



CHAPTER 4: The Choice of Work (continued)

My DEAR COMRADES,

I said something in my last Letter about it being the Duty of parents to find good Work for their children. I am sure you will see the bearing of the question upon their happiness and usefulness in the future. You know, and sometimes say, that there has been much in the shaping of your own life that you could wish had been different. But that evil is beyond remedy now. You cannot go back to your childhood and change the things that happened then. But, to a marvellous extent, you can do for your children what you wish had been done for you, and so make it easier for them to live the sort of life that you wish you had lived yourself.

Few questions of greater importance can arise in the hearts of parents than that which asks, "What shall we do with the children? How are they to earn their livelihood? What employment shall we choose for them?"

What I said in my last Letter was, in some part, an answer to this question, but perhaps a word or two further may be useful:

1. Do not choose for them any Work which will make it difficult for them to live a truly Godly life. When any form of industry is proposed, your first inquiry respecting it should be – "Is this business, to which I am about to consign my child, such an one as can be followed by him with honour and truth and righteousness? Is it an employment that is favourable to his keeping a clear conscience and exhibiting the character of Jesus Christ? Is it one upon which he will look back with satisfaction in the world to come? Is it one, that will permit him to put forth a fair share of effort for the Salvation of souls and the glory of his Saviour?"

Now, if it is not, I beseech you to let not prospect of wages, or position, the pleasing of friends, the wishes of the child himself, or anything else, lead you to consign him to it. No earthly allurements must be strong enough to induce you to give your child to an employment that must be, more or less, one of conflict with his conscience, all



through his life, and which may involve the ultimate loss of his soul.

2. Do not consign your children to those kinds of employment, where the surroundings will be likely to lead them from God. There is a great difference in the class of temptations that have to be averted, and the companions that have to be resisted, in the various trades around you. Some are, indeed, and of a truth, a broad way leading straight down to destruction. Any other destiny for those whose feet are placed thereon seems all but impossible. By all and every honest means keep your children away from these downhill roads to Hell.

You would count a father cruel, who sent his boys to skate or slide on ice, which a little enquiry might show him was not equal to bearing their weight. Do not send your children into circumstances which, a little foresight will show you, are dangerous – where the ice will give way and let them in.

3. Do not fix your children up in any employment which their health will not be likely to stand. Look into the thing beforehand, and if it seems that the hours may be too many, or the physical strain too great, or the standing too taxing, or the anxieties too much for the nerves, let it pass. Perhaps the trade may unavoidably render some noxious vapours, or there may be some other tendencies that will sap the springs of vigour in your boy. Never mind what it is, if it is injurious. Think what a precious treasure good health is! If the child has a healthy body, take care of it, – and if not, so much the more need for you to watch over the measure of health that he does enjoy.

I do not want you to shrink from committing your children to lives of hard work. But I do think you should be careful in this respect, especially with the delicate members of your flock. Some will stand more hardship than others. Discriminate.

4. Strive to select Work that will match the capacities of your children. I suppose that every child is specially gifted in some particular direction. One boy will have extra ability for one kind of work, and his brother for another. As a rule, children, indeed everybody, prefer to do those things for which they have the most aptitude. Therefore, if you can set them going in the direction for which they not only have the most liking, but the most ability, you will serve them well.



But here I am faced with a difficulty. I know that many of my people will lack both means and opportunity, for settling their boys and girls in that Work which will best match their tastes and capacities. Circumstances render it indispensable that Dick should go to the mine, or Harry should follow the plough, or Mary should go to domestic service, however much they would prefer, or seem fitted for, something else. Well, if that be so, as I have said before, you must conclude that, at present, that is God's plan, and you must wait on Him to learn whether He has any other.

5. In making a choice of employment for your children, let me warn you against allowing yourselves to regard any class of labour as menial or degrading, if that Work be good and honest Work, honourable in the sight of God, and serviceable to your fellowmen.

The prevalent rage for what are considered to be more "respectable" methods of earning a livelihood, is working very injuriously amongst the labouring part of the community. Everywhere parents who have themselves brought up families by hard, manual toil, are carried away with the desire to put their children into positions by which they shall be able to earn their bread by what they have the vain conceit to imagine is an easier and more reputable way than that which served them so well.

