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CHAPTER XVII

SOME AUTHORS AND THE ARMY

It has often been a matter of surprise to me that some author of world repute, in search of a subject around which his literary genius might weave an immortal romance, has not thought of the Salvation Army. Alike in its spirit and method and in the results which have followed its labours, The Army has at any rate the very necessary quality of human interest.

But while The Army awaits a great romanticist, several writers of distinction, both in the English-speaking world and outside, have paid their tribute to our operations, and in the course of our history we have come more or less into intimate touch with a number of authors.

One of the most interesting men of his period was Sir Walter Besant, who did us more than one good turn, showed an acute interest in our aims, and in his great work on London, in the volume dealing with the nineteenth century, included a long chapter on the Salvation Army, giving a close and sympathetic account of the work.

A writer of altogether another type — the poet of modern revolt, as he was sometimes called — was Robert Buchanan, an outspoken unbeliever, and yet one of the world's great hearts. Buchanan was one of the merriest of all the sad souls I have had to deal with, an amazing collection of contradictions, and yet one of the most delightful characters to be met with on the day's journey. In a lengthy piece of verse entitled "Hallelujah Jane," which attracted widespread attention for a long time after it first appeared, he spoke out of the depths. The poem tells the story of the reclamation of an unhappy woman of the slums, and a kind of refrain runs as follows:

"Glory! Hallelujah! March along together!
March along, march along, every kind of weather!
Wet or dry, shower or shine, ready night and day,
Travelling to Jesus, singing on the way!"



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He is waiting for us, yonder in the sky,
Stooping down His shining head to

Hear
Our
Cry!"

There are many touching lines in the poem, especially those which tell of the devotion of this woman to a little sick sister, but here is the expressive way in which the story of her conversion is told:

"But one mornin' when The Army was a-gatherin', I stood by, And they 'oller'd, 'Glory, glory, to our Father in the sky! And I thought the tune was jolly, and I sang out loud and gay. And the minute I began it, 'arf my trouble pass'd away, And the louder as I sung it, that great lump I felt inside Grew a-lighter and a-lighter, while I lep' and sung and cried! And when the song was over, up the Captain comes to me, And he sez, ' That voice of yours, Jane, is as good as any three! Why, you're like a op'ry singer!' he sez, larfin ... 'Never mind.'

He sez (for I look'd sulky, and his heart was allays kind!), 'Never mind — there's many among us of such singin' would be proud —

He's a long way off, is Jesus, so we've got to make it loud!

Then they marched, and I went marchin', for I seem'd gone mad that day, And my 'eart inside was dancin' every footstep of the way.

Yes, and that there singin' saved me! For the louder as I sung, Why, the more my load was lighten'd, and it seem'd as how I sprung From the ground right up to Jesus, and I 'eard Him 'oller clear, Keep a-marchin' and a-singin', for you've got to get up 'ere!"

Another widely-known writer who was always anxious to help us was Rider Haggard. His writing was chiefly fiction, of a startling and original type. But he did some serious work also, and his "A



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"Farmer's Year" and "Rural England" are likely to be read and valued long after "She" and "Ayesha" have passed away.

Haggard liked the Salvation Army from its early days. He liked my dear father, and his liking was cordially reciprocated. They were very different men, but they were amazingly one in some questions of the highest significance for the community, though they did not agree about the Transvaal, and they had both of them a frank outspokenness which is not always an attraction. In Rider Haggard's autobiography he describes a visit he paid to Queen Victoria Street when the old General, stripped to his red jersey, was steaming with perspiration and very vexed because his tea or whatever the meal was called was not ready. At length the meal arrived — a huge dish of mushrooms and a pot of strong tea. "Contemplating this combination of fungi and tannin," says Rider Haggard, "I remarked that never before had I understood the height and depth and breadth of his faith in the heavenly protection!"

Our first intimate association came about in rather a curious way. The Army had established a colony for landless men from the Eastern States. The early results obtained at this irrigation colony, which was near Denver, in Colorado, justified us in thinking that such colonies could be successfully established elsewhere. The British Government at first refused our request that they should look into the work, but after a time, partly owing to the influence of Earl Grey, who was then (1904-5) Governor-General of Canada, and who had come into contact with our people when he was in South Africa, the Government agreed to send someone out to look at the experiment and report.

