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Chapter XVI

SPEAKING FOR CHRIST

I

Comrades and Friends, — There are a great many people on earth, and a growing number in Heaven, who have been converted through some personal word spoken by the lovers of Jesus at unexpected times and in unusual places.

The opportunities for this kind of usefulness are so numerous that they cannot be counted. They come to us every day, and to most of us many times a day. But, alas! How often they come and go unnoted and unimproved! This should not be. I want to ask you to take advantage of them.

I want you to feel that if you wear our blessed Uniform, or in any other way signify that you belong to The Army, people expect you to say something to them about eternal things.

In many cases your neglect of what appears to be a duty may cause some surprise, and even lead those who witness it to set you down as insincere, or as only half believing the great truths on which The Army lays so great a stress.

Of course, opportunities will ever be occurring to you to speak to the members of your own family about their spiritual interests. But it is not those opportunities to which, at this moment, I refer, important as they may be. Neither am I asking you to avail yourselves of every chance of speaking to your Comrades on these subjects. I am asking for something more than this. I am urging you to seize every opportunity of putting in your word for Salvation with the ungodly people around you.

I am not now asking you to visit them in their homes, on their sick beds, in the drinking saloons, in the workshops or elsewhere, although that is important – very important – an multitudes of your comrades all over the world have been successful in such efforts. But I am asking you to drop a word, or have a little conversation, with the people you meet in the train, or on the tram; that when you buy or sell, when you are at the mill, when you meet friends or strangers by the way, you should be ready to speak a word for God and Salvation.



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Now some of you will say, 'I cannot do that sort of thing. I never could. I do not like it.' Perhaps not. But just wait a bit. I shall hope to show you not only that you can do this kind of work, but how you may find pleasure in doing it.

In order to do this, I recommend you to –

1. Make up your mind to speak about God's will to the first stranger that crosses your path after reading this Message.

Do not think it absolutely necessary to decide beforehand what you shall say. The Holy Spirit will supply you with words, and bless you in speaking.

2. Keep a sharp look out for opportunities as they arise.

Again, I say, God will guide you. But wherever there is a chance, strive to make the most of it. Oh, how often these chances come and go unimproved!

Do we not often reproach ourselves for having let such opportunities slip? 'Why did I not speak about his soul to that man with whom I had the chat?' Or, 'Why did I not drop a word to that woman whom I spoke to on some other matter?'

Sometimes those to whom God has given us the chance of speaking are suddenly stricken down, and pass away. Then in bitterness of heart we say: 'Oh, why did I not utter a word of warning when the chance was mine? Now they are gone beyond my reach for ever!' Perhaps God, on the Judgement Day, will echo that question, 'Why?' Therefore, be watchful.

3. In speaking to strangers, be careful not to give needless offence.

Speak kindly and gently, and with all due courtesy and respect, and you will be surprised how far you can go without creating ill feeling. Should any one, however, be offended, you must apologize.

4. Be sure and deal faithfully when you do speak.



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In many cases you can create interest by relating something of your own experience. Testimony is a wonderful thing, and when given modestly, with faith in God, generally moves the hearts of those who hear it.

5. Be sure every time, and all the time, to cast yourselves on God for His blessing on what you say, remembering that He is with you.

Do not be discouraged if your words are rejected, or received with scorn, or, it may even be, cast back in your teeth with sneers or curses. You can remember that this was the experience of your Lord, and that it is no proof that you have not said the right thing, and that it may not have the desired effect.

It is not you who do the work, but the truth you speak. Unknown to you, the leaven you have imparted may be working in the heart you have approached, and the seed you have sown may be destined to bring forth precious fruit.

For, soon or late, to all that sow,
The time of harvest shall be given
The flower shall bloom, the fruit shall grow,
If not on earth, at last in Heaven!

My comrades, let me ask whether you are in the habit of following this method of usefulness? If you are, I congratulate you, and bless you in the name of the Lord. Go on, and prosper more and more!

If it has not been your custom to speak for your Lord after this fashion, I want you to ask Him to forgive your neglect; to promise Him that you will do better in the future, and that you will begin today.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.