



The Guest of The Soul

Chapter 7 – LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD AFTER SEVENTY YEARS

Seventy years are less than a pinpoint in the vastness of God's Eternity, but they are a long, long time in the life of a man. When I was a child a man of seventy seemed to me to be as old as the hills. I stood in awe of him. No words could express how venerable he was. When I looked up to him it was like looking up to the snowy, sun-crowned, storm-swept heights of great mountains.

And now, having lived threescore years and ten, I feel as one who has scaled a mighty mountain, done an exploit, or won a war. What toil it has involved! What dangers have been met and overcome! What dull routine; what thrilling adventure! What love, what joy and sorrow, what defeats and victories, what hopes and fears; what visions and dreams yet to be fulfilled! And the River not far away, yet to be crossed. "My soul, be on thy guard!" I remember and marvel.

And yet I feel I am but a child. At times I feel as frisky as a boy and I have stoutly to repress myself to keep from behaving frivolously as a boy, and I hear my friend and brother, mentor and companion of half a century, Paul, saying: "Aged men be sober, grave, temperate" (Titus ii. 2). Then again I feel as old as I am. The leaden weight of seventy years presses heavily upon me.

I look back and it seems like centuries since I was a care-free little lad; then some vivid memory will leap up within me, and the seventy years seem like a tale of yesterday and I am again a wee little boy with the tousled head," playing around the flower-embowered cottage in the tiny village by the little Blue River where I was born.

The average age of man is much less than seventy years, so I am a leftover from a departed generation. But while the snows of seventy winters are on my head, the sunshine of seventy summers is in my heart. The fading, falling leaves of seventy autumns solemnize my soul, but the resurrection life upspringing in flower and tree, the returning song-birds, the laughing, leaping brooks and swelling rivers, and the sweet, soft winds of seventy springtimes gladden me.



A history of the world during the seventy years would show such an advance socially, politically, educationally, economically, scientifically and morally as has not been seen during any previous thousand years of recorded history. People without a background of knowledge of history may dispute this, but desperate as are the moral, social and economic conditions of great masses of men today, those who know the story of the ages will not dispute it.

Woman no longer has to be mistress and plaything of prime ministers and kings to influence the political destinies of nations; she now sits as man's equal in parliament and senate, proclaims from pulpit and platform the Gospel of God's holiness and redeeming love, and is mistress of her own fortune and person.

Childhood is protected by law. The white slave traffic, while still carried on, is outlawed by civilized nations. Human slavery and serfdom have been swept away among all but the least advanced peoples. Africa has been opened to the light of civilization and the Gospel, and its open sores are being healed. The cannibal islands have been evangelized, and shipwrecked sailors and missionaries are safe on their shore.

When I was a child it took weeks to communicate with Europe, and months to reach Asia. Today King George speaks words of welcome in London to the peace envoys of nations, and the whole world listens in." We in America hear his royal voice five hours before he spoke, according to our clocks! Admiral Byrd at the South Pole speaks, and we hear him over twelve thousand miles of land and sea before his voice could reach his companion one hundred feet away! Time and space are conquered, and the whole world has become one vast whispering gallery since I was a child.

Diseases which had scourged mankind from time immemorial are now being banished from the earth. War, as the policy of nations, is renounced and denounced. Open diplomacy is an accomplished fact.

Wealth is now looked upon as a trust for humanity. Instead of fitting out pirate ships and ravaging the coasts of China as men would have done long ago, Mr. Rockefeller gives millions to establish



one of the most beautiful and up-to-date hospitals and medical schools in the world in Peiping, and untold millions are cabled across the ocean to feed the starving peoples.

When I consider the vanishing darkness, the toppling thrones, the crumbling empires, the fallen crowns, the outlawed tyrannies, the mastery of nature's secrets, the harnessing of her exhaustless energies, the penetration of all lands with the story and light of the Gospel, which I have witnessed in my day, I can but feel that I was born at the beginning of the end of the Dark Ages.

