



# The H. Mann will.brook Collection

## XIX

### THE CALL AND MINISTRY OF WOMAN

THE position held by woman in The Salvation Army almost from the beginning has been unique. There has probably been nothing like it before in the history of the world, and it may be useful to review, however briefly, some of the influences and circumstances which have led to what we now see.

When I say that the association of woman with The Salvation Army is unique, I am not forgetting that, so far as we are able to understand the circumstances, a prominent position was accorded to woman for a considerable period in the history of the early Church. Paul, who has been called 'the great silencer' so far as woman's public ministry is concerned, nevertheless entrusted women with some of the most difficult and delicate work of the infant Churches. It is quite possible, not to say probable, that in this as in other matters his views had changed as he had gained experience. Whether this be so or not, there is sufficient ground for saying that woman did play an important part in early Christianity. She was recognized as a teacher and guide in the first centuries. She took her place by the side of man in proclaiming her Saviour, in suffering for her testimony, and in dying for the truth. Authentic records of the early martyrs are meagre, but so far as they exist it is clearly seen that woman had a place among them fully equal to that of man. Indeed, the complexity and delicacy of her nature made it possible to inflict upon her ignominy and anguish which her brethren were spared. And she did not quail.

But for one reason or another she fell into the background after the first two or three hundred years so far as public ministry was concerned. Later the Roman Church raised up some remarkable women, as, for instance, Theresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Bridget of Sweden, and in these islands, Hilda of Whitby, and Juliana of Norwich. Ireland had a Bridget as well as a Patrick.

Nearer to our own times George Fox revived in theory a great deal that had been in abeyance, and the early Quaker records, both of England and Ireland, give us some splendid examples of



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women ministers.' But here again, for one reason or another, there was a great falling off shortly before and immediately after George Fox's death. Methodism, also, strove to give woman a place of testimony for her Lord, and although the records of her occupying pulpits are very few, there is no doubt that some Methodist women, especially during the first twenty years after John Wesley's death, were useful and powerful. Methodism inherited a great difficulty in this matter from the fact that the Methodists grew up in the established Church. To put a woman, no matter how gifted, into the pulpit of the parish Church would have been considered a very improper thing, not only from the point of view of the Church itself, but from that of the State. Nevertheless, many Methodist women took up their cross, and here and there among them were powerful preachers and successful soul-winners.

No surprise need be felt, therefore, that The Salvation Army, even in its earliest days, should move in this direction. But it was not merely an evangelistic impulse — which was evidently the origin of woman's position in the societies to which I have referred — that led The Army to take the course it did, though no doubt a similar impulse played a part. With us the position taken arose from deep convictions first expressed by Catherine Booth, and from the realization of a much wider calling of God than anything which had influenced either the Friends or the Methodists.

Like so much in the history of The Army, we can trace the origin of this movement for it clearly was a movement within a greater movement — to the work of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of the Founders. There is still in existence a correspondence which shows how, though by very slow degrees at first, the Founder came to the same judgment as Catherine Booth with regard to woman's position. I will quote a few sentences from a letter written by him in 1855, a few months before their marriage, replying to some arguments of hers:

Thy remarks on Woman's position I will read again. . . . From the first reading I cannot see anything in them to lead me for one moment to think of altering my opinion. You combat a great deal that I hold as firmly as you do — viz., her equality, her perfect equality, as a whole — as a being. But as to concede that she is man's equal, or capable of becoming man's equal in intellectual attainments or prowess — I must say that is contradicted by experience in the world



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and [by] my honest conviction. You know, my dear, I acknowledge the superiority of your sex in very many things — in others I believe her inferior. Vice versa with man.

I would not stop a woman preaching on any account. I would not encourage one to begin. You should preach if you felt moved thereto; felt equal to the task. I would not stay you if I had power to do so. Although I should not like it. It is easy for you to say my views are the result of prejudice; perhaps they are. I am for the world's Salvation; I will quarrel with no means that promises help.

This letter is interesting because it shows the views which were entertained at that time by those who may reasonably be regarded as being among the most advanced in all matters relating to freedom in the service of God. It is also useful because it shows the line of difficulty which, notwithstanding his wonderful Catholicity, the Founder felt and which had to be combated in succeeding periods when advances were taken which led to our present position.

Catherine Booth's own convictions in this matter were not reached without very considerable thought. That those views were entertained before she met the Founder may be seen from a remarkable letter (she was then 21) which she addressed to a Minister for whom she had a high regard and who had made some critical remarks in her hearing. She writes:

Permit me, my dear sir, to ask whether you have ever made the subject of woman's equality as a being the matter of calm investigation and thought? ...

