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CHAPTER XV

GIFTS LARGE AND SMALL

The unexpected always happens," says the proverb. Not always, otherwise it would not be the unexpected. But in The Army, at all events, often where the ground looked driest we have found that at a mere jab with the pick the water gushed out. Unexpected ways and means have continually opened to us, and we have learned by experience to find that God is, as Faber's hymn says, on the field when He is most invisible.

Take the beginnings of our work outside the United Kingdom. In the late 'eighties the dominant question before the High Command of The Army was the pushing forward of the work into other countries. A beginning had been made, and so far as we could judge from the fruits already gathered or in sight, it appeared probable that The Army would find a hearing for its message and an opening for its work in many, if not in all, lands.

The result of the first years in India, in spite of serious difficulties — including a series of rather silly prosecutions by the Government and a certain amount of definite opposition from some of the established missions — had abundantly justified all the effort made. The work in the North of Europe was also encouraging as a beginning, and though in France and Switzerland we had achieved little more than an open door, there was, in spite of bitter and sustained opposition, particularly in Switzerland, a promise of "abundance of rain."

Each of these developments had, of course, involved more or less serious financial responsibility. Even where, as was the exception, a country like Sweden provided for the necessities of the work by the offerings of the people, some claim was still made upon our slender resources for providing and training the pioneer officers. In India, of course, the responsibility was much greater. In the very first year or two there a good deal of money had to be found, and it soon became evident that further considerable sums would be necessary — if the work were to be



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continued.

Invitations and suggestions with regard to other countries were also coming in. The success of our methods in India made a profound impression upon us all, calling for, even demanding, serious thought about the claims of the heathen world generally. No doubt one of the difficulties in the way, which at the time seemed more serious than afterwards proved to be the case, was the provision of men and women; but as time went on, and the reports from India became more and more gratifying, we found both men and women in the ranks of the Army coming forward to offer their lives for service in non-Christian countries.

The financial aspect of the problem was not so easily met. When men and women freely offered themselves for the service of these countries, there had still to be considered the cost of their training and equipment, and of their maintenance in the early years of their work. The continued increase of the work at home also during these years involved ever larger demands for money. Every new station opened, every new officer trained or commissioned, and every new building erected or hired required some help from Headquarters, and we were often at our wits' end to meet the needs of the day. The money burden weighed heavily on the Founder. Indeed, at one time it looked like weighing him down!

Unexpected ways and means opened to us, however. One source of income which proved important was the profit arising from the sale of our newspapers. Other unexpected gains were the gifts and offerings at my mother's meetings; these often amounted to considerable sums. How well I remember our humble gratitude to God when the collection at a certain drawing-room meeting in a house near Hyde Park Corner, attended by not more than twenty or thirty persons, brought in £1,200, and that at a moment of urgent need. Some notable givers were greatly stirred by the attacks on us in the newspapers. One fine old man, a retired London manufacturer, always sent a cheque upon the appearance of anything disagreeable about us in a certain Daily. Sometimes the cheque was for £100, at other times, when the attack had been specially damaging, up to £500. On these occasions he would simply pin the cutting from the newspaper to his cheque and enclose his card! One was almost tempted to wish that the editor had been even more aggressive.



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These special and irregular supplies, however, were not enough to meet the new demands which were being made from outside the United Kingdom. We needed both a sign in this matter and a supply. There was, of course, no actual compulsion upon us to take up the work, at any rate in the East, and the Founder laid it down most definitely that he would not incur debt; even loans without interest we regarded as unsatisfactory, and at one time declined considerable sums. The whole subject became a care and a burden. There were endless conferences and discussions in the inner circle, and a great deal of earnest prayer for guidance.

The sign and the supply were both forthcoming in a remarkable way. C. T. Studd, the famous cricketer, who had gone out to China a year or two before, and was working with the China Inland Mission, there read something about our work in India, and was constrained to send £5,000 from his own wealth to help on that work. Here was indeed a sign the significance of which was at that time far more impressive than it would have been in later years. Up to that date this was one of the two or three largest single gifts we had received, and it produced a deep, as well as an encouraging, effect upon the Founder, and indeed upon us all.

Shortly after this we made the acquaintance of the late Frank Crossley, of Crossley Brothers, the great engineering firm of Manchester. He attended some meetings, first in Torquay, where he happened to be on a visit, and afterwards in London, and was much blessed and uplifted in his own spiritual experience. He was a most charming man, and the impact of The Army upon his life had many notable results. At the time of which I now speak he had come to feel very deep sympathy with us in our burdens. Especially was he attracted by the Founder's simplicity and wide compassion, and by Mrs. Booth's directness of teaching and testimony. He soon became one of our most generous helpers.

