



## CHAPTER I

### Introductory

THE crowning victories of a great career are always more inspiring when viewed in the light of the campaigns of earlier days. For this reason the following very brief outline of some of the more important events in Mrs. Booth's life will perhaps add interest to these pages.

Mrs. Booth was born on January 17, 1829, at Ashbourne, in Derbyshire. In early childhood her parents removed to London, where she grew up under the ceaseless care and tenderest love of a godly mother. She was converted in childhood, and so far as health would permit, took an active part in such work as was then open to women in the service of Christ.

At the age of seventeen a painful and long- protracted illness removed her from all her usual activity. Her spine was seriously affected, and for nearly three years she was a prisoner, during seven months of the time lying continuously on her face in a sling couch specially prepared for her use. It was during this period that our beloved Leader laid the foundations of that wider education in the things of the Kingdom which was to prove of such great value in the work God gave her to do. By her own ingenuity a contrivance was made by which she could read and yet lie in the required position. Her extraordinary knowledge of the Bible, as well as her familiarity with the great theological and social questions which had agitated the world for the last fifty years, was in large part acquired by this timid girl in the silent watches and weary hours of that sick chamber, in a time of such suffering as would preclude most people from doing anything at all.

Early in 1852, the Founder, then a young Metho-dist minister, in the midst of a career of exceptional popularity as an evangelist, met his future wife at a private gathering of friends in the South of London. Each was much impressed with the other, and the acquaintance, after deep thought and prayer, ripened into a union of the closest confidence and affection. During their three years' engagement, Mrs. Booth's correspondence was extremely brilliant and vigorous. Every week she sent to the Founder the outline of a sermon on some topic of current interest, and many of her letters – some of which extend to ten and twelve double folios – are able and



thoughtful essays on subjects of the highest importance. It is not difficult to find in them the germs of the teaching which was afterwards to become associated with her name throughout the world. Many of these letters are published in Commissioner Booth-Tucker's 'Life of Mrs. Booth.'

Concerning her work for God before her marriage Mrs. Booth has said little; but the following brief sketch of the way she was led to undertake systematic visitation of the poor is of deep interest:

'On a certain Sabbath, some years ago, I was passing down a narrow, thickly-populated street on my way to bear a much-honoured minister of Christ, anticipating an evening's enjoyment for myself, and hoping to see some anxious ones brought into the Kingdom, when I chanced to look up at the thick rows of small windows above me, where numbers of women were sitting, peering through at the passers-by, or listlessly gossiping with each other. It was suggested to my mind with great power, "Would you not be doing God more service, and acting more like your Redeemer, by turning into some of these houses, speaking to these careless sinners, and inviting them to the service, than by going to enjoy it yourself?" I was startled; it was a new thought; and while I was reasoning about it, the same inaudible interrogator demanded, "What effort do Christians put forth, answerable to the command, 'Compel them to come in, that My house may be filled!'" This was accompanied with a light and unction which I knew to be Divine. I felt greatly agitated. I felt verily guilty. I knew that I had never thus laboured to bring lost sinners to Christ, and trembling with a sense of my utter weakness, I stood still for a moment, looked up to Heaven, and said, "Lord, if Thou wilt help me, I will try"; and without stopping longer to confer with flesh and blood, turned back and commenced my work.

'I spoke first to a group of women sitting on a doorstep; and Oh! what that effort cost me, words cannot describe; but the Spirit helped my infirmities, and secured for me a patient and respectful hearing, with a promise from some of them to attend the house of God. This much encouraged me: I began to taste the joy which lies hidden under the cross, and to realize in some faint degree that it is more blessed to give than to receive. With this timely, loving cordial from my blessed Master, I went on to the next group standing at the entrance of a low, dirty court. Here, again, I



was received kindly, and promises were given – no rude repulse, no bitter ridicule were allowed to shake my newfound confidence or chill my feeble zeal. I began to realize that my Master's feet were behind me; nay, before me, smoothing my path.

