

## THE CHIEF OF THE STAFF

No account of the Salvation Army would be complete without some words about Mr. Bramwell Booth, General Booth's eldest son and right-hand man, who in the Army is known as the Chief of the Staff. Being convinced of this, I sought an interview with him--the last of the many that I have had in connexion with the present work.

In the Army Mr. Bramwell Booth is generally recognized as 'the power behind the throne.' He it is who, seated in his office in London, directs the affairs and administers the policy of this vast Organization in all lands; the care of the countless Salvation Army churches is on his shoulders, and has been for these many years. He does not travel outside Europe; his work lies chiefly at home. I understand, however, that he takes his share in the evangelical labours of the Army, and is a powerful and convincing speaker, although I have never chanced to hear any of his addresses.

In appearance at his present age of something over fifty, he is tall and not robust, with an extremely sympathetic face that has about it little of his father's rugged cast and sternness. Perhaps it is this evident sympathy that commands the affection of so many, for I have been told more than once that he is the best beloved man in the Army, and one who never uses a stern word.

I found him busy and pressed for time, even more so, if possible, than I was myself; he had but just arrived by an early train from some provincial city. In fact, he was then engaged upon his annual visitation to all the Field Officers in the country, which, as he explained, takes him away from London for three days a week for a period of six weeks, and throws upon him a considerable extra strain of mind and body. The diocese of the Salvation Army is very extensive!

I said to Mr. Bramwell Booth that I desired from him his views of the Army as a religious and a social force throughout the wide world, in every land where it sets its foot. I wished to hear of the work considered as a whole, likewise of that work in its various aspects, and of the different races of mankind among which it is carried on. Also, amongst others, I put to him the following specific questions:--

In what way and by what means does the Army adapt itself to the needs and customs of the various peoples among whom it is established?

What is its comparative measure of success with each of these peoples, and what future is anticipated for it among them respectively?

Where is the work advancing, where does it hang in the balance, and where is it being driven backwards?

What are your views upon the future of the Army as a religious and social power throughout the world, bearing in mind the undoubted difficulties with which it is confronted?

Do you consider that now, after forty-five years of existence, it is, speaking generally, on the downward or on the upward grade?

What information can you give me as to the position of the Army in its relations with other religious bodies?

At this point Mr. Bramwell Booth inquired mildly how much time I had to spare. The result of my answer was that we agreed together that it was clearly impossible to deal with all these great matters in an interview. So it was decided that he should take time to think them over, and should furnish his replies in the form of a written memorandum. This he has done, and I may say without flattery that the paper which he has drawn up is one of the most clear and broad-minded that I have had the pleasure of reading for a long while. Since it is too long to be used as a quotation, I print it in an appendix,[7] trusting sincerely that all who are interested in the Salvation Army in its various aspects will not neglect its perusal. Indeed, it is a valuable and an authoritative document, composed by perhaps the only person in the world who, from his place and information, is equal to the task.

Personally I venture upon neither criticism nor comment, whose rôle throughout all these pages is but that of a showman, although I trust one not altogether devoid of insight into the matter in hand.

To only one point will I call attention--that of the general note of confidence which runs through Mr. Bramwell Booth's remarks. Clearly he at least does not believe that the Salvation Army is in danger of dissolution. Like his father, he believes that it will go on from good to good and from strength to strength.

There remain, however, one or two other points that we discussed together to which I will allude. Thus I asked him if he had anything to say as to the attacks which from time to time were made upon the Army. He replied as his father had done: 'Nothing, except that they were best left to answer themselves.'

Then our conversation turned to the matter of the resignation of certain Officers of the Army which had caused some passing public remark.

'We have an old saying here,' he said, with some humour, 'that we do not often lose any one whom we very much desire to keep.'

I pointed out that I had heard allegations made to the effect that the Army Officers were badly paid, hardly treated, and, when they proved

of no more use, let go to find a living as best they could.

He replied that, as to the matter of money, the Army had established a Pension fund in all the Western countries, which now amounts to a large total. In this country the sum was about £44,000, and during 1909 about £1,800 had been paid here in pensions. This, however, was only a beginning, but he thought that the effort was being made on the right lines, and that, notwithstanding their poverty, a really adequate Pension fund would be built up in due course.

Then of a sudden he became eloquent. He said he admitted that the Army had little to offer. Those who came into its service knew that this was so; that they had no hope of temporal reward; that thenceforth the great feature of their life and work was that it must be filled with labour and self-denial. The whole business of helping and saving our fellow-creatures was one of struggle and suffering. Sacrifice was the key-note of Christianity as laid down by its Founder. Those who sought money and temporal honour must look elsewhere than to the Salvation Army. Its pride and glory was that thousands were willing to suffer and deny themselves from year to year, and to find their joy and their recompense in the consciousness that they were doing something, however little, to lighten the darkness and relieve the misery of the world.

Here are some of his actual words upon this matter that I will quote, as I cannot better them:--

'The two facts of real consequence about our Officers are these:

First, that their numbers go on increasing year by year, and second, that they remain devoted to their work, very poor, and absolutely bent on obtaining a reward in Heaven. But let me quote here from General Booth on this matter:--

"I resolved that no disadvantage as to birth, or education, or social condition should debar any one from entering the list of combatants so long as he was one with me in love for God, in faith for the salvation of men, and in willingness to obey the orders he should receive from me and from those I authorized to direct him. I have, of course, had many disappointments--not a few of them very hard to bear at the time--but from the early days of 1868, when I engaged my first recognized helper, to 1878, when the number had increased by slow degrees to about 100, and on to the present day, when their number is rapidly approaching 20,000, there has not been a single year without its increase, not only in quantity, but in quality.