So far as Scriptural evidence is concerned, did I but possess ability to do justice to the subject, I dare take my stand on it against the world in defending her perfect equality. And it is because I am persuaded that no honest unprejudiced investigation of the sacred volume can give perpetuity to the mere assumptions and false notions which have gained currency in society on this subject, that I so earnestly commend it to your attention.

That woman is, in consequence of her inadequate education, generally inferior to man intellectually, I admit. But that she is naturally so, as your remarks seem to imply, I see no cause to believe. I think the disparity is as easily accounted for as the difference between woman



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intellectually in this country and under the degrading slavery of heathen lands. No argument, in my judgment, can be drawn from past experience on this point, because the past has been false in theory and wrong in practice. Never yet in the history of the world has woman been placed on an intellectual footing with man. Her training from babyhood, even in this highly favoured land, has hitherto been such as to cramp and paralyse rather than develop and strengthen her energies, and calculated to crush and wither her aspirations after mental greatness rather than to excite and stimulate them. And even where the more directly depressing influence has been withdrawn, the indirect and more powerful stimulus has been wanting.

This letter clearly sets forth one determining factor in my mother's attitude on the woman question. She claimed that woman was to take her place by the side of man in all things relating to the Kingdom of God, not only because redemption equally extended to her with man — 'In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female' — but because she was, as a being, intellectually, morally, spiritually his equal. We see the same thought, but more fully developed, in a letter to the Founder, one of the last of the love letters:

I am ready to admit that in the majority of cases the training of woman has made her man's inferior, as under the degrading slavery of heathen lands she is inferior to her own sex in Christian countries; but that naturally she is in any respect except physical strength and courage inferior to man I cannot see cause to believe, and I am sure no one can prove it from the Word of God, and it is on this foundation that professors of religion always try to establish it. I believe that one of the greatest boons to the race would be woman's exaltation to her proper position mentally and spiritually. Who can tell its consequences to posterity?

After a reference to the women of the Old Testament who exercised the prophetic gift, she goes on:

God having once spoken directly by woman, and man having once recognized her divine commission and obeyed it, on what ground is omnipotence to be restricted, or woman's spiritual labours ignored? Who shall dare say unto the Lord, 'What doest Thou?' when He 'pours out His Spirit upon His handmaidens,' or when it is poured out shall I render it null with impunity? If,



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indeed, there is 'in Christ Jesus neither male nor female,' but in all touching His Kingdom' they are one,' who shall dare thrust woman out of the Church's operations, or presume to put my candle which God has lighted under a bushel? ...

If God has given her ability, why should not woman persuade the vacillating, instruct and console the penitent, and pour out her soul in prayer for sinners?

She ends the letter with some passionate words about the equality of woman with man in Christ, and there is a fine irony in her suggestion that if modern quibblers had been among the disciples to whom a woman announced the Lord's resurrection they would have hesitated to receive such tidings from her lips. In this letter there is to be found a sufficient apology for the whole position which The Army has claimed for and given to woman in its ranks.

The Founder, however, moved slowly, and it is evident from letters and memoranda too voluminous to quote here that it was not until some years later that he came fully to accept the position for which Mrs. Booth contended. A curious circumstance contributed to this result. They were stationed at Gateshead-on-Tyne. Some special meetings were being conducted at Newcastle, just across the river, by an American evangelist named Palmer, helped by his wife. Mrs. Phoebe Palmer was a devout and also an eloquent woman, and her services were popular. They attracted the attention of a minister of one of the Nonconformist bodies who had formerly been Vicar of the parish, and he made a studied criticism of woman as a preacher of the Gospel, attacking Mrs. Palmer with more or less asperity. Mrs. Booth felt called upon to reply to this attack, and wrote and published a pamphlet of some thirty pages dealing with the whole question in what has generally been conceded to be a comprehensive and effective manner. The preparation of that pamphlet involved considerable research, and in order that she might reveal any weaknesses in her own argument she fully discussed the whole subject with the Founder. It was these conversations and the reasoning they evolved which resulted in his coming completely to take the view she had already urged upon him, and from that time no serious question arose in either of their minds as to the equality of woman with man.



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When the Mission originated in the East of London, there came immediately to the front converts who were obviously gifted in public testimony. For a long time the forces were very small, and the immediate seizure of the opportunity for open-air work which was afforded by the Mile End Waste taxed the resources of the infant Society to the utmost. One consequence of this was that, without any deliberate plan, or even very serious consideration, the women who could speak to the crowds were encouraged, even urged, to do so equally with the men, and it was soon observed that they could often win the sympathy of those to whom they spoke more easily than could the men. The same thing was seen in the private meetings. There the women, though often reluctant and hesitating, spoke with an impressiveness which seemed quite as appealing as anything the men were able to command. Thus by degrees, and without any preconceived arrangement, though with the entire approval of the Founders, woman took for herself a place in the Mission, and began a work which proved to be of the greatest consequence.