'This blessed assurance so increased my courage and enkindled my hope, that I ventured to knock at the door of the next house, and when it was opened, to go in and speak to the inmates of Jesus, death, judgment, and eternity. The man, who appeared to be one of the better class of mechanics, seemed to be much interested and affected by my words, and promised with his wife to attend the Revival services which were being held at the chapel farther on. With a heart full of gratitude and eyes full of tears, I was thinking where I should go next, when I observed a woman standing on an adjoining door-step, with a jug in her hand. My Divine Teacher said, "Speak to that woman." Satan suggested, "Perhaps she is intoxicated"; but after a momentary struggle, I introduced myself to her by saying, "Are the people out who live on this floor?" observing that the lower part of the house was closed. "Yes," she said, "they are gone to chapel"; and I thought I perceived a weary sadness in her voice and manner. I said, "Oh, I am so glad to hear that; how is it that you are not gone to a place of worship?" "No!" she said, looking down upon her forlorn appearance, "I can't go to chapel; I am kept at home by a drunken husband. I have to stop with him to keep him from the public-house, and I have just been fetching him some drink." I expressed my sorrow for her, and asked if I might come in and see her husband. "No," she said, "he is drunk; you could do nothing with him now." I replied, "I do not mind his being drunk, if you will let me come in; I am not afraid; he will not hurt me." "Well," said the woman, "you can come in if you like; but he will only abuse you." I said, "Never mind that," and followed her up the stairs.

'I felt strong now in the Lord and in the power of His might, and as safe as a babe in the arms of its mother. I felt that I was in the path of obedience, and I feared no evil. The woman led me to a small room on the first floor, where I found a fine, intelligent man, about forty, sitting almost double in a chair, with a jug by his side. I leaned on my Heavenly Guide for strength and wisdom, love and power, and He gave me all I needed. He silenced the demon, Strong Drink, and quickened the man's perceptions to receive my words. As I began to talk to him, his wife wept bitterly, and by fragments told me a little of their previous history. I found that she had once



known the Lord, that her husband was a clever workman, and could earn very good wages as a journeyman, but he drank it nearly all, so that they were compelled to live in two rooms, and often went without necessary food. I read to him the parable of the Prodigal Son, while the tears ran down his face like rain. I then prayed with him as the Spirit gave me utterance, and left, promising to call the next day.

'I now felt that my work was done for that time. Exhausted in body, but happy in soul, I wended my way to the sanctuary, just in time for the conclusion of the service, and to lend a helping hand in the Prayer Meeting.'

On July 11, 1855, Mrs. Booth was married to the Founder. Of that union he has said:

'How she has helped me as companion, friend, counsellor, and not least as the mother of our children, I cannot here attempt to describe. It may be said that the world knows all about us, seeing that her life has been almost as public as my own. I may say, however, that if personally I have, in the hands of God, had to do with the origination of this remarkable movement, if I have stood to it in the relation of a father, surely my precious wife may be truly considered to have been its mother.'

After their marriage the Founders continued to travel as evangelists from town to town, and thousands of souls were gathered into the Kingdom. During the early years of married life Mrs. Booth, while helping her husband privately, took no part in public work. It was at this period, however that she first took up her pen in the service of God. Mrs. Phoebe Palmer, a devoted saint and teacher of Holiness, had been preaching in the North of England with abundant success, and the Rev. A. A. Rees, of Sunderland, had attacked her, denouncing the public speaking of women. Mrs. Booth replied in a spirited and convincing treatise on 'Female Ministry,' in which she not only disposed of Mr. Rees' superficial and personal attack, but dealt with the whole question on the highest Scriptural grounds. Her tract, which was never replied to, was afterwards rewritten, and is now to be found in the volume, 'Practical Religion.'