Haggard — a capital selection was chosen. He was a skilled agriculturist, a landowner, and a shrewd business man, not without a vein of real sympathy with the poor. He went out and made a full and, on the whole, a very "favourable report." The colony ultimately did not succeed owing to unforeseen difficulties with water, but Haggard received a very excellent impression both of our aims and of our businesslike and common sense methods. He said so.

Some little time after this we were in very low water as to funds for our Social Work in the United Kingdom, and I suggested to the Founder that we should ask some writer of repute to go and



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look at the work and write his own impressions for publication. The idea was approved, and I thought of Haggard. We suggested that if he would undertake the work we were quite prepared to consider any reasonable fee he might propose. He called at Headquarters and told me he had decided to undertake the job, but must make two conditions. "First," he said, "you must give me a list of your places, few or many, both for men and for women, and I will go and visit them when I like and how I like, with or without notice, and" — with emphasis — "I shall report what I see." I replied, "Right, that will suit us admirably. What is the other condition? other condition," he said, "is that you do not pay me anything for the work." Naturally I replied, "Right," again, and although Sir Rider, as he later became, gave three months to this undertaking, travelling the length and breadth of the country, and employing a secretary to assist him, he would not take a shilling from us. I always felt that this was rather a fine thing. He was not a wealthy man, especially at that time, and when he did produce it, the "book" proved of real financial importance to us.

Haggard, in his autobiography, tells the story of "Regeneration," and he adds:

"I emerged from this work with a most wholehearted admiration for the Salvation Army and its splendid self-sacrificing labours among the lowest of the low. Its success with these, where so many have failed, remains something of a mystery to my mind, which I can only explain by a belief that it is aided through the agency of the Power above us. Nothing else will account for the transformation it effects in the natures of utterly degraded men and women. Long may it endure and Prosper!"

In the same book Haggard writes, on the occasion of the death of The Army Founder, that here on earth William Booth had built himself a monument of many thousands of regenerated hearts. "Why, I wonder," he writes, was burial in Westminster Abbey not offered for his remains? I suppose the answer is because he did not belong to the Church of England. Yet if the Abbey can open its ancient doors to those who amuse many of the people — eminent actors, for instance — it seems hard that these should be closed to one who saved so many of the people, and in all lands."



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One other circumstance occurs to me. When he had finished the work, Haggard called upon me at Headquarters and handed over the manuscript. He was very warm, in fact enthusiastic, about much that he had seen in the course of his investigation, and I asked him before he went to tell me what single incident in the course of all his work had made the greatest impression upon his mind.

He thought a moment, and then he said, "I will tell you. I called at one of your institutions for women, and during my conversation with the warden we were interrupted, and she left me with an apology. When she returned I asked her where she had been. She put me off rather, but I said I was there to investigate, and I wanted to know what the interruption was about. Then she told me a long story. One of the women, who had been rescued from a most deplorable existence, had called upon her to pay some money she had promised. The promise had been made in strange circumstances. The chief constable had called at this home one day and explained that the police and magistrates were at their wits' end about a notorious character who had become a menace to the health and decency of the city. She agreed, although they were full, to find a place for this poor, broken, dishevelled creature, whose condition was about as bad as it could be. At the Home they washed her, prayed with her, and loved her, and after a few months she became a changed woman. One day when she went out on an errand, she noticed a young girl standing sadly at the corner of the street, and, knowing all that it meant, she begged the warden to let the girl, of whom she knew nothing, come into the Home. When it was pointed out to her that the Home was crowded, and that there was not a bed left, this woman pleaded that the girl might be given her bed, and she would sleep on the landing. The warden gave way, and then spoke of financial difficulties, whereupon the woman said, 'Well, I have been a bad woman, and I know you can't trust me fully yet, but I do mean to be right, and I am quick with my needle. I will earn extra money when I take my situation and pay for that girl's keep while in the Home.' The warden accepted her promise, the girl was brought in and rescued, and had done well in her situation, and the warden concluded by saying, 'All this, Mr. Haggard, was two years ago. This morning the woman called to pay the money which she had promised!'

There was a break in Haggard's voice when he finished the story, and I saw that it had deeply impressed him. "That," he said, "is your great achievement. You have not only descended into



the very sewers of our modern life and rescued the jewels you have found there, but you have inspired them with a like passion to rescue their fellows."

Haggard was a man with a heart and a sympathetic understanding of human nature. He talked more sense about tramps and idlers, and regular workhouse frequenters and the victims of poverty and misfortune, than any man I ever met outside the Salvation Army.

