

CHAPTER 4: Keep off the Rocks

My Dear Comrades,

Even at the risk of being thought tedious, I feel I must turn aside for a moment, from my main argument, in order to look at one or two of the more prominent dangers that confront young people – yes, and older ones too– in making the selection of A partner for life. I might truly describe them as rocks on which any number of good people have suffered shipwreck, thereby marring the whole joy and usefulness of their after lives.

1. One rock on which many thus make shipwreck in this matter, is what, in homely phrase, we speak of as “Good Looks”. They get wrong by allowing their choice to be influenced chiefly by the outward appearance. Some charm of feature, or figure, or voice or something else, attracts and pleases, leading first to friendliness and familiarity, then to an Engagement, and ultimately to Marriage.

Now, a comely and agreeable appearance is not to be despised; and, if accompanied by the qualities I named in my last Letter, may be wisely coveted and should, when gained, be greatly prized. But whoever allows himself to be influenced by Good Looks, apart from those higher qualities which alone can command abiding esteem, or ensure lasting happiness, will, sooner or later, find that he has made a mistake for which he or she may have to pay a heavy penalty – a mistake which may prove fatal to all true interests.

When captivated, however, by appearances, I would urge you, then, to remember:

(i) That all earthly beauty must soon fade and pass away. A few years, at the longest, and the roses will pale from the cheeks, the bright eyes will lack their lustre, and the youthful form will largely lose its grace and elasticity. Yes! There must be something more substantial and abiding than human beauty, however nearly it may approach perfection, on which to rely for the happiness and usefulness of the future.



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(ii) Then it should be remembered that outward appearances soon lose the charm with which they first fascinate us, if they are not combined with more valuable and enduring qualities. Nothing is better known than the fact that the most beautiful features cease to please, nay, to be even noticed, after being looked upon for a season, except so far as they remind us of those rarer qualities which have more especially to do with our higher and nobler life.

It is, alas I sadly too common a thing, in the history of wedded life, to find men turning away from wives of the most lovely form, to whom they have been united by the most sacred ties, in their preference for women of far less prepossessing appearance. The same may be said of women as of men, the fact simply being that outward form and grace, however they may charm at the onset, have little power to hold and gratify the heart in comparison with those moral and intellectual qualities that appeal to what is best in our nature.

How often we see – and many of our own experiences are, doubtless, illustrative of the fact – that an ill-proportioned and actually misshapen face or figure will become more and more beautiful in our eyes, as the years go by, simply because it reminds us of the love, or unselfishness, or of other noble qualities possessed by the individual! Take, for instance, the crippled son of an affectionate mother. His deformity will actually become beautiful in her eyes, as age creeps on, not simply on account of the deformity itself, but because it symbolises the utter weakness and dependence of her child. Or, it may be, because his infirmity reminds her of some admirable moral quality possessed by him, or of the strong affection he gives back in return for all her labour on his behalf.

Take the case of the woman whose husband is brought home disfigured for life by an accident. Is there any lessening of her love for him in consequence? No, I should say that there would probably be – nay, that in a vast majority of instances there actually is – an increase of all her tenderest feelings.

What is the sum, then, of what I have said on this question? Am I saying that beauty of face and grace of form are evils, or at best not worth consideration? By no means. They are great and good gifts of God, and should be prized accordingly. If you find in



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a man or a woman the essentials I have named to you in these Letters, of goodness, and truth, and holiness, and readiness to join in a self-sacrificing life, thank God for it all. And if, in addition, the object of your esteem should be possessed of a pleasing appearance, so much the more precious will be your treasure, and so much the more value ought you to set upon it. But, in any case, beware lest your admiration and love should lead you to idolatry, and so provoke your Heavenly Father to remove your idol from before your eyes.

2. The second rock on which men and women often come to grief on this subject is Money. By this, I mean any temporal advantages that may offer themselves as inducements to Marriage. Much that I have said concerning the danger already referred to, is also applicable to this. But still, this is a peril so serious, and so real, that I must add some further counsel respecting it.

While men and women often fall into the former mistake, unwittingly, they frequently drift on to this rock with their eyes wide open, or even, alas! they drift on to it of a set purpose. They are lured into Marriage solely by the attraction of certain earthly benefits; or, in other words, they sell themselves, body and soul, for a bit of gold. How many lives of glorious promise and possibilities have I seen wrecked on this reef! There have been, in my experience, it is true, some beautiful exceptions: the money, the position, the advantages gained by Marriage have been sanctified, laid on the altar, and made helpful to a holy, consecrated, soul-winning life; but the exceptions have, I say it with sorrow, been few.

Now, observe what I say. I am speaking to Salvationists, or to any others, so far as that goes, who may be in danger of being influenced in their choice merely by prospects of "Better-offness" of one kind or another. To them I say, Stop a moment, and consider what you want in the partner with whom you expect to live out the rest of your days; whose lot, with its trials, battles, and sorrows, you are going to share for better or for worse.

If there is to be any happiness in your heart and home, the partner you select must command your personal love and respect, and give back to your heart a real sympathy on all the main questions that will most influence life. Can you be happy



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with him or with her under any other conditions? I answer, "No, you cannot; I do not care who you are."

Here is a sum in Matrimonial Arithmetic. Work it out for yourself. Answer it to your own heart "Which is preferable, a cottage with love and sympathy, or a mansion without?"

For instance, we will suppose that you marry that man for what he has, and what he promises to bestow upon you, and not for what he is. He is not what you desire in affection, in religion, or Salvationism. But he has property or position, and you will be able to live in a larger house, and to keep servants. You will have better clothes to wear, more comforts in sickness, and something in store for a rainy day.

Now, let me ask the readers of this Letter who may be in perplexity as to how they ought to act in such a case, a question which will, I think, help them to a right conclusion. "Would you, as a good Salvationist, marry that man without these earthly advantages? Would you have him if he were poor and friendless, or without the things that now charm you?" If your heart answers, "No; I would not," then I say, do not have him at any price, for you will be happier, holier, and more useful in the humblest dwelling, with a husband or a wife who is one with you in heart and soul, than in a palace without – nay, more, you will be happier, holier, and more useful without being married at all, than you would be united with one whose great attraction in your eyes is the base and sordid advantage of this world's goods.

There are, doubtless, other rocks on which married happiness and usefulness go to pieces, but I cannot refer to them now. Perhaps I have noticed those most likely to affect Salvationists, and on these I think I have said sufficient. I speak as unto the wise. "Judge ye what I say."

But in the concluding words of my last Letter, I referred to a subject which deserves a more prominent notice than was given to it there. I said, that whatever else was, or was not, found in the qualifications demanded for Marriage, there must be Love – that is, there must be not merely a passing regard, but a deep affection. If that is there, in addition to the qualities I have named, then, I think, trusting in Divine Providence, the



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engagement may be made, with the confident anticipation that the blessing of God will be given to the union that is to consummate it.