

General Booth and his Mission.

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GENERAL BOOTH was a man with a mission. He felt it his duty to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in." His mission was to the outcast and poor.

We may not always agree with the methods of the Salvation Army. They often seem too rough and crude for more sensitive souls; and the matter-of-fact way of putting certain doctrines does not always appeal to the more refined, and may shock or repel those who otherwise would be in sympathy with the objects of the movement. But all such criticism is on the surface, and does not touch the heart of General Booth's mission. Before we dare criticize, we must learn; we must see that our sympathies with the objects of the mission are quickened before we are in a proper position to judge of the methods. Every prophet has alienated some people; and a prophet's originality does not always appeal to the good folk who love the conventions. It may be that General Booth adopted the most suitable methods for the attainment of his object. At any rate, if we believe in the object, it rests with us to find better methods.

Now it is somewhat humiliating to find that still another prophet could find no home in the older organized Churches. One assumes here what is now commonly agreed—that the Salvation Army has done an enormously valuable and much-needed work, and has taught us the necessity of the Church seeking and saving the lost. William Booth was born in a Church of England family and baptized as a member of the Church of England, but he did not remain long in the Church, and was early attracted to the Wesleyans. But the Wesleyans have not so much kept alive John Wesley's evangelistic spirit as stereotyped his methods into a new conventional groove, and

William Booth believed that he could be of much more use preaching in the streets than addressing a respectable congregation as a local preacher ; hence his severance from the Wesleyans. The Congregationalists pleased him no better, and, though he was ordained a minister of the Methodist New Connexion in 1858, the Conference finally threw him over in 1861 owing to his unconventional methods. Since that time he managed his own organization, although the title "The Salvation Army" was not adopted until 1877.

We cannot blame General Booth for his isolation. He had the same justification as John Wesley had in his day, although perhaps Wesley tried harder to keep in touch with the wider Church. But the isolation has not been in all ways good. The working-man has largely taken up his schemes of social reform, but neglected his form of religion ; and in so far as the older Churches have not combined social reform with spiritual salvation they have been left stranded "high and dry." The great danger of our time is lest material welfare solely shall be sought by the working classes, while their spiritual welfare is not so much as thought of. This is, of course, totally alien from the spirit of General Booth, who taught that material welfare and spiritual welfare were almost inseparably mingled. He sought material improvements because he found that they were the necessary basis on which to build spiritual improvement. The conditions of life for thousands of our population are so degrading that it is almost hopeless to expect that the soul can be kept pure. Body and soul mutually influence each other : the foul body degrades the soul, and the foul soul degrades the body. Give a man food, air, cleanliness, and there is hope of a pure and spotless soul, just as a pure soul will, if the struggle be not too great, fashion for itself a pure and clean environment. It was this mutual interplay of bodily conditions and spiritual that lay at the heart of the great appeal, "In Darkest England, and the Way Out."

We cannot say what will happen now to the Salvation Army. For some time, at any rate, it will go on under the

inspiration of its great founder. But there are signs that its power has reached its zenith, and that henceforth, as a separate organization, it may wane. The real success of General Booth's work will be in the degree in which his spirit pervades all the Churches. Every Church should be a Salvation Army. Every Church ought to provide the link between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the saint and the sinner, the spiritual and the material. It should not be necessary to form a separate organization for the rescue of the outcast, another for social reform, one for the rich, and one for the poor. There may be room for separate societies emphasizing certain necessary works, but they should all be within the one Church. Where the spirit of exclusiveness reigns, there you have Pharisaism, class-feeling, mutual distrust. The exclusive Church ceases to be Christian, for the Christian Church is the Communion of all faithful people.

Now this exclusive spirit is by no means uncommon in our churches, and this applies quite, or nearly, as much to the Nonconformists as to ourselves. Time was when the church was regarded as the place for the rich and the chapel the home of the poor. But in many places, with the growth of Nonconformist prosperity, the position is exactly reversed. Workingmen often say they do not attend the chapel because, perhaps, the deacons are those who grind them down during the week. One remembers a Nonconformist chapel where the deacons would not hear of a men's service because they would dirty the cushions. If the cushions are more important than the saving of a soul, can you wonder that men stay away from church? But many indications of this exclusiveness may be named. If a church is too richly upholstered, it does not look inviting to a working-man; it is not as comfortable as the plain, democratic bench. If the pew he enters has the name of the proprietor on the end, he wonders all through the service if he is keeping anybody else out of his seat—that is, if the proprietor has not already asked him to move farther along. He has perhaps received no welcome at the door, no hymn-book, no prayer-

book. Or, if he has the hymn-book, the hymns are often unknown and almost unintelligible, and the choir does the singing. The prayer-book is impossible to the man who has not been used to church, and, if there is no one by his side to show him, he flounders hopelessly amongst the services for the Burial of the Dead or the Churching of Women, and his dignity does not allow him to come again. When one hopes for a simple booklet of "Church Prayers and Psalms" to meet such cases as these, the publisher replies that "we are not allowed to sell this, by order of the Church authorities." Or if our friend can find his places in the prayer-book, he often wonders why he should listen to long chapters about military skirmishes at Michmash, or a list of apostolic salutations, or sing heartily about "the company of the spearmen" and "the beasts of the people," and throwing innocent children against the stones. Then perhaps, when the time for a good English talk comes, there is culture without zeal, poetry and rhetoric instead of exhortation and advice, or a political harangue against his own party in politics, or perhaps a languid dissertation about seemingly nothing whatever. Downy cushions, drawing-room pews, vicarious music, and flowers of rhetoric do not help, do not save, do not profit: they are vain.