Another writer who has done some important work for The Army is Harold Begbie. I have no idea what his own opinion may be, but in my judgment few books have so stirred the religious world as his "Broken Earthenware"; a story of our work as seen in one of our London corps, and in the lives of just a dozen or so converts rescued from the depths. When we asked him to write that history we left him perfectly free as to his methods of investigation and presentation, making only one request in the matter, namely, that he should and live for a few weeks among the people of whom he was to write. He did so, and to this I attribute no little of what may be called the "atmosphere" of the book, which has much to do with its intense reality. Mr. Begbie sank himself into the deeps inhabited by the broken and forlorn, the drink-sodden and suffering, and in no small measure succeeded in receiving into his own spirit the very spirit of their lives — their disappointments, their misfortunes, their failures and their passions.

To me the chief lesson of "Broken Earthenware" is its revelation of the conflicts of the spirit even in the most degraded. In his preface, Begbie defends that particular side of the Salvation Army's methods which offends so many people — its bands, its cheerful singing, its laughing optimism.

"You cannot imagine," he writes, "what effect those exhilarating bands, those rejoicing hymns, and those radiant Salvationists produce in streets of infinite squalor and abysmal degradation. Think what it means for the sodden and degraded miserable, shivering some Sunday morning in his filthy rags on the steps of a common lodging-house, hating himself, hating God, and regarding the whole race of humanity with hostility, to hear suddenly the jocund clash of brass music, to catch words that challenge his wretchedness and despair with exhilarating joy, and then to see among those marching down the centre of his dreary street, happy, clean, and rejoicing, the very men who once shared his dog's



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life of misery and crime. It is the rejoicing, singing, irrepressible happiness of the Salvationist which often makes him such a powerful saver of other men."

Begbie is not so happy in "Other Sheep" — a study of the Salvation Army in India, written during a visit of some months' duration. Nevertheless, this also is a powerful book and has done us good in promoting a better understanding of our missionary work and the principles which underlie it. Both books have been used to the illumination of many souls. "The Life of William Booth," also by Begbie, is destined to prove, I believe, one of the great biographies of modern times, and I feel that the Founder, who himself named Begbie as his biographer, was justified in his choice.

Another popular writer with whom we had something to do was Marie Corelli. The Founder was her guest once or twice at Stratford-on-Avon. She presented one of our corps in the Midlands with a building costing about £1,500, and showed in several ways a very sympathetic appreciation of our work.

I have not read many of Miss Corelli's books, and I confess I have not liked many things in those I have read. On the other hand, "The Mighty Atom" contains a powerful appeal of all but universal application. It may be, probably is, overdrawn, but its general effect is true. "The Treasure of Heaven," though marred by overmuch sentimentalism, in my opinion only just misses being a really great book, and tends to encourage, if not to inspire, some of the noblest things in human life. The original of at least one of the characters in that book—and one of the most pleasantly to be remembered—was a Salvationist, a reformed poacher and woodman, who works for the abatement of evil and the promoting of practical goodness. One of the most touching scenes in the book is where a company of rather rough characters make a copper collection for one whom they believe to be a poor old tramp, and steal up to his bedroom in the inn and lay it upon his pillow after writing some friendly words. "Miss Tranter," says one of them to the lady of the inn as the rough cap goes round, "we are doing a mission. We are Salvationists. Now's your chance. Give us a sixpence."



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Miss Corelli was a Roman Catholic. The Founder, of whom she was, I believe, a sincere admirer, spoke to her on the concerns of her soul, and they prayed together. I do not know, of course, what impression he made upon her, but I do know that he believed her to be a sincere woman. More than once I heard him speak of her spiritual discernment and womanly compassion. She was one who belonged to that choice kindred of whom he himself was a member — those who care for humanity for its own sake. One strong point of interest was that she had made what she regarded as a success of her lifework in spite of the opposition of a Press at one time absolutely opposed to her.

There are other authors who have brought the Salvation Army into their works either in blessing or cursing. It is doubtful in which spirit Mr. H. G. Wells makes his reference to The Army in "The Sleeper Awakes." That volume depicts a state of affairs in which in two hundred years' time the workers are regulated by a Labour Department which had purchased "an emotional religious organization called the Salvation Army," and turned it into a business company for the elimination of destitution. The result is not fortunate — which perhaps is an indirect compliment to us.

But Mr. Wells, far as his eye can range the future, does not tell us under what circumstances, nor under the treachery of what General, The Army came to be "purchased!"