While the work of the Mission was confined to the one station at Whitechapel, the care of those who had joined themselves to the little Society, was easily compassed by the Founder and by one or two volunteers who gave him their spare time. But after the first few years, when stations were opened at Bethnal Green, at Millwall, at Poplar, at Limehouse, and later, at Canning Town, it became necessary to employ others for this work. The first of these were working women, who were engaged for part of their time. Actually the first was a Mrs. Collingridge, who worked for her bread in a candle factory in Millwall. She and her delicate husband were among the early converts of the Mission, and she showed a great aptitude for this work. She received a few shillings weekly from the funds for boot leather, and to enable her to get her tea when away from home.' She filled up a careful return — some of those returns are still in existence — showing the number of persons visited and including a brief report upon special cases. Mrs. Collingridge became the forerunner of others, and at each of the Stations, before the appointment of regular Evangelists, there were one or two such local part-time workers. On the whole, they were well received by the people.

After the first two or three years the Mission was organized on a very definite plan. Each Station or Society had its own duly appointed workers — Treasurer, Secretary, Elders — who together formed an Elders' Meeting for the transaction of certain local business. Other lay workers, known



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by various terms, also came into being. From the beginning women took a part in this local organization, and although in some cases that part was relatively small, it was an important fact. Many of the women who thus shared the burden of the Stations did splendid work, softening opposition, which at times was fierce, and helping the weak and trembling with whom some of the men had little patience.

It must not be supposed that this arrangement was carried out without difficulty. Some of the men who had been converted in the Mission — some, indeed, who had been raised from the very gutters—as soon as they found themselves in office and with certain influence in their own Societies, demurred when women were placed beside them in similar positions. Men who had been brought up amidst the ruffianism of the lowest districts, objected to women being regarded as on an equality with themselves, and again and again, men who gave the most hopeful promise of future usefulness declined to work with women, and were only brought round after great effort and much prayer. Some, I am afraid, were never brought round. The difficulty was not a little increased from the fact that though many of the women in question were fully alive to their own usefulness and had deep experiences of spiritual religion, they hesitated or drew back in the presence of opposition from the men. They suffered equally with the men who objected, from the long prejudices and ignorances of the past.

Nor was it only the men who objected. There were certain women who raised difficulties. Some married women, in particular, thought it unwise and even indelicate to bring their single sisters into any sort of confidential relations with the members, or, indeed, into any public service in which they had to deal with men.

But we held on. The women who had taken up the burden of the work were encouraged — sometimes, I think, coaxed — to persevere. They were met in little companies, and were urged with infinite patience to take up their Cross, to hold fast to the opportunity which had been given them, and as a rule they did not disappoint us.

The problem was complicated by the fact that some of the women who had taken up local positions were married women whose husbands, either saved or unsaved, objected to their



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undertaking any sort of public work, especially in association with such a despised and openly ridiculed community as ours quickly became. But here again, convinced that God was guiding them, the leaders persevered. Some of the women withdrew owing to their husbands' objections, but the majority overcame their difficulties, and often had, in addition to other joys, the joy of leading both husband and children to Christ.

This brings me to a further development. The women Evangelists, although very acceptable and useful, were not at first entrusted with the responsible control of a Corps or Society. To place a woman in charge of one of these Societies — or, as they would be called outside The Army, Churches involved quite a new departure. Opinion was divided amongst the most thoughtful of the leaders. The Army Mother herself had never quite contemplated placing women in positions which would involve their authority over men. This would be going further than anything recorded even in the early Church. The Founder delayed for a considerable time before making his decision. Commissioner Railton, who was always ready for new departures, favoured entrusting women with the responsibilities and authorities which we had given to the men. Some of the leading Evangelists, on the other hand — all good men and true — were opposed to anything of this kind. They said, 'Let the woman help us, but do not give her any authority over men.' John Allen, probably the most spiritually-minded of all those early fighters, and a true lover of souls, felt very strongly that there was something positively dangerous to the woman in placing her in any position of public notoriety.

The Army Mother hesitated. She felt that the women, especially the single women, who might be appointed to command Corps, would undoubtedly be placed in circumstances of danger and temptation. That aspect of the matter was fully considered. Without safeguards she never would have agreed, as she did agree, that the women should assume these positions. Indeed, there was a kind of undertaking given that single women should always be appointed in couples.

At the time, when this question arose it caused great perplexity. We only wanted to do what was the best. That a great opportunity had arisen could not be denied. The difficulty of raising, in sufficient numbers, men competent for the work was only too manifest. The call for leaders from station after station and town after town was constantly ringing in our ears. And there before our



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eyes was unmistakable evidence of woman's remarkable acceptableness as a messenger of Christ and her wonderful success in winning souls. The work of the Local Officers and of those early shepherds' to whom I have referred, pointed also to the probability that many women would be found possessed of other gifts — the gifts necessary for the conduct of secular affairs, for the guidance in spiritual things of those under their care, and for the management and control of the people. Finally, therefore, it was decided to make a trial.

