Army.

(iii) Early Engagements often lead to Marriage before that experience has been gained either in the things of God or in the affairs of this world, or that position secured which is necessary to ensure the greatest amount of future happiness and usefulness.

(iv) Early Engagements, as I have already said, are specially objectionable when they are made before evidence is forthcoming as to the ability for supporting the Marriage state; and this is often the case.

(v) Early Engagements are objectionable, because they so often lead to broken pledges, to indescribable and unending regrets, or because, worse still, they terminate in miserable Marriages, entailing lifelong sufferings.

(vi) Early Engagements are objectionable because they are, as a rule, merely the product of a little natural feeling, and are, consequently, entered upon without any rational calculations as to the serious consequences they may entail.

I speak feelingly. As I have already remarked, I wasted some precious hours of my own youth in this direction. It was the usual story, with trifling variations. Because of some



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real or fancied resemblance to a young son, just laid in the grave, I became a welcome visitor at the house of a highly respected neighbour, whose daughter soon manifested an interest in me that fully equalled that of her parents.

Her figure, her eyes, her hair, her disposition charmed me. Here, then, was my companion spirit for life! Drawn out by this infatuation, I wrote poetry, read fiction, and spent hours in sighs and dreams and nonsense in general; and yet, as I can see the matter now, two creatures more unlikely to be usefully yoked together never talked lovers' talk together.

But, then, I was only a lad, unconverted, and utterly destitute of any practical knowledge of the seriousness and responsibility of life. The world to me was neither more nor less than a playground for pleasure, or a market-place for profit; and that mode of passing the time away, which was most agreeable at the moment, was the most attractive.

But the Grace of God ended all this nonsense. It brought a revolution without and within. Without, the world, instead of being a pleasure-ground, or a market-place, became a battle-field, in which I felt I had received a call to struggle with the right against the wrong, and to fight the demons of Hell for the Salvation of men. Henceforth, I had neither thoughts, nor words, nor heart, for the pastime of making love, until the hour arrived when the occupation would answer some legitimate purpose. More-over, my tastes and requirements, as to a partner for my future days, all changed with the change that had been wrought in me. Involuntarily, instinctively you might say, the childish business was abandoned. In after years, I offered to fulfill the thoughtless pledges made in those early days, but was honourably relieved from any obligations arising out of them; and so my first Engagement came to an end. It might have been different, and the senseless "calf-love" of inexperienced youth might have entailed a withering blight on all the happiness and usefulness of my future days.