One believes that the masses are not very far away from the Church of England if they felt they were encouraged to come, but too often they ask for bread and are given a stone; they seek the warmth of Christian brotherhood, and they find an icy chill. Progress has assuredly been made. The spirit of evangelization has taken hold of many of our Churches. The Church Army has imitated many of the good features of the Salvation Army, while it has kept closely in touch with the rest of the Church. It has pioneered much rescue work, and has coupled spiritual inspiration with regard for material conditions. The Church Army may yet do a great deal to revivify the Church, if it receives adequate support. At present much of its pioneering activity is crippled for want of funds. Work such as Mr. Watts-Ditchfield's in East London has received abundant

justification, but societies such as the Church Pastoral Aid Society, which make it their special work to help poorer parishes, have always an inordinately long waiting-list. Meanwhile, the clergy who most require help are often left unaided, and find it difficult to maintain the minimum of parochial organizations. Assuredly every Church is not a Salvation Army yet, and not often do we "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in."

The lack of funds, the lack of buildings and workers, will always be a difficulty, but if we have our aim right perhaps we can always find some methods that are feasible. The churches need not be shut from one week-end to another, like great "temples of dualism," as an agnostic friend once called them, as witnessing to the uselessness of religion in daily life; nor will there be that irreligious severance between the spiritual and the secular that finds no room for clubs and games, social recreation, or meetings for the discussion of the great problems of industry and poverty. Almost every parish should have a mission room, where the folk who wish may have a simpler service, and energetic workers, who desire such work, find vent for their activities. Here may be centred the open-air service organization, popular lantern services, ragged school, clothing club, men's institute, and so on. A Church Army captain, or a curate, and a lady helper, would find ample work in nearly every parish, and the vicar would often find more scope for evangelistic work here than in the parish church.

But apart from the mission room, or where it is not possible to have a separate mission centre, ought not the parish church to be more often a centre of evangelization and rescue? We have simple services for men, and they are good, but they are often not as much frequented as they might be, owing to their time being in the afternoon, when most men prefer to be free. They also isolate the men from the women folk. Combined afternoon services sometimes obviate the latter objection, but the afternoon is still not the best time. Would it not be possible, say once a month, to advertise a simple, popular service at the usual even-

ing time, and so educate the people to regular evening worship? The Prayer Book is confessedly a difficult book, and the Church would lose nothing by putting it aside occasionally, for definite evangelistic effort. On such occasions, if legal difficulties were raised, the Prayer Book service could be read half an hour before. How long is the Church to remain absolutely tied down to all the conventional uniformities of the past? We need occasionally new forms of expression, new and perhaps striking manifestations of the living Spirit within. We have got so stereotyped, so conventional, so icy. People think that the form is more important than the life, and life has so often to burst through the bondage of forms, and too often ends in schism. We need sometimes to get out of our old ruts and put definite evangelistic work first and foremost, even though the methods may not be entirely "correct," according to the rules that have been laid down.

It must not be forgotten that after all our statutory Prayer Book services imply a fairly high standard of Christianity in the worshippers. The services are probably ideal for the mature Christian; they are masterpieces of liturgical arrangement. But they are not suitable for those who have scarcely any elementary knowledge of the faith; they do not touch the dwellers in slumland, the outcast, or the hostile. We have to supplement the services by suitable hymns; we ought also to be able to omit the most difficult parts.

Along with this definite evangelistic work we also need more social rescue agencies. It is the principle of medical missions that care of the body should go along with care of the soul, and we know that the care for a man's bodily welfare often predisposes the patient to listen to words concerning his spiritual welfare. General Booth tried to work on the same principle: it was his regard for social and material well-being that predisposed thousands to think of his spiritual message. If the spiritual message does not seem to result in concrete love for a man in all the relationships of life, the ordinary man thinks there is something hollow and superficial about it. He is very soon

ready to dub a man a hypocrite who asks him about his soul and leaves him to struggle. The struggle to live is an evil ever present; the evils that are understood are unemployment, disease, bad housing, under-pay, over-work, sweating. "Care for these things," says the man in the street, "and I will listen to you. If you do not care for these things, I suspect your good faith in the others." The Church is, undoubtedly, suspected in this way. The words and deeds of the Church do not seem to square with one another. The working-man has fully accepted the doctrine of St. James: "Faith apart from works is barren." By our works we have to show him our faith, and if we try to show him our faith apart from works, do we wonder if he calls it vanity?

Care for material welfare must go hand in hand with spiritual ministrations, and the Church has enormous leeway to make up. Men have gone elsewhere for other gospels because the gospel of the Church has seemed to fail. It has been said over and over again during the last few months that General Booth's method in this direction has done more than anything else to make the working-classes believe that Christianity has still a message for them. It is this double message that we need to emphasize if the half-alienated masses are to be won back.

There is power in the old gospel yet, if we preserve its true balance. Our Lord went about doing good, spending what seems an inordinate amount of His time on bodily ministrations; but by this method His spiritual message did not lose; rather, it gained a hearing, it gained force, because of the loving deeds behind. We need a revival of self-sacrifice, a revival of Christ-like love, a passionate care for men, an enthusiasm for their welfare—bodily, mentally, and spiritually. We cannot split men up into sections, and say, this section is our sphere. Men are living personalities, unities, influenced by every detail of their lives. They cannot get away from their bodies. Let us, then, take men as they are, and try, by God's help, to lift them higher.

"Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."