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Chapter XXI

THE CHILDREN

II

Comrades and Friends, — You will remember that my last letter was about saving the Children. I felt I must have another word on the subject. The matter is so important that it will bear a great deal more consideration than it usually receives even at the hands of Salvationists. You remember my text last week, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' That text will serve me for a second Message.

At this point I think I hear some one saying, 'Yes, General, the Salvation of the children is important indeed. I agree with everything you say about it. But how is it to be accomplished? That is the question.' While another says: 'The discouragements suffered by those who have started on the task are great, and the failures have been many, some of the best people having been most unfortunate with their children.'

Alas! My friends, what you say is only too true; but, as Jesus Christ said to one of His Apostles on one occasion, 'What is that to thee? Follow thou Me.' By that He meant, I suppose, that you must not allow either the ignorance or the failure of other people in the discharge of yours. Do as He tells you — follow His example, and you will stand clear whatever the consequences may be.

Moreover, you do not know how far the disheartening instances of which you speak have really been failures. Many children who have failed to respond to efforts made for their Salvation at the time those efforts were made, have found mercy at some future time, and found it as the result of the efforts which were pronounced failures.

Then it must also be borne in mind that no one can tell how far parents or guardians have destroyed the worth of the efforts made by inconsistencies in their own lives and conduct.

Anyway, let me give you a hint or two bearing on the effective discharge of your task, and may God help you to understand and carry them out.



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1. My first counsel is, comply with the invitation given in the text: Take them to Jesus.

Not only does He command you to suffer them to come to Him, but He expects you to persuade them to do so. He alone can meet their need. It is God that saves. Take them to Him.

By all means, as far as you are able, take them to the Bible, to the Directory, to the Junior Meetings, to the Band of Love, and to every other source of human help likely to be useful; but Jesus, the Living, Conquering Christ, must be the Saviour of every precious child, if that child is to be saved at all. What a mercy it is that He lives, loves, and waits for them! Take them to Him.

2. Begin early with your task.

Be beforehand with the world and the Devil and their own selfish natures. You cannot start too soon. Teach them the name of Jesus as soon as they can lisp any name at all. Hush them to sleep with Salvation Songs. Meet their opening minds with the message of mercy. Prepare them to carry out His wishes by making them carry out yours. I cannot insist too strongly on the importance of inspiring them with the spirit of obedience to those whom God has placed in authority over them. The practice of obedience to man will help them to learn the practice of obedience to God. I say again, you cannot begin too soon.

3. Get them converted.

Make that your target. The bare knowledge of the theory of religion – of the Bible story, and the Saviour's love, is good, very good. Association with The Salvation Army and with religious efforts and godly companions are all excellent; for them to be obedient and kind and truthful is better still. But all these things, if put in the place of the Holy Spirit's work upon the heart, will prove a delusion. The children must be converted – Jesus Christ expressly says they must be born again, or they cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven. You know what we mean by conversion. You must have experienced it yourselves. Oh, never rest or let your boys and girls rest until you have reason to believe it has become an actual fact in their experience. All things are possible with God. The children can be saved.

4. Then, you must have faith in God for the attainment of your object.



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Many Salvationists are sorely troubled with doubts and fears with respect to the Salvation of their children. If you use the means, you must believe that you are going to succeed. Unbelief may hinder everything.

5. You must secure their conversion as early as possible.

You know the scripture says: 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of Salvation.' If those glorious words can be applied to anyone, it is to the children. So believe for their Salvation right away.

If a certain amount of human knowledge or some particular experience in wickedness was essential to Salvation, then it would seem necessary for the work to be postponed to a later time. But seeing that all that is required on the part of the children, in order to be saved, is the giving up of their heart and life to Jesus Christ, and that this can be accomplished as soon as the little ones can distinguish between right and wrong, why should there be any delay?

6. Watch over them when they are saved.

Guard them as you do the tender plants in the garden, or any other delicate things you want to rear up to maturity. If they fall into sin, remember Jesus Christ has said that if there is repentance, they must be forgiven, though they have sinned seventy times seven. Take them to Him again. Do not question their reality because they chance frequently to flag in faith or duty, or to grow weary in well-doing; continue to encourage them. Cheer them up when they seem to be almost hopeless. Develop the spark that remains, and breathe new life into them, when the life they had seems to have all but expired.

Encouragement is a long way towards being the greatest help you can render to the perseverance of the young. Never give the children up.

7. See the children to do some work for God, which is possible for them, and for which they are suitable.

The sense of responsibility for some other soul, and the question: 'What will be said if I backslide?' saved me from falling away from God in the boyish trials and depressions of my



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impulsive nature, more than all other human means. So it will be with other boys and girls, I have no doubt.

8. Pray for the children, and let them feel that you are doing so.

Pray for them not only in their presence, but when you are alone.

There are many other things that I would like to say, but there is one other counsel I must mention; and that is:

9. Live a consistent life before their eyes.

Perhaps I can best explain what I mean by giving you an illustration. Some time ago a Soldier in a leading Corps was giving his testimony, when his little boy (Johnnie, we will call him), sitting in the congregation, said in a whisper that could be plainly heard by those around, 'Yes, he's a fine Salvationer, he is! You ought to hear the jolly rows he kicks up when he is at home!'

Oh, do not shut your children out of Heaven by living at home a life which contradicts the testimony you give in the Meetings, and the profession you make in public! Set the children a holy example.

Now, let me ask, What is being done for the Salvation of the children in your Corps? If a census could be taken of the Soldiers who are doing what they can to effect the Salvation of the children, I wonder how many names the list would contain. Would your names be on it, my Comrades?

I know of few earthly satisfactions which surpass that of seeing your boys and girls growing up around you, champions for Christ, and able to speak for Him with the enemy at the gate.

So fathers, mothers, Sergeants, Company Guards, or whoever you may be, that are wrestling for the souls of the children, persevere; and ever ion this world you shall have as the fruits of your labours many beautiful lives.



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And some, whose Salvation was despaired of here, shall, through the efforts made on their behalf, call down blessings on your name in their last hour; and, believing in the Saviour of whom you told them, shall pass through the Cold River to be stars in your crown for ever and ever.

Your affectionate General,  
William Booth.