The first woman to be appointed in sole charge of one of the Societies was Captain Annie Davis, who afterwards became the wife of Commissioner Ridsdel. She was sent to Barking (a suburb of East London) in July, 1875. She was a remarkable little woman, gifted less from the public standpoint than from devotion to principle and ability to manage and control. Her appointment proved a complete success. The men members of the Society were soon as devoted to her as they could have been to any man, and she, guided from above, watchful and prayerful and conscious that she was making important experiments for the guidance of others, overcame every difficulty. From that time no serious hesitation was felt, and women soon came to be appointed to take charge of Corps just as men.

There were, of course, notwithstanding this success, still some of the Evangelists — or Officers, as I will now call them — who objected. They doubted the reality of the success reported, and still questioned the possibility of the women maintaining the work which they (the men) had begun. But all these questions were set at rest by one circumstance. The rapid extension of The Army after 1878 taxed all our resources, and the Founder decided that he would send women just as he sent men, not only to maintain work already commenced, but to establish new Stations. It was, no doubt, an adventure. There was a great deal of headshaking about it. But it was an instant success. And when, later on, some of the brethren who had doubted the capacity of their sisters to control and maintain the work of God committed to them, came themselves to succeed these sisters, and were appointed to take charge of the Corps which their sister comrades had raised up, they soon found that the women had proved fully equal - sometimes more than equal to themselves.



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The appointment of women to take command of Corps encouraged other developments, and we soon had women in charge of various important undertakings. My sister Emma — 'The Consul,' as she was afterwards called—was placed in charge of the Women's Training Home. Then my sister Eva, widely known as the Field Commissioner, was successful in the charge of one of our large London Corps. Mrs. Bramwell Booth, a year after our marriage, took over the work which later spread into many parts of the world as the Women's Social Work, and afterwards other women, as occasion demanded, were placed with full confidence in various commands.

This brings me to another stage in our evolution. It was not until a few years after their appointment to Corps that it seemed desirable to place women in any of those Higher Commands which also involved authority over men. Many of our men Officers (and some women also) who had been quite happy to work side by side with women Captains who were, like themselves, placed over Corps, objected - in some cases strongly — to being themselves placed under women who were designated for the position of Divisional Commanders. But, there again, the progress of the work and an unexpected development secured the way. Two women of striking character quarried the road for their comrades.

My sister Catherine in her work as pioneer and leader of The Army in France and Switzerland after 1881, and Commissioner Hannah Ouchterlony, as pioneer and leader of our work in Sweden after 1883, made it perfectly plain, so that those who ran could read, that there was no adequate reason for withholding the higher Commands from women. The work in France was small, and my sister always had a serious difficulty in that she never completely silenced the criticism of some in her immediate Staff. The work in Sweden, on the other hand, grew with great rapidity, but Commissioner Ouchterlony also was not without serious difficulties in that some of her staff, though devoted to her and to The Army, never entirely accepted her authority. Yet in both these Commands God was so evidently using the Leaders, and so evidently guiding them in the rule and management of the work, that without our having to make any show of the matter, the way was clear. The barriers of fear and prejudice were broken down, men and women alike came to acknowledge that woman no less than man might possess those natural gifts and receive those endowments of the Spirit which were needed for the governing and leadership of the people of God.



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By this I do not mean to say that there are not still in The Army men Officers working under women — and, for that matter, women Officers also — who would prefer to work under men. I do say, however, that, with perhaps here and there an exception, all that small jealousy which was so troublesome in the past, and the prejudices which belong to narrow and selfish minds, have become things of yesterday. I do occasionally hear an objection raised to the command of a woman, and I am sometimes challenged by suggestions that there are among our women leaders those who are influenced in their rule by the desire for praise of men or by vanity or by other unworthy considerations. But I am persuaded that even if these grievous things be so they are exceptional.

Woman has won her place in The Army. She has won a very wonderful place in the world by means of The Army. It may be worth while to remark here that, though seldom acknowledged, there is little doubt that the women of The Army have played a part in the general emancipation of woman which we see to be going on in the Western nations. In the political struggle, The Army, of course, has taken no part, but in the higher realms of the fight, the hand of the Salvation woman, both Officer and Soldier, has helped to carry the banner to victory. The women who marched at the head of the little bands of despised Salvationists in years gone by were accustoming the public mind to the spectacle of woman in command, of woman taking an active unshrinking share in public duty, and overcoming by the grace of God her supposed inferiorities. Thus we may truly say that we were opening a door through which women might carry the Message of Love and Life to multitudes who would never receive it save from a woman's lips. That door will never again be shut.