



The H. Mamwell Prook Collection

II

THE FIRST GENERAL OF THE SALVATION ARMY AND HIS CHIEF OF STAFF

This book is not the place for a considered estimate of my father's achievements. That has been undertaken already by another hand, not the hand of a son nor even the hand of a Soldier of The Salvation Army, but the result is perhaps all the more balanced and complete because of the fresh, untrammelled mind which Mr. Harold Begbie brought to his task. Constant and intimate association with a man, such as I had with my father until I myself was almost within hail of threescore, may have the effect, if not of concealing, at least of foreshortening the view. Fully to survey a great personality, it may be necessary to abide a day's journey away from the mount.

At the same time, my relations with the first General were of quite an unusual kind. I was not only his eldest son, but one of his Officers for nearly forty years of the hurly-burly of a strenuous campaign, and his Chief of the Staff for more than thirty; and as I am often asked by those who have studied The Army with some degree of care how affairs were managed between my father and myself, it may be not only interesting, but perhaps useful, to put on record something of the manner in which we worked together. Our co-operation over so long a period, and on so varied a field of activity, is a remarkable circumstance, especially when it is remembered that our temperaments were different and our points of view by no means always the same.

It would be foolish to pretend that we were invariably of one mind. On the contrary, from time to time we differed, both in judgment and feeling, with regard to some of the most difficult problems to be solved. Nor can I say that, in the light of subsequent events, either of us has proved to be always right. Oftener than not, from my very first experience of the responsibilities of an Officer in close association with him, the questions which exercised us levied toll not only on all our mental but on our spiritual resources. We had from the beginning — the day of very small things the sense that we were really dealing with large affairs, though we I especially, of course — had little experience of such affairs. The Movement with which we had to do was a new movement; we had no precedent to go upon, very little experience to guide us. Much that



The H. Mann Willbrook Collection

we did had to be done literally as an act of faith. We were often in such complete and balanced uncertainty as seemed to make any given course highly speculative.

Moreover, we were both of us very ignorant as to many matters which were essential to success (though we had the saving virtue of knowing it!), and yet we were the responsible guides of a concern, as we sometimes called it, to which hundreds, and presently thousands of men and women were giving their allegiance, abandoning in so doing their worldly prospects, and even in many cases severing their family connexions. In later years considerable accumulations of property also came under our control, though we were but slightly versed in the ways of finance and the business world. In this respect, of all others, previous experience would have been of the highest value, and we had almost none. We had to build the ship while we were at sea, and not only build the ship, but master the laws of navigation, and not only master the laws of navigation, but hammer sense into a strangely assorted crew!

This ignorance was not without its advantages, if only because it stimulated us — especially me — to study at first hand the questions on which we needed information. Although my father had an amazing kind of intuition, he had not a particle of the folly which supposes that this can take the place of careful investigation and vigilant balancing of judgment. As The Army began to develop an international organization, we came up with such large questions as the laws of different countries and their bearing upon our work, status, and possessions in those countries, or the way in which our disturbing and irregular methods could be best adapted to fresh environments. He would charge me to enter on a course of research into such subjects, and would himself also labour over them, until we had sufficient material to enable him to make decisions. Experts were available, of course — at any rate in some departments of effort — and he neither despised them nor stood in awe of them. He knew that undue reliance on experts was likely to lead us into mistakes, and their advice was only acted upon when we had assured ourselves that it was not materially opposed to his own instincts as to what was best. The character of much of the work was so new in religious history that many decisions, even though they seemed at the time to involve only minor points of policy and method, proved to be of great importance. If we 'rolled the old chariot along,' as our song runs, it was never on a rutted road. It was often on tracks that were scarcely a road at all.



The H. Mamwell Proby Collection

As the years passed on, not only did the occupied territory greatly extend, but the operations became more diverse, and in some ways complicated, though in all this we kept ever in mind our own overruling purpose — the illumination and spiritual emancipation of the people.

The list of the operations of The Army towards the end of the Founder's life included services and visitations for the churchless masses, evangelistic, educational, and social work for the heathen abroad, labour bureaux and industrial homes and workshops for the unemployed, food dépôts, and the provision of breakfasts and other meals for the starving, migration and other assistance for the workless, shelters for the homeless, homes and colonies for inebriates, prison visitation and police-court and prison-gate work for the criminal, homes and hospitals for the daughters of shame, preventive work for young girls, nursing, clothing dépôts, and holiday homes for the people of the slums, hospitals and dispensaries for the sick, special corps, bands, schools, leagues, and a host of other agencies for the young. Then there were land schemes and innumerable other features of service for those who in one direction or another needed help.

Although my father was the General and I was his chief executive Officer, there was, after the first few years, no very hard-and-fast division of authority between us. He continued — at any rate until the last ten or twelve years of his life — to do many things which would ordinarily have fallen to me as Chief of Staff. For example, when he felt able during his distant travels to decide matters on the spot, it would have been ridiculous to have referred them to me in London merely because technically such matters came within my appointed province. Again, when he was thousands of miles away he unhesitatingly required me to make decisions which ought properly to have been left to him if he had been more accessible. In the ordinary routine he was both generous and wise in guarding my position. He made my office a reality, and not a mere name; and in the course of time he increasingly left large affairs in my hands — to take action on his behalf often without reference to him.

In certain respects he was exacting. For example, he required that any information I set before him or for which I was responsible, should be authentic beyond cavil; and if I tripped, as I am afraid occasionally happened, either through my own fault or the inefficiency of others, and circumstances turned out otherwise than he had been led to believe, he could be very angry,



The H. Mann Willbrook Collection

and rightly angry. On such occasions he showed his displeasure in a way that was sometimes grievous to bear.