They think that if they can make them clerks or teachers, get them behind counters, or train them for some profession which will not soil their hands, it will be preferable to domestic service, or to the mining or mechanical or other laborious trades followed by themselves.

Hence, all round the world, those branches of industry which are regarded as being genteel are overcrowded; the wages paid in them being often insufficient to purchase the necessities of life for the workers and their families. So that when they get the opportunity of Marriage, a respectable semi-starvation is frequently the result of what they had thought would be a change for the better.

Now I want you to realise that the Work of the servant in the kitchen, or the artisan in the workshop, or the labourer in the field, is as respectable, before God, as that of the master in the counting-house, or the mistress in the drawing-room.



The employment of the stoker in the fire-hole of the steamer is just as honourable as that of the engineer, who superintends the machinery; of the Doctor who prescribes for the sicknesses of the passengers; or the Captain who directs the course of the vessel.

Other considerations, no doubt, enter into this question, some of which I may refer to another time. But what I now beg of you is, not to be led off by any stupid notions as to hard, manual, common Work being in itself degrading, or anything of the kind. No true honourable labour on the face of the earth, which works no ill to one's neighbour, is to be despised.

6. But here I may be asked the question, Ought not a Soldier's children to be trained for Officership? To this I reply, Most certainly they ought, if they make it manifest that they possess, or are likely to possess gifts that will qualify them for such an important position.

Every Salvationist father ought to foster in the hearts and minds of his children – boys and girls alike – the idea that to be Officers in The Salvation Army is the highest and most useful position to which they can hope to aspire in this world, and so create the ambition in their hearts to reach it. And every Salvationist mother ought to do the same, only more so.

That ambition took possession of my own soul soon after I was converted. There was no Salvation Army in those days, so that I could not aspire to be an Officer in it; and to be a Minister in any Church appeared so high, so lofty, and so far away, that I scarcely dared to think I could ever attain unto that. Still, I yearned after it with an increasing yearning, for six long years, never turning aside from it, hoping in the face of every kind of discouragement that the position would ultimately be mine. In due course God, in His loving-kindness rewarded my perseverance, and brought me into it.

In after days my precious Wife joined with me in creating in the hearts of our dear children a similar ambition. They were made to feel that there was only one walk in life that would be right and proper for them. This feeling grew and grew; until it became an inward conviction, that they had been redeemed, and converted, and sent into the



world, in order that they might engage in this great Work.

It will be so with the children of my dear Soldiers, if they will only lead them on to it, by home example and teaching, and when they do develop some desire and show some ability for Officership, that desire should be strengthened and that capacity should be cultivated. Let them be enrolled as Corps Cadets, and have every opportunity possible given them for acquiring the necessary Training. Above all, their religion should be carefully watched over, and the flame of love to God and souls kept burning in their hearts.

But where Officership has been decided upon, supposing the necessary gifts and piety are forthcoming, a thorough training in some form of industry will prove advantageous to them in after life, no matter what rank they may hold, or what position they may fill.

The advantage of such a course, with respect to the boys, will be self-evident. I believe there is a custom in the German Royal Family which binds every member to acquire a knowledge of some form of skilled labour. I think the present Emperor is a compositor; that is, a printer. If to have a practical knowledge of a trade at his finger ends is considered a desirable acquisition in an Emperor, how much more will it be found so in a Salvation Officer! Then, should some difficulty intervene to prevent the child reaching the position of Officership, the knowledge he has acquired will serve the important purpose of enabling him to earn a livelihood. Or should health, or some other unforeseen trouble make it necessary for him to retire from active command after he has gained the position, the trade learned in his youth will be very useful.

But if it is deemed desirable that the boys should be taught some useful form of Work, it is absolutely essential that the girls should, at least, learn those things that lie within a woman's sphere which they ought to know, and which have to do with the comfort, economy, and well-being of the household.

There was nothing about a home that my dear Wife did not understand, and was not able to do. She could whitewash the ceilings, paper the walls, paint the doors, plan the carpets, make the children's clothes; and, what was of no little importance in a



large family, so bake the bread and cook the simple food as to make it, at the same time, pleasant to the taste and easy for the, digestion.

None of this kind of knowledge will be a burden to any of our dear girls when they have grown to womanhood, or acquired the position of Officership. On the contrary, it will greatly increase their worth and usefulness in a thousand different ways.