Crossley's contributions to the various funds had already reached a notable figure when a special circumstance occurred. At the conclusion of two days of remarkable meetings in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, during which the Founder and Mrs. Booth and several officers had spoken with great freedom of full salvation, he came with us from the platform into the speakers room and, drawing the Founder aside, said to him, "General, I want to help you. I shall give you as a thank-



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offering £20,000! It was done with such simplicity and so humbly that we scarcely realized its significance at the moment. As might be expected, very warm letters passed both to him and Mrs. Crossley from Mrs. Booth as well as the Founder. Here was a “sign” indeed, and at any rate something in the direction of supply! The Founder was greatly encouraged, and his spirits rose. The money was soon in our hands, and allocated forthwith to the various funds.

A year later another series of meetings similar in character was held in the same place. Frank Crossley, who had become more and more friendly in the interval, was again present and again blessed. I remember well our feelings about that visit. During the year the Founder had opened to him some of our schemes, and while there were some occasions for criticism — and, by the way, quite reasonable criticism — we did not feel able to arrange everything as Mr. Crossley thought advisable. When, therefore, the meetings in the Free Trade Hall came round again, we had no thought of any further large gifts — indeed it would have been absurd to expect that any such sum was likely to be repeated so soon and both the Founder and I were most anxious that Crossley should not think we were looking for anything of that kind. On the second day of the campaign we three lunched together in one of the rooms at the Hall, and the conversation turned on the new developments of the past year. Mr. Crossley was greatly stirred by the recital. Once or twice he said, “Can you not do this?” or “Why do you not go there?” though in the main he was a listener to the Founder's plans. At last he turned to me and said, quite in his ordinary tone of voice, and with the charming smile which often irradiated his countenance, “Mr. Bramwell, are you not going to ask me about money? I looked at the Founder — we had agreed we would certainly not ask about money — and the Founder said in his own frank and simple way, “Well, no, we settled not to ask you for money, but if you wish it we will! How we all laughed! Then Crossley, taking the old General's hand, said some charming words of encouragement, and added, “I shall give you another twenty!”

We all felt greatly lifted up. We seemed to see God manifestly leading us on, and giving us signs which we could not mistake. As to Crossley, I have often wished in later years that he could have known of the glorious work which has grown up on the foundation his munificence helped us to lay.



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But in the sight of God, to whom much that is so great to us is very small, and much that is trifling to us is of everlasting significance, it may well be that these large — and, alas, very occasional - gifts are really not more fruitful than the small and unnoticed benefactions of those who can only give at all at the cost of pinching sacrifice. In another volume I have given some touching instances of the “little” gifts that have come The Army's way. Here I call to mind one incident which I have always treasured as a choice example of one of the precious things of Army life.

Examining one day at Headquarters the returns of subscriptions received during a given period, I noticed a frequently recurring item of one shilling and fourpence under the same name. On making inquiry I learned that for some time this amount had been regularly received month by month from a woman of whom nothing more was known than that she was a widow and a soldier of one of our country corps. I was taken by the fact that with the money came only the sender's address and the words “For the poor.” I directed that an officer should go and see her with a view to discovering something of her circumstances, and with authority to raise the question of her ability to send this monthly gift. Accordingly a woman lieutenant went over from a neighbouring city to the little village where she lived, and found the good soul in a sweet, two-roomed cottage with a tiny garden growing potatoes and flowers. She quickly learned her history, which, as nearly as may be, was told in the following words:

“Yes, my dear, I live alone since my husband died. He worked at the factory in — for many years, and when he got past it they kindly made us an allowance of two-and-six a week, and we had the old age pension for one of us. We came down here and paid eighteen pence a week for this cottage, and we grew a few vegetables, as you see. Then he died, and I just manage to keep going on from week to week.”

“About the trifle of money I send to Headquarters, yes, it is quite right — that is from me. And it is like this, lieutenant, I always said if I had been on the earth when the Lord Jesus was here, I should have loved Him to have come to see us in our little home, and I should always have wanted to give Him some food, no matter how pinched I might have been. Of course, that will never be, but He said that if we give anything to the poor and suffering for His sake it was just the same as giving it to Him. And so I always reckon to save the



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money for one loaf each week — I call it my 'Jesus Loaf' — and I send the money each month to Headquarters. You see, both I and my husband were saved in The Army, and I know about its work."

Here the lieutenant gathered up her courage, somewhat dispersed by the circumstances now related, and introduced the question she had come to ask. "Are you really able to spare this money? Our people at Headquarters are not very happy about it. They would not like you to give more than you ought, and they have sent me to inquire. I really do not see how you can get enough for yourself if you send this money away."

In all the dignity of old age, and with the sweetness of a great heart, the old lady laid her hands on the young officer's shoulders, and said, "Ah, lieutenant, that is where the blessing comes in — to leave off a little hungry for His sake."

Gifts made in such a spirit, in such divine humility, so near to the Cross, must bear fruit unto God out of all proportion to the money values by which we identify and record them. We must leave it to Almighty God to determine which is the greater and which the less. But perhaps comparisons have no meaning in the Kingdom of Heaven.