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Chapter I

AN ELECT LADY

A NEW generation has arisen since my mother, the “Mother” of the Salvation Army, passed away. Even to those already in middle age she is little more than a tradition, so swiftly do the years go by. But time itself is impotent to blur the image that the “Mother” so deeply engraved on the hearts of those who were associated with her.

In a previous volume I have recalled my father. I set out to do so in one chapter, but the subject overran into three or four. Now the same thing is happening as I set down some memories of my mother, although she left us more than twenty years before he did. I think of her first as a woman; a woman of very definite religious experience, rare passion, intense feeling, deep affection, vivid personality: then as a mother; skilled and diligent in household ways, asking no release from any homely duty, intensely concerned for her children, above all, for their salvation: then as a Mother in God; guiding with wise counsel, persuading with an eloquence more than words, rebuking in a manner which those who came under her displeasure never forgot; and finally I think of her as a woman in the public eye, swaying great audiences, and having the power to move the hearts of men in the mass as well as one by one.

Let me recall the figure of my mother. A slightly built woman, some five feet six inches in height, extremely gentle and refined in appearance, suggesting even timidity (although about her there was always a resoluteness of spirit which overcame a diffidence and shrinking largely physical), and in her countenance such strength and intensity as made it, especially when animated, almost mesmeric in its power to hold the attention even of the indifferent and casual. As Longfellow has said of another woman, “The light upon her face shone from the windows of another world.” So great an impression did the mere sight of her create that often people passing her in the street, not knowing who she was, turned back to gaze.

Her head, which was small, was well set on her shoulders, its poise and movement conveying great personal force and dignity. Her hair was dark, almost black, and after middle-life, scanty.



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Her eyes were wide open rather than large, and were dark brown and lustrous. They held a wonderful tenderness, but they could, and indeed often did, flash with deep fires. The eyes themselves, apart from the face, argued and strove and compelled, and no doubt this accounted in some degree for her power over assemblies. At times, when on the platform, a great tenderness would suffuse her countenance, and yet always there was an expression betokening firmness and exalted passion.

Her mobile mouth was finely curved, very correct in its lines, and there was a challenge in her laughter. Her hands and feet were small and shapely; indeed, her whole body suggested a fine instrument carefully fashioned for some great purpose. Her voice was pleasant, though not of great volume, and in some buildings it needed an effort to make all the people hear. This contributed to the exhaustion which often followed the delivery of her addresses. But she persevered even when so weak that my brother or I had to carry her from her bed to the cab, and from the cab to the platform, where she would yet speak with such command of herself that few realized her weary invalidism, a triumph of spirit over body!

Her life in the body was lived in a kind of warfare with it. But her great soul continually broke through the physical fetters. In spite of shyness and the tremulousness of a frail and suffering frame, her hunger for righteousness and truth and godliness carried her into a realm of passionate freedom. Perhaps her bodily weakness was in some ways a blessing, though indeed much disguised. It was a blessing in that it demanded and secured special watchfulness over all her steps, a "going softly" before the Lord, and a vigilance in self-control and self-denial so far as outward things were concerned, which greatly ministered to the safety and upholding of the inner man.

In her relations with strangers there was nothing stiff or formal. She seemed to invite them into her confidence. Even with people at the opposite pole of personality to herself — people who made no impression on their fellows, and whose eyes were like the windows of an empty house — she could make herself quite at home and "bring them out." She took endless pains to make inquirers of every sort feel at ease, and she had a very attractive manner and address, interwoven with a dignity which enhanced her influence.



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This charm of manner notwithstanding, there was a definiteness that amounted almost to brusqueness in dealing with folly and stupidity. Whenever she wished it, her old-world courtesies, her wonderful smile, the light and softness of her beautiful eyes, made a fascinating impression, but it is also true that she did not "suffer fools gladly," and she had little hope of mending them. Her notion was rather Solomon's — and it often depressed her— and depressed us also! — "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." When through folly or carelessness opportunities for advancing the work of God were lost, she was patient and perhaps severe, and though I have often heard her speak with affection about "the dear Lord's idiot children," I know that at times she heartily wished them out of the way!

