



XXV

CORONATIONS

SHORTLY after the announcement of the Coronation of King Edward we received an intimation from the Earl Marshal, the Duke of Norfolk, that the King had commanded that a representative of The Salvation Army should be invited to attend the solemnity in Westminster Abbey. The Founder appointed me for this duty. I received in due course a very handsome invitation card and the usual instructions giving particulars of the hour at which I was to be in my place. I found that I was expected to wear Court dress. After thinking over the matter I came to the conclusion that if I was present at all it must be as an Officer of The Salvation Army, in The Army uniform. Accordingly I wrote to the Earl Marshal requesting his authority for this alteration. His Grace, though with courtesy and respect, replied that he found himself unable to allow our uniform to be worn at so important a State function. I explained that the uniform was much more to us than a badge of office or rank; that it represented the great principles for which we were contending, and that it was rich in many sacred associations for those who wore it. I added that I did not feel at liberty to lay it aside even though I might be deprived of the honour of representing The Army at the Coronation. The decision, however, appeared to be inalterable. Court dress was de rigueur, Then I determined to write to the King, and indeed was in the act of doing so when the announcement was made that owing to his illness the Coronation had been postponed.

As soon as the date of the service was again fixed, and the King was reported to be sufficiently improved in health to come back to London, I wrote to His Majesty, August 5, 1902, and sent my letter to Cowes by special messenger, to the following effect:

Having been honoured by an invitation to be present at the solemnity of His Majesty's Coronation as a representative of The Salvation Army, I asked the King to give me 'his gracious permission to attend in the uniform of my rank as a Salvation Army Officer.' I continued:



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I feel it could not be in harmony with Your Majesty's wish that I should lay aside our uniform at a moment when I am called to represent our people on an occasion of such widespread interest among them in every part of the Empire.

It is only because I have been informed by the Earl Marshal that he has no power to give me the permission I desire that I have ventured to address you on the subject.

Among all the peoples who are rejoicing on account of your recovery none are more truly grateful to God for His great goodness to Your Majesty and to the Queen than are we of The Salvation Army.

On the following morning I received a telegram from Lord Knollys, finally disposing of the matter in the most kind and satisfactory way:

I am commanded by the King to say that he has much pleasure in giving you permission to attend the Coronation in the uniform of your rank as a Salvation Army Officer. His Majesty thanks you for your kind congratulations.

KNOLLYS

That ended the episode. Everybody had acted with perfect correctness: the Earl Marshal in insisting on the usual etiquette, I in claiming privilege for The Army uniform, and the King in exercising his prerogative. Thus for the first time in history, on a great State occasion, admission was found for the simple Salvationist uniform amid the astonishing splendour of velvet and lace, plumage and jewellery, priestly vestments and knightly armour. So far from any one at the Abbey appearing to object to our uniform, I think that most, if not all, of those who saw it in their midst felt that the King had done the right thing in the right way. The officials who were looking after the King's guests showed it every mark of respect and consideration, as did those of the guests themselves with whom I came in contact. This act of the King commanded attention all over the Empire, and even in some other countries, and we have never had this kind of difficulty again, either as regards our men or our women. It was a royal gesture which had behind it something



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of greater significance than a mere concession to Army practice or the good-nature of a King who was not over-concerned for the minutiae of ceremonial.

The Coronation service throughout was calculated to stir the imagination and touch the heart. It had deep inward meanings as well as outward magnificence. It embodied, of course, certain dreary forms and precedents which had largely lost their value in this gentler age. Some people, no doubt, objected to the ecclesiastical order of the service, and declared much of it to be vain repetition. Yet, on the whole, it was a service with warm devotional elements and continual appeal to the best in King and people. It was a recognition of the rights and duties of each towards the other, and an open acknowledgment that neither the Throne nor its lieges could properly exercise those rights or discharge those duties without the strength of God. Dull indeed must have been the mind and cold the heart that was not impressed.

I shall not be misunderstood when I say that much in this service reminded me of a Salvation Army Meeting. Here was what the general body of the British people regarded as a supreme expression of national faith and consecration, yet it contained many things which we in The Army have loved and fought for amid much criticism and abuse. To begin with, there were processions, with banners, from the doors of the Abbey to the altar steps. There were uniforms, the great crimson robe of State which was worn by the King, and the gowns and trappings of his distinguished subjects and of the foreign Ambassadors, all of them betokening some rank, some office, some authority, some privilege, some association, some conquest. There were the responses of the congregation to the prayers offered by the prelates, and the unrestrained acclamations, whose fervour and exuberance almost recalled our loudest Hallelujahs. There was the reading of moving passages of Scripture which brought the distant past into sharp relation with the present. There was the note through it all of glory to God and of abounding joy, as when the choir, assisted by trumpeters and trombone players, sang to the noble tune 'Ein feste Burg':

Rejoice today with one accord,
Sing out with exultation;
Rejoice and praise our mighty Lord,
Whose arm hath brought Salvation.