One of his characteristic requirements was that both sides of every course of action should be fully stated. If, for example, his advisers — I among them — had made up our minds to propose a certain course of action with regard, say, to new work in Europe or to fresh financial arrangements, perhaps in India, or to the promotion and transfer of a particular Officer, he insisted, when the matter was submitted to him, that we should argue against the projected course as well as in its favour. All that we were aware of on the other side of the question had to be put before him. We had sometimes perforce to take the rôle of an *advocatus diaboli*, and woe betide any one who was found afterwards not to have disclosed everything! It was the same in all matters. Never would he allow any retreat under the familiar plea, 'Ah, but if you only knew all!' His instant reply to such an observation was, 'If you know anything that I don't, what are you there for but to tell me?'

I do not mean to say that on every question he adopted the extreme course just indicated. If only because of the multiplicity of matters requiring decision, that would have been impracticable. He took the advice of his Staff on many matters without very close inquiry, especially during the last twenty years of his life. But when on any point there was a difference of opinion, or he was in doubt and asked for further particulars, or required us to study a case from its opposite aspect, then everything had to be laid on the table. The unbroken happiness of my long relationship with him was greatly furthered by my own scrupulous care to muster the pro and con of every matter of serious import which came before us, although this often involved immense labour for myself, and sometimes not often — unpleasantness with other responsible Officers. But the slightest idea that something was being kept back, no matter whether he was in London or ten thousand miles away, was fatal to his peace of mind — and to ours!

We had, of course, differences of opinion. They sometimes cut deep and caused me — as I know they caused him — very considerable searching of heart, especially so, in his case, when a final decision had to be taken in opposition to my views. Yet in undertaking by his instructions a given course the wisdom of which I doubted, I was always helped by his patience in hearing all that we



The H. Mann willbrook Collection

had to say against what he thought best, and by his evident desire not merely to gratify some whim of his own, but to do what was for the highest welfare of The Army and of the Kingdom of God.

He was very agreeable to do business with. Conferences were a reality. The youngest member present felt that his advice was sought for and valued. No time was begrudged, no labour spared, to explore fully the questions before him. When he was in doubt about this or that course, he would reserve decision for thought and prayer. When his mind was made up there was no use spending another moment on the matter. His humour was a great help. If one vexed him, and the heavens were suddenly darkened, sure enough the clouds quickly passed and out came the sun. In later years he acted on the principle that 'the king can do no wrong' — that we, the men he called in on the different questions and problems, and whom he trusted so fully, were responsible advisers, and that if mistakes were made, we ought to have guided him in a better way.

One beautiful trait of his was that if, in the long run, it turned out that he had been mistaken in his own judgment, he would always acknowledge it with a quite delightful frankness. At times he would go unnecessarily out of his way to have it made clear that another had proved right and he had been wrong. That also helped to win for him not only the affection and esteem but the perfect confidence of those he led.

The world best knew the Founder as he appeared when on the platform, but to his Officers the picture of him which is most complete is his appearance at the Officers' Councils — to which only his Officers were admitted — in different parts of the world. Each of these gatherings would probably extend over two or three days, and each day would have its three long sessions. Councils with the Staff often continued much longer. A month or sometimes more would be devoted to preparation for such assemblies, when various phases of the work in its most recent developments, or its approaching advances, would be faithfully examined, and both possibilities and weaknesses explored. In preparing for these Councils the Founder frequently called in the most experienced of his Staff, and his own notes were of the most comprehensive character. In such gatherings he never spared himself, and his preparation was usually so complete as to make



The H. Mann Willbrook Collection

him independent of the inspiration of the moment, though if that inspiration came he took advantage of it to the full. We had in these Councils some glorious experiences of light and freedom in the presence of the Lord, and revelations under which all hearts were united in love and joy with the Greatheart who led us forward.

No doubt, my relationship as his son had some disadvantages, but it was helpful, too. While I must say that he seldom if ever forgot the General in thinking of the father, I can say on the other hand that I never forgot the father in dealing with the General. I do not mean that I presumed because of my relationship, nor would he have brooked this for a moment, he who knew no man after the flesh. But the remembrance of it was a help to me in moments of special anxiety or strain.

The life in our old home was a training for me. While he was always a forceful and dominating personality, and also most sensitive to anything that seemed like unfaithfulness or undutifulness, he was remarkably tolerant of different opinions over the family table. In all our discussions at home, whether on historical, political, social, or religious questions, we were permitted great freedom of expression within limits, of course although the views of the ardent youth about him must often have run counter to his own. He liked to hear the other side, and, knowing this, I never hesitated to reason with him, although sometimes he would more or less playfully object, and tell me that I would stand arguing with death itself! This freedom of expression carried over, so to speak, into our official relations. It gave me more tenacity in arguing a case, and I think it also enabled him to understand, even when his orders had been most peremptory, and I had sallied forth to carry out instructions about which I had anxious misgivings, that after all I might be right!

He was sometimes nervous and hasty, but always with such kindness in the background that one could love — and I did love — his every mood. And so we never quarrelled. The differences, which were those of method, rather than of principle, were quickly adjusted. Every day brought to us some mountain to lift, some gulf to bridge, but we worked together in true love for God and man and for each other, and somehow the crooked bits in the road were made straight and the rough places plain. While I can say nothing of any faculty for conciliation or accommodation



The
Hiram Wallbrook
Collection

which I may possess, I feel that I was greatly privileged to be able to work with him for forty years, ever feeling for him an increasing reverence and deeper affection, and carrying, as time went on, a larger and larger share of responsibility, which, in his own generous words, made it possible for him to do what otherwise he would not have been able to accomplish.