In 1860 the Conference of the Methodist New Connexion, of which the Founder was a minister,



decided, against his wish and solemn protest, to take him from the evangelistic work in which God had so greatly blessed him, and to station him in a circuit. Gateshead was the selected place. Not willing to appear insubordinate, he took the appointment, hoping that the personal feeling against him on the part of a few persons in the Conference which had largely influenced its decision, would pass away. His work at Gateshead was a glorious success – from having been one of the poorest, it became one of the most prosperous circuits in the Connexion. The experience gained there was, no doubt, of infinite value to him in after years, for it was very far from ordinary circuit work, or parish work, which was done in those two or three years at Gateshead. Here was first manifested the wonderful versatility with which the Founder afterward astounded the world; and here, on a small scale, with time and room to experiment, he was able to formulate and test many of the principles of aggressive campaigning which subsequently secured the amazing success seen in the work of The Salvation Army.

But Gateshead was to be memorable most of all for the momentous decision taken by Mrs. Booth with regard to her own public ministry. She had been in controversy long upon the subject held back more by her sense of inability and unworthiness than by unwillingness to follow her Lord. Here are her own touching words describing the final stepping out on to the waters:

'I had long had a controversy on this question in my soul. In fact, from the time I was converted, the Spirit of God had constantly been urging me into paths of usefulness and labour which seemed to me impossible. Perhaps some of you would hardly credit that I was one of the most timid and bashful disciples the Lord Jesus ever saved. I used to make up my mind I would, and resolve and intend, and then, when the hour came, I failed for want of courage. I need not have failed. I now see how foolish I was, and how wrong; but, for some four or five months before I commenced speaking, the controversy had been signally roused in my soul which God had awakened years before, but which, through mistaken notions, fear, and timidity, I had allowed almost to die out. I was brought to very severe heart-searchings at this time. I had not been realizing so much of the Divine presence. During a season of sickness, one day it seemed as if the Lord revealed it all to me by His Spirit. I had no vision, but a revelation to my mind. He seemed to take me back to the time when I was fifteen and sixteen, when I first gave my heart to Him. I felt how it had hindered the revelation of Himself to me, and hindered me from growing



in grace, and learning more of the deep things of God. He showed it to me, and then I remember prostrating myself upon my face before Him, and I promised Him there in the sick room: "Lord, if Thou wilt return unto me, as in the days of old, and revisit me with those urgings of Thy Spirit which I used to have I will obey, if I die in the attempt. I care not: I will obey." However, the Lord did not revisit me immediately. He let me recover, and I went out again. About three months after that I went to the chapel of which my husband was a minister, and he had an extraordinary service. I felt the Spirit come upon me. You alone who have felt it know what it means. It cannot be described. It seemed as if a voice said to me, "Now, if you were to go and testify, you know I would bless it to your own soul as well as to the souls of the people," and I gasped again, and I said, in my soul, "Yes, Lord, I believe Thou wouldst, but I cannot do it." I had forgotten my vow – it did not occur to me at all. And then the Devil said, "Besides, you are not prepared to speak. You will look like a fool, and have nothing to say." He made a mistake. He overdid himself for once. It was that word settled it. I said, "Ah! this is just the point. I have never yet been willing to be a fool for Christ, now I will be one"; and without stopping another moment, I rose up in the seat, and walked up the aisle. My dear husband was just going to conclude. He thought something had happened, and so did the people.

'He stepped down to ask me' "What is the matter, my dear?" I said, "I want to say a word." He was so taken by surprise that he could only say, "My dear wife wants to say a word," and sat down. He had been trying to persuade me to do it for ten years. I felt as if I were clinging to some human arm and yet it was a Divine arm – to hold me. I just got up and told the people how it came about. I confessed, as I think everybody should when they have been in the wrong and misrepresented the religion of Jesus Christ. I said, "I daresay many of you have been looking upon me as a very devoted woman, and one who has been living faithfully to God, but I have come to know that I have been living in disobedience, and to that extent I have brought darkness and leanness into my soul, but I promised the Lord three or four months ago, and I dare not disobey. I have come to tell you this, and to promise that I will be obedient to the Heavenly vision."