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The words 'Salvation,' 'Lamb,' 'Blood,' 'Fire,' were not eschewed. The walls of the Abbey rang to what might have been sung in any of our Holiness gatherings:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And 'lighten with Celestial Fire:
Thou the Anointing Spirit art,
Who dost the sevenfold gifts impart:
Thy blessed unction from above,
Is comfort, life, and fire, and love.

Finally, the King not only had a crown placed on his head, but he was also girt with a sword. With this sword,' said the Archbishop,'... faithfully serve our Lord Jesus Christ in this life.'

The possibility occurred to me that the Church of England had taken some lessons from The Salvation Army, while hesitating to acknowledge the source! The adoption of brass instruments by The Army, from the time when Leedham first blew his cornet in our Halls, offended many good people as a sin against reverence and decorum. Yet here were brass instruments in the Abbey on this most solemn of occasions; and drums, too, powerful drums, which accompanied nearly all the singing. I was told — I do not know whether it was true that drums had never been heard in the Abbey before. The band consisted of seventy-five players (including ten fanfare trumpeters, resplendent in habiliments of gold), and at one or two parts of the service the band played sacred music without the accompaniment of voices. Then if one looked beyond the immediate circumstance and setting, the service was such as to appeal even more to the Salvationist heart and soul. Here was a profession of humble submission to the King of kings. When Edward the Seventh rose from his chair and knelt down before the vast concourse, he made, by an outward act as to which there could be no uncertainty, his admission that God had the supreme claim upon his life and service. He swore in the hearing of us all, not only to be faithful to the realm, but to maintain the laws of God. From beginning to end there was an open avowal that God was the true foundation of life and the real source of power, that by Him kings reign and princes decree justice. It was not enough inwardly to acknowledge and resolve; he did it outwardly before as many as could be gathered together. And that led me to feel that surely



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this recognition of God on the part of the highest in the realm ought to make us in our humbler walks more than ever daring in declaring ourselves the servants of our Lord. From my place in the Abbey, the pride or unbelief which refused to acknowledge Him seemed more than ever contemptible. The King never looked more manly than when he knelt down while the Archbishop prayed for him that God would pour upon his head and heart the blessing of the Holy Ghost, and make him at last a partaker of the Eternal Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then if one looked away from that central space, and surveyed the distinguished throng to right and left, one had a fresh sense of the impressiveness of the occasion. Hither men had gathered from every clime. They were there from every continent and from the islands of the sea. They represented every province, even every outpost, of the Empire. There were Ambassadors from every nation. What moving thoughts the scene inspired! What multitudes beyond multitudes, of every colour and tongue, it called to mind! Here were gathered the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them! Yet what were they all -- what was the proud Empire whose Monarch was the central figure in this scene - but a range of sandhills, to be washed away by the relentless waves of time? And over against it all, the wondrous thing to which the whole service was a continual approach, was an everlasting Kingdom, a Kingdom of Salvation, a Kingdom without end.

At King George's Coronation I was not so well placed. I neither heard nor saw so much. But the scene was again one of great beauty and splendour, and it was illuminated, as the former occasion had not been, by sunlight, though this came and went in fitful spells. The picture was one of life and colour as before, and some of the music was very moving, though to a less degree, I think, than at the Coronation of King Edward. The sermon by the Archbishop of York had the brevity which has characterized the last three or four Coronation sermons, in distinction from the extreme length of those sermons in the olden time. It was on the sovereignty of service, and in speaking of the King's work for the people and the Queen's influence in the home, the Archbishop came near to many hearts. The Prince of Wales met with a very warm greeting, as did all the members of the Royal Family. The King and Queen themselves, as they passed out, robed and crowned, in that great final procession, created such a sense of awe as perhaps checked the acclamations of many. And in this case there was not the great pathos of the former occasion when we had greeted a king but lately come back to us from the very gates of death.



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Once again the prayers offered for the King found a deep response in the Salvationist heart. 'Strengthen him, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter. Confirm and establish him with Thy free Spirit ... and fill him, O Lord, with the spirit of Thy holy fear, now and for ever; also the prayer immediately preceding the crowning: 'O God, the Crown of the faithful . . . as Thou dost this day set a crown of pure gold on his head, so enrich his heart with Thine abundant grace, and crown him with princely virtues, through the King Eternal, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.'