But, while the light increases and widens, the darkness still comprehends it not. And while God's "truth is marching on," "evil men and seducers" wax worse, become more and more self-conscious and class-conscious and organize and mass themselves to fight against God and His Christ and His saints and soldiers more subtly and determinedly than at any time since the days of the Roman persecutions and the Spanish Inquisition; and this may result in:

Vast eddies in the flood

Of onward time ...

And throned races may degrade.

This makes me wish for the strength of youth that I might share in the battles yet to be. But that is denied me. I must go on, like Tennyson's ships, "to the haven under the hill." But I go on serene in unshaken confidence that the flood, in spite of all eddies, flows onward not backward, that the light will evermore increase and that any triumph of "evil men and seducers" will be short.

Many of God's children are longing for Jesus to come in Person, visibly to lead on His hosts to victory. But ever since that wonderful morning forty-five years ago when He baptized me with the Holy Ghost and fire, purifying my heart and revealing Himself within me, I have felt that He meant to win His triumphs through dead men and women – dead to sin, to the world, to its prizes and praises; and all alive to Him, filled with His Spirit, indwelt by His presence, burning with His



love, glad with His joy, enduring with His patience, thrilled with His hope, daring with His self-renunciation and courage, being consumed with His zeal; all conquering with His faith, rejoicing in "the fellowship of His sufferings," and gladly made "conformable unto His death." I expect the true Vine to show forth all its strength, its beauty, its fruitfulness through the branches.

I do not expect the love of the Father, the eternal intercession of the risen and enthroned Son, the wise and loving and ceaseless ministry of conviction, conversion, regeneration and sanctification of the Holy Ghost, the prayers, and preachings and sacrifice and holy living of the soldiers of Jesus and saints of God, to fail. Jesus is even now leading on His hosts to victory, Hallelujah!

I cannot always, if ever, comprehend His great strategy. My small sector of the vast battlefield may be covered with smoke and thick darkness. The mocking foe may be pressing hard, and comrades may fear and falter and flee, and the enemy may apparently triumph as he did when Jesus died, and when the martyrs perished in sheets of flame, by the sword and headman's axe, mauled by the lion's paw, crunched by the tiger's tooth and slain by the serpent's fang. But the enemy's triumph ever has been and ever will be short, for Jesus is leading on and up, ever on, ever up, never backward, never forward, ever toward the rising sun. Revivals, resurrection life and power, are resident in our religion. A dead church, a dead Salvation Army corps, may, when we least expect, flame with revival fire, for Jesus, though unseen, is on the battlefield, and He is leading on. "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

In the lonely and still night, while others sleep, He stirs some longing soul to sighs and tears and strong cryings and wrestling prayer. He kindles utter, deathless devotion in that soul, a consuming jealousy for God's glory, for the salvation of men, for the coming of the Kingdom of God; and in that lonely and still night and out of that travail, that agony of spirit, mingled with solemn joy, a revival is born. Behold, "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke xvii. 20). There may be no blast of trumpets, no thunder of drums, no flaunting of flags. The revival is born in the heart of some lonely, longing, wrestling, believing, importunate man or



woman who will give God no rest, who will not let Him go without He blesses. Bright-eyed, golden-haired, rosy-cheeked dolls can be made by machinery and turned out to order, but living babies are born of sore travail and death agony. So revivals may be simulated, trumped up, made to order, but not so do revivals begotten by the Holy Ghost come.

Three local officers of The Salvation Army were concerned about the spiritual life of their corps. Souls were not being saved. They agreed to spend time in prayer. Saturday night they did not go home. Sunday they were not in the meetings. No one knew where they were. Sunday night there was a great "break" among the sinners and lukewarm Christians. Many souls were at the penitent-form. Many tears were shed. All hearts seemed moved and softened. About ten o'clock at night, with tears streaming down their faces, these three local officers came from under the platform where they had spent Saturday night and all day Sunday in prayer. That was the secret of the great meeting.

Seventy years have passed over my head, fifty-seven of which I have spent in the service of my Lord, and forty-three with The Salvation Army; and the experience and observation of these years confirm me in my conviction that revivals are born, not made, and that God waits to be gracious and aid and answer prayer.