From this time Mrs. Booth, so far as her always delicate health would permit, regularly spoke and



preached in public, and it was at once apparent that her gifts were of no mean order. God was with her mightily. Whether addressing the regular congregation of a popular place of worship, speaking to a crowd of little children gathered specially to hear her, or dealing out the truth of God to the utterly godless and careless visitors at a fashionable watering place, her splendid directness and unwavering and fearless honesty not only secured respect and affection, but won thousands of souls for her Master.

In 1862, after four years of circuit work, the Founder again offered himself to the Conference for evangelistic labour, feeling the unerring call of God to have come to him. The Conference refused. Mrs. Booth was at the time in extremely delicate health, and had four little children. Outside Methodism they had scarcely a friend in the world. Without a home and without means of any kind, she might well have hesitated about the convictions of which the Founder had spoken. But she did not hesitate. It was not her way when her interests or her comfort seemed in opposition to her Master's. They came out and left all. Of this time the General said:

'We went out together, not knowing whither we went. We did not know a soul who would give us a shilling. We fell back on the home of one of our parents, and then waited on God. Before a fortnight had passed we were at work in Cornwall, side by side, in one of the greatest Revivals that county has ever seen. Two years and a half we stayed, and during that time no less than 7,000 people professed forgiveness of sins, some thousands of whom were united to the Churches.'

After Cornwall came work in Cardiff and other places, and then in 1865, when on a chance visit to London, the Founder was invited to hold a week's Meetings in a tent in the East End, and his heart was drawn out in an unparalleled degree towards its million souls. Mrs. Booth was joined with him in a burning desire to do something for them; and so, although not yet named, The Salvation Army was born.

For some years after the work was begun in the East End Mrs. Booth held series of Meetings in various towns, which were wonderfully blessed in the Salvation of souls, in the quickening of the Lord's people, and in raising up friends whose influence and whose wealth became of



inestimable service to The Army. When later on the extent and importance of the War made her absence from London for long together impossible, she undertook several series of Meetings in London, which will never be forgotten. In 1881 in the Steinway and Portland Rooms, in 1882 and 1883 in St. James's Hall, she delivered addresses, some of which will be read with interest and with blessing throughout the world for the next hundred years.

In defence of Army methods and teaching, no one has spoken with such unanswerable force as Mrs. Booth. Both in London and the Provinces her lectures on The Army attracted huge congregations of leading Christians, to whom she brought home with convincing eloquence the claims of the people, the reasonableness of The Army system, and the obligation of all lovers of God to help forward its work.

And much of this toil was accomplished in the face of terrible weakness and suffering. Always an invalid, it often seemed as though she would die before she could leave the building in which she had been pouring out her soul upon the people, and yet, go she would. Many a time rising from her bed, and all but carried to the platform, she would preach for an hour as though inspired by Divine strength and compassion, and then fall fainting into the arms of those around her. The doctors had protested, and her dear ones had exclaimed, and in the agony of nervous reaction and prostration her own flesh had cried out, that it was impossible to go on, and yet, go on she would, and that to conquer in her Captain's cause.

In later years Mrs. Booth's help and counsel in the Cabinet of The Army was, of course, simply invaluable. Perhaps there, more than on the platform and more than in the Press, her influence on the Movement and on the world has been felt. In such an enterprise as this great War there daily arise questions of infinite moment which must be answered, and problems of the widest interest and importance must be solved. To these, with inflex-ible determination to find out what was best, and to help in doing it, Mrs. Booth could always be relied upon to address herself with marvellous wisdom and courage. Her voice is silent now, and her chair in the inner councils is empty. It is a terrible and irreparable loss. But God will carry on the work He thus enabled her to begin. To Him, His own glory and honour in the Salvation of men is of the first moment, and He will still guide this wonderful Organization to the full accomplishment of all His holy Will, and to



the realization of the hopes and ambitions with which He inspired the heart and upheld the hand of Catherine Booth, the Mother of The Salvation Army.