Intellectually her gifts were quite exceptional. Of her power as a public speaker I have something to say in a subsequent chapter. She had distinction as a writer, too. But all her gifts were secondary to the fervour and courage of her soul. W. T. Stead, upon whom she had a tranquillizing influence, said in a memorial article that there were only three women of the Victorian era for whose graves posterity would look in Westminster — and in each case in vain - Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot and Catherine Booth. Not altogether a happy conjunction of names. The fame of Mrs. Browning and George Eliot rests upon their achievements in the realm of imagination. Catherine Booth was a woman of action. She lived and wrought in a world of actualities, and what she was in herself, rather than anything she produced, accounts for the spell she exercised. Though not learned in the schools, she had considerable culture and a critical and analytical mind. But it was no mere cunning of words, nor the exercise of a particular mental ability through which she gained her influence and swayed alike assemblies of the most refined and the most rude. It was rather her own intense conviction of the truth of what she had to say. Her appeal was to conscience. She summoned men to the bar of God, and her message was the faith of her own soul arising from

"... clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood."



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It was the soul of the woman that shone forth, fearless, victorious, passionately devoted, absorbed in the interests of the Kingdom of God. Wise she was, with the wisdom from above, prudent in counsel, valiant in battle, and yet gentle and womanly, by nature most modest and retiring, and at all events during her earlier years, approaching the great burden of her public work with a deep reluctance. Speaking in later life of her former hesitations, she says:

"Perhaps some of you would hardly credit that I was one of the most timid and bashful disciples the Lord Jesus ever had. For ten years of my Christian life, my life was one daily battle with the cross, not because I willfully rejected as many do, for that I never dared to do. Oh, no! I used to make up my mind I would, and resolve and intend, and then, when the hour came, I used to fail for want of courage. For some four or five months before I commenced speaking, the controversy had been signally raised in my soul. I was brought to a very severe heart-searching at last. I had no vision, but a revelation to my mind in a season of sickness, when I saw that my reluctance to testify had been the fly in the pot of ointment."

Her first public efforts as the wife of a minister, sharing his duty, by reason of their complete novelty at the time, attracted considerable attention in the press. With scarcely an exception, the newspapers commented on the unseemliness, the immodesty, the vulgar desire for an unsavoury notoriety involved in these strange proceedings! My mother felt all this acutely. She realized that, necessary though it was, her action did mean a departure from the conventions and accepted standards of the day concerning woman. She could only answer that a new compelling spirit had taken possession of her own. She, by nature most retiring, had to come forth as a messenger of Christ before large audiences, to plead with them of sin, of righteousness, of judgment, and to show them the love of God as interpreted by a woman in whose heart that love was a living fountain and must shed itself abroad.

Her shrinking and hesitation over the public ordeal was only one of the things she overcame. Compared with some others, indeed, it was almost a minor hindrance. Her whole life was a triumph over foes seen and unseen. This was no sham fight for her, no spectacular tournament. There was no need to summon up imaginary enemies. Here was the enemy present in very truth.



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Catherine Booth was intensely aware of evil. We get a glimpse of inner conflicts in some of her private letters. Here is one to an intimate friend dated 1883:

Pray on, dear. He is a wonder-working God. Be desperate and don't let Him go. Faith won the victory even when He had said: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.' 'True, Lord, but the dogs may have the crumbs!' How sublime! How could He withstand that? 'Oh, woman, great is thy faith.' Amen and Amen! Lord, make ours like hers!

"Thank dear Mrs. T. for her prayers and tell her to pray on for the work in this half-damned West End — talk of the Masses, here are the Devil's strongest fortresses! Oh, the iniquities in high places! Oh, for Jeremiahs! Every true Christian ought to be crying on his face at every opportunity for this wicked city and for this wicked nation. ... Oh, Lord, make haste to our help!"

There were times when she thought, and said, that the Devil reserved some of his most venomous darts for her, that she had been singled out for his special malice. Worsted at all points in his efforts to disturb her faith, he turned upon her poor body. "It seems to have been my special lot," she said, during her last illness, "to suffer. I can scarcely remember the day in my life which has been free from one kind of pain or other." In early life she had suffered from spinal weakness, and in the years when she had the care of a growing family her health was always delicate; for quite long periods she lived on the verge of complete breakdown.

Nor was physical weakness the only thing that harassed her. Her husband, a man not over strong, was committed, before he was forty, to a task in the East End of London which would have tried the strength of a dozen men. Storms of vituperation and slander were attending the rise and growth of The Army. The abuse, it is true, was not often directed against Catherine Booth herself. In the coarsest denunciations of the "Booths" she was usually excepted; but the flying missiles hurt her all the more because they were aimed at those, especially at one, whom she loved better than life.