I was converted one Christmas Eve at the age of thirteen, and I have never looked back, though I side-stepped and faltered a bit at times in my early years. Immediately I joined the Church, yielded loyally to its discipline, kept its rules, and though I had not the Blessing of a Clean Heart I felt keenly that I must not prove false or do anything that would bring reproach upon the Church or the cause of Christ. When I was fifteen years old, my mother slipped away to be with the Lord, and I became homeless for the next twelve years, with no one to counsel me; but this loyalty to the rules of the Church safeguarded me.

For five years I taught a Sunday School class, and at the age of twenty-three I became a pastor, with four preaching places on my circuit, in three of which we had blazing revivals. Although not sanctified, I preached all the truth I knew with all my might, and believed what I preached with



all my heart, and God blessed me, for He always has blessed and ever will bless such preaching.

When He gloriously sanctified me my knowledge and keen perception of truth were greatly enlarged and quickened, and my preaching became far more searching and effective. And now for forty-seven years God has been giving me revivals with many souls. This has been the glad and consuming ambition of my life. Place, promotion, power, popularity have meant nothing to me as compared with the smile of God and the winning of men to Him. Hallelujah! And this has enabled me to give myself wholly and effectively to my job without thought of what my job would give to me; and I shout Amen to my Lord's word: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35).

Many kind and generous things have been said to me and about me, but the greatest compliment ever paid me was by General William Booth, when, on two different occasions, he said to me, Brengle, you are equal to your job"; a job to which he appointed me, and in which he took special interest. Since I knew his tongue was not that of an oily flatterer, and that he was not carrying flowers around for promiscuous presentation, I rejoiced; for one of my great desires was to gladden his heart, so often wounded, to put my full strength so far as possible under his vast burden, and to ease his anxieties where some others failed him.

The greatest compliment ever paid to my work was by Commissioner Hay, following my seven months' campaign in Australia. He wrote the Chief of the Staff, saying that the campaign not only brought showers of blessing, but opened up spiritual springs. Showers are transient in effect, but springs flow on forever.

My father-in-law lived to be nearly ninety, and he said: "As men grow old they become either sweet or sour." He ripened sweetly and became more and more gracious in his old age. I want to be like that.

Let me grow lovely, growing old,



So many fine things do;
Laces, and ivory, and gold,
And silks need not be new;
And there is healing in old trees;
Old streets a glamour hold;
Why may not I, as well as these,
Grow lovely, growing old?

Some painful and a few bitter things may have happened to me during these forty-three years I have been in The Salvation Army, but really I cannot recall them. I refuse to harbour such memories, so they fade away. Why should I pour bitter poison into the sweet wells of my joy, from which I must continue to drink if I would really live? I won't do it. Paul is my patron saint, and he has told me what to do: "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8). That I will, Paul.

At the same time, I do not want to indulge in saccharine sentimentality, for I remember that Jesus said, "Ye are [not the sugar, but] the salt of the earth." I must not lose my saltiness. But too much salt is dangerous, so I must beware. Nor must I ever forget, as our evangelist Paul bids me, to:

Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come [God forbid that it should come to The Salvation Army!] when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. iv. 2-4).



And though retired I must still "watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of ministry" (2 Tim. iv. 5). For the solemn day of accounting is yet to come – coming surely, swiftly – when I must render an account of my stewardship; when the final commendations or condemnations shall be spoken; when the great prizes and rewards will be given, and the awful deprivations and dooms will be announced.

Apostles though they were, Peter and Paul never lost their awe of that day; nor must I, for Jesus said:

Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me (Matt. vii. 22, 23).

Remembering these words I gird my armour closer, grip my sword, and, watching, praying, marching breast forward, I sing:

My soul, be on thy guard!

Ten thousand foes arise;

The hosts of Hell are pressing hard

To draw thee from the skies.

Ne'er think the battle won,

Nor lay thine armour down:

The fight of faith will not be done

Till thou obtain the crown!



It is a fight of faith, and faith is nourished by the word of the Lord, to which I return daily for my portion and am not denied Hallelujah!