"I am sometimes asked, What about those who have left me? Well, I am thankful to say that we remain in sympathetic and friendly relations with the great bulk of them. It was to be expected that in work such as ours, demanding, as it does, not only arduous toil and constant self-denial and often real hardships of one kind or another, some should prove unworthy, some should grow weary, and others should faint by the way, whilst others again, though very excellent souls, should

prove unsuitable. It could not be otherwise, for we are engaged in real warfare, and whoever heard of war without wounds and losses? But even of those who do thus step aside from the position of Officers, a large proportion--in this country nine out of ten--remain with us, engaged in some voluntary effort in our ranks."

'But,' continued Mr. Bramwell Booth, 'I would be the last person to minimize our losses. They may be accounted for in the most natural way, and yet we cannot but feel them and suffer from them. And yet it is all just a repetition of the Bible stories of all ages; nay, of all stories of genuine fighting in any great cause. The great feature of our present experience in this matter is that the number who go out from us grows every year smaller in proportion to the whole, and that, as the General says in the above extract, a very large proportion of those continue in friendly relations with us.'

'The triumph of these splendid men and women, in the face of every kind of difficulty in every part of the world is, however, really a triumph of their faith. It is not the Army, it is not their leaders, it is not even the wonderful devotion which many of them manifest, which is the secret of their continued life and continued success, nor is it any confidence in their own abilities. No! The true representative of the Army is relying at every turn upon the presence, guidance, and help of God in trying to carry out the Father's purpose with respect to every lost and suffering child of man. By that test, alike in the present and future, we must ever stand or fall. The Army

is either a work of faith or it is nothing at all.

'Everything throughout all our ranks can really be brought to that test, and I regard with composure every loss and attack, every puzzle and danger, chiefly because I rely upon my comrades' trust in God being responded to by Him according to their need.'

Perhaps I may be allowed to add a few remarks upon this subject. A great deal is made of the resignation of a few Salvation Army Officers in order that they may accept excellent posts in other walks of life; indeed, it is not uncommon to see it stated that such resignations herald the dissolution of the Society. Inasmuch as the number of the Army's Officers is nearing 20,000 it would seem that it can very well spare a few of them. What fills me with wonder is not that some go, but that so many remain. This is one of the facts which, amongst much that is discouraging, convinces me of the innate nobility of man. An old friend of mine of pious disposition once remarked to me that he could never have been a Christian martyr. At the first twist of the cord, or the first nip of the red-hot pincers, he was sure that he would have thrown incense by the handful upon the altar of any heathen god or goddess that was fashionable at the moment. His spirit might have been willing, but his flesh would certainly have proved weak.

I sympathized with the honesty of this confession, and in the same way I sympathize with those Officers of the Salvation Army who, in racing



slang, cannot 'stay the course.'

Let us consider the lot of these men. Any who have entered on even a secular crusade, something that takes them off the beaten, official paths, that leads them through the thorns and wildernesses of a new, untravelled country, towards some distant goal seen dimly, or not seen at all except in dreams, will know what such an undertaking means. It means snakes in the grass; it means savages, or in other words veiled and poisonous hatreds and bitter foes, or, still worse, treacherous friends. The crusader may get through, in which case no one will thank him except, perhaps, after he is dead. Or he may fail and perish, in which case every one will mock at him. Or he may retreat discouraged and return to the official road, in which case his friends will remark that they are glad to see that his insanity was only of the intermittent order, and that at length he has learned his place in the world and to whom he ought to touch his cap.

Well, these are official roads to Heaven as well as to the House of Lords and other mundane goals, a fact which the Salvation Army Officer and others of his kind have probably found out. On the official road, if he has interest and ability--the first is to be preferred--he might have become anything, and with ordinary fortune would certainly have become something.

But on the path that he has chosen what is there for him to gain? An inheritance of dim glory beyond the stars, obscured doubtless from

time to time, if he is like other men, by sudden and sickening eclipses of his faith. And meanwhile the daily round, the insolent gibe, and the bitter ingratitude of men that leaves him grieving. Also not enough money to pay for a cab when it is wet, and considerable uncertainty as to the future of his children, and even as to his own old age. Few comforts for him, not even those of a glass of wine to stimulate him, or of tobacco to soothe his nerves, for these are forbidden to him by the rules of his Order. Unless he can reach the very top of his particular tree also, which it is most unlikely that he will, no public recognition even of his faithful, strenuous work, and who is there that at heart does not long for public recognition? In short, nothing that is desirable to man save the consciousness of a virtue which, after all, he must feel to be indifferent (being well aware of his own secret faults), and the satisfaction of having helped a certain number of lame human dogs over moral or physical stiles.

In such a case and in a world which we must admit to be selfish and imperfect, the wonder is not that certain Salvation Army Officers, being trained men of high ability, yield to tempting offers and go, but that so many of them remain.

'Look at my case,' said one of them to me. 'With my experience and organizing ability I am worth £2,000 a year as the manager of any big business, and I could have it if I liked. Here I get about £200!'

This was one of those who remain. I say all honour to such noble

souls, for surely they are of the salt of the earth.