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## Chapter XVI

### Jonathan.

#### OFFICERS AND THEIR LIEUTENANTS.

*And Jonathan loved David as his own soul. — 1 Samuel xviii. 1.*

*And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. — 1 Samuel xxiii. 16, 17.*

If David be a type of Christ, then Jonathan will stand for John the Baptist. He was a true forerunner, for his whole life, from the time of his first meeting with David, seems to have been actuated by the principle, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' His is a very beautiful history, and contains many lessons for Officers, especially the lesson which I would now urge upon your attention.

1. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, and the heir to the throne of Israel. The sad events which marked his father's backsliding, and consequent loss of the kingdom, should, in the ordinary course of things, have brought the crown to him, and with it an opportunity to govern the people in harmony with the Will of God. His education and training, and proper expectations, all pointed to the succession. Great as was Saul's fall before God and in the eyes of Samuel, the nation still honoured him as King — their first King. He was rich; he was handsome; he was just; he was successful in battle; indeed, Saul prospered in almost everything necessary to the favour of his people. His family, too, looked like continuing. Jonathan, the eldest, was much beloved; he was, in fact, the popular son of a popular father.

In the midst of all this David appears. First he slays the giant, and soon Samuel hints that he is the coming man. Gradually it becomes apparent that God has put away Saul, and that He has



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also passed over his family. Jonathan's hopes and plans of coming power and wealth are shattered. The dreams of youth and early manhood are alike gone. It must have been a bitter blow for him. The reproaches of dependents, and the disappointments of loved ones who had joined him in the heyday of prosperity, would fall upon him. Instead of succeeding his father, he must yield his place to another, and that through no fault of his own,

2. Very few lives pass without similar experiences — similar, that is, in character, if not the same in details. We are called to stand by while others reap in joy what we have sown in tears and blood. The credit and praise which we feel ought rightfully to come to us, which we feel some toil or sacrifice on our part has deserved, passes over to another. The love and trust of our comrades or our leaders, which was so precious to us, seems often to be more manifestly given to those around us than to us who have toiled so hard to deserve it. Some who were but children when we were already bearing the heat and burden of the battle have come to the front, and gone on towards promotion and to positions that we had aspired to, while we are left in the humbler ranks, or to tarry with the staff.' We are called on to yield to another the honours we expected for ourselves.

3. Jonathan felt, indeed knew, that David was to be Saul's successor; he was to take the command - I should say, the kingdom. How easy it would have been to criticise this shepherd boy. How easy to have ridiculed David's flight from the javelin, and his retreat into the mountains, and other flaws in his character and faults in his conduct. How very human and natural it would have appeared to us if Jonathan had been sore and awkward with David; had picked holes in his coat; had accused him of being conceited and ambitious, and of wanting to make a great deal of himself and far too little of the King. In fact, we should hardly have been surprised if he had gone about the court and country, saying, 'Oh, as for this David, he is a self-seeker and a disloyal man, and will be of no use for the King's service! He has had no experience in war, and no special training in affairs; he is, in fact, a mere nobody, and will make a mess of the whole business if he is allowed to go forward.' But there is nothing of this, not even a hint of it; there is much of the very opposite, for Jonathan loved David. As soon as he knew that he had slain the giant, and as soon as he heard him speak about it to Saul, we are told that 'he loved him as his own soul.'



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Is this, my comrade, the way that you deal with your successor? Do you act thus towards those who reap what you have sown? Are you looking out for their good points? Do you enter into the burdens that they will have to bear, and the difficulties they will have to face? And does your soul flow out to them in sympathy, and tenderness, and prayer? Is your feeling, 'There cometh one after me who is preferred before me'? Are you watching and waiting for the faults and failings of your comrade — anxious to make your work appear so good that his may appear so poor; or are you crying, 'Prosper him, Lord, in all he puts his hand to for Thee'?