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In the year before her death The Army was passing through a crisis, the result of falsehood and calumny. But she never doubted that God would more than justify His own. To a delegation from a Staff-Officers' Council who attended at her bedside, she said that the persecution should be regarded as a glorious proof that God was with them, and that they were on the right lines, doing the work to which Jesus Christ had called them, and for which they had been specially raised up. In one of these times of trial of earlier date she writes to a personal friend:

"I had such a view of His love and faithfulness on the journey from Wellingborough, that I thought I should never doubt again about anything. I had the carriage to myself, and such a precious season with the Lord that the time seemed to fly. As the lightning gleamed around I felt ready to shout, 'The chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.' Oh, how precious it is when we see as well as believe, and yet more blessed to believe and not see! ... As I looked at the waving fields, the grazing sheep, the flashing sky, a voice said in my soul, 'Of what oughtest thou to be afraid? Am I not God? Cannot I supply thy little, tiny needs? My heart replied, 'It is enough, Lord, I will trust Thee. Forgive my unbelief!'

"My dear friend, you do trust a little. Oh, be encouraged to trust altogether."

The one-time idea of a saint demanded some gentle, placid person, of meek voice and unlined countenance. Catherine Booth, a great modern saint, was surely nearer the pattern of heaven!

Writing of my mother as a woman, how can I but notice her delightful love-letters? Harold Begbie says:

"Some of these letters seem to me as beautiful love-letters as any in the world, reaching at times heights of religious inspiration hardly to be matched in the literature of the saints, and sounding so unmistakable a note of truth and purity of aim that they do not suffer in the least from an occasional use of now outworn vocabulary."



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Let me quote from two of these letters, one having regard to the things of the spirit, the other containing intimations which betoken her deep womanly affection:

“Pray for me, pray for me, and let us give ourselves to the promotion of God's glory, and let us ever remember that God is glorified in the full consecration of what we have, be it small or great; He desires not the increase of five talents for the loan of one, but a full, perfect consecration of that one to His own honour, and whoever renders this, He pronounces as hearty a ‘Well done’ upon, as upon him who has received ten. I have often erred here. I will try to remember in future that all I have is all He wants; you remember it too, dearest, and be not anxious because you have not as much talent as this or that man, but only to have what you have fully sanctified, and you will realize the end of your existence as fully and glorify God as much in your sphere as Gabriel does in his.”

It adds to the human interest of the following extract that it was written by a girl of twenty-two, and, as its contents show, within a year of her betrothal:

“I thought about you very much during the day Christmas). I could not but contrast my feelings with those of last year. Then my anxieties and affections were centred in objects whose love and care I had experienced through many changing years. Then, I knew no love but that of a child, a sister, a friend, and I thought that love deep, sincere, fervent; perhaps it was, nay, I know it was; but since then a stranger, unknown, unseen till within the last short year, has strangely drawn around him the finest tendrils of my heart, and awakened a new absorbing affection which seems, as it were, to eclipse what I before deemed the intensity of love. Then my anxieties were almost confined to home; With this same stranger, like a magnet, draws them after him in all his wanderings, so that they seldom are at home! What a change in one short year! Can you solve the mystery? Can you divine the reason?”

Her life as a whole throbbed with every emotion expressed in the deeply interesting letters from among which these are taken. Amid the strain and conflict involved in the care of a large family, and in the glorious share she had alike in the great campaigns and the inner conflicts amid which



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the foundations of The Army were laid, she more and more showed the finest and strongest qualities of a true woman.

The influence of her love for William Booth, and of his love upon her, no doubt powerfully furthered this. He was spiritually her superior as she was intellectually his, but in their love they were equals. That love became a kind of element remote from the world, purer than the common air, in which they acted and reacted on one another to the comfort and joy of both. She brought to him, and ever rendered to him, the utmost tenderness of a woman completely yielded to the man of her choice. The bonds between them were continually strengthened, over that long stretch of years, by the loving surrender of each to the other. They both saw — she especially — that the real value of true love is not merely that it sanctifies the endearments and tender intimacies of a complete union, or that it produces transient ecstasies, whether of body or soul, but that it permeates and transfigures commonplace life and everyday service. This it did for them.

And what of the years that followed their separation, after she was taken from him? Those were long and lonely years for my father, but the same tender and transfiguring influence permeated and enriched them also. This influence touched him with a most tender healing art in his times of trial and depression, and when circumstances combined to re-open the wound made by her death or to make wounds anew, turned his eyes to God and God's glory in his moments of most exalted gladness and success; it never left him: in death as in life, he and she were one. Though using other words, he often said to us — but, indeed, we needed not to be told:

"Whichever way my days decline,
I felt and feel, though left alone,
Her being working in my own,
The footsteps of her life in mine."