4. David was Jonathan's junior by many years — in fact, he was but a stripling by comparison with the King's son. He was also Jonathan's subordinate, and much his inferior in social position; the one was a mere shepherd lad, while the other was a prince of the royal family. The positions of the two men were such that Jonathan could easily have kept David back, at least for a time. He could have sided with Saul; he could have planned for himself; he could have gone about increasing his own popularity in Israel; he could have schemed, in any event, to secure David as his Lieutenant - I mean his Prime Minister! Thousands of people would have applauded him for thus taking care of himself and his family. But he did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, 'he went to David, and strengthened his hand in God.'

Salvation Army Officers, with few exceptions, are like Jonathan in this, that they constantly meet with Davids — that is, with men or women who are better and abler than they are themselves. And they know that this is so. Officers meet with such soldiers; Captains command such Lieutenants; Staff Officers have under them such Field Officers. Oh, my comrades, how do you deal with the Davids? Can it be that you are jealous of them, and want to keep them back? Are you selfish, and seeking to secure them for yourselves in order to increase your success and strengthen your position? Do you use them merely as a heifer to plough for you, so that you may have an easier time and better prospects? Or, do you follow the example of Jonathan - which appears so beautiful in our eyes — and strengthen them in God? Do you seek to increase their faith, and influence, and usefulness rather than your own; pushing them forward, and recommending them for honour and confidence? Do you deal with them in the spirit of Jonathan when he said to David, 'Fear not, thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'? That is, instead of you serving me; I shall be ready to serve you.' Is not this the very spirit of



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Christ?

5. But there was something more than this in Jonathan's love for David, something deeper even than his realisation that God had chosen his friend to be King. Great as the influence of these two facts would have been, they alone would not account for Jonathan's extraordinary conduct. What was that something? It was this, that Jonathan loved Israel. He longed for the prosperity of the Kingdom. He saw clearly that God had departed from his father Saul and from his house, and he wanted God back. The Kingdom was first. His prayer night and day was, 'Oh that the Salvation of Israel would come to Zion!' If he could bring this to pass by his coming down from the throne, in order to give place to another, then he was ready to come down. If David could make God and God's law more loved and trusted than he could, then he would help David. How foolish his conduct must have appeared in the eyes of those who wanted him to be the King! Yes, unselfishness often looks foolish — for a little while. But Jonathan cared for the nation far more than he cared for Jonathan. That was the great secret of his action — that is for us the great lesson of his life.

Is it the lesson of your life? Do you say, 'O God, Your Kingdom is first with me; if You can use anybody more than You can use me, then send them, and I will love them and help them, whether men love or hate me, whether they trust or doubt me, whether they honour or dishonour me. I care not about myself, if only Your Will is done, and The Army is helped forward, and the people are saved, and Jesus reigns.'

6. And then, also, Jonathan's love for David made David afterwards very careful of Jonathan. Among the first things which he did after he came to the throne was to honour his predecessors. Saul and his sons had perished on the mountains of Gilboa, and were all gone; but David set to work to find some one who belonged to them, whom he could help for their sakes. 'Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,' he sang, 'and the beauty of Israel is slain.' And all the nation sang with him. 'I am distressed,' he said, among his tears, 'for thee, my brother Jonathan; thy love to me was wonderful.'



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This talking and singing about those who had gone before him in his high office, and thus keeping their names honoured before the people, was very beautiful in David. But this was not enough for: the grateful heart. 'Is there yet,' he asks, 'any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' and with such feelings it is no surprise to find that he soon discovered a son of Jonathan's, a cripple, lame on both his feet, now, alas! hiding and in want. Sending for him, David said to him: 'I will show thee kindness for Jonathan's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul, and thou shalt eat bread at my table.'

Yes, love begets love. Jonathan loved David, and now David helps Jonathan. He remembers and honours his predecessors, he sings of their victories, and is silent about their failings. He seeks carefully for those he can favour who may be left of them. Not an unkind word is heard. Not a hasty reflection falls from his lips. No hints about the want of 'solidity' in the work, and the great change there has been for the better since Saul departed the realm and David came! No, nothing of that; nothing but love and kindness. David had plenty of troubles in Israel: rebellions and backslidings to the full, and splits and losses that rent his heart; but when things went wrong he did not say, Ah, you must remember how Saul left the concern! No, no. He went about saying, 'Is there any yet left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?'