

# Autobiography

GIPSY SMITH

1902

## 1 HIS LIFE AND WORK

### 1.1 CHAPTER 12

”The Word of the Lord Grew and Multiplied.”

BALLINGTON BOOTH

MY MARRIAGE

THE CHATHAM FOSSILS

MY next station was West Hartlepool. During these months I was teaching myself reading and writing. I had to prepare a good many discourses. I soon came to the end of my own native mental store, and I had to seek replenishment for my mind in study and thinking. And one cannot well study unless one knows how to read. I taught myself writing from a copybook, and like everybody else who has pursued this method of self-instruction, I found the first line I wrote under the copy was always the best. As I got farther away from the model, the worse my writing grew. The thoughtful reader will see a lesson here for himself. The nearer we keep to our model, Christ, the more like will our life be to His. Should not this be our daily prayer:

”A heart in every thought renewed And full of love divine, Perfect and right and pure and good, A copy, Lord, of Thine”?

My days were spent somewhat after this fashion: I rose about seven and breakfasted at eight or half-past. Some of the time before breakfast was always spent in devotional exercises, and occasionally also in a little study. Then I went out to visit the most urgent cases. If there were no such cases I spent most of the morning in reading, writing, and preparing my addresses. The afternoons were occupied in visiting. I had a service every night, and the service was almost invariably preceded by an open-air meeting. On Sunday we had three services.

My stay at West Hartlepool was brief. Soon I received instructions to go to Manchester to work under Mr. Ballington Booth, the General’s second son. An address was given to me at which I might find him in Manchester. When I got there he was absent and was not expected home for many days. The woman who occupied the house told me that she did not know where I was to stay. I

left a short note with her for Mr. Ballington Booth, saying that as he was not there, as operations had not begun, as the hall was not to be opened for some days, and as I had been working hard and wanted a rest, I would go and stay at Mr. Howorth's, Blackburn Road, Bolton, and that that address would find me the moment he needed me. That same night I went to Bolton and attended a meeting of the Christian Mission there. I was, of course, well known to all the people. The missionary in charge, a Miss Rose Clapham, immediately asked me what business I had in her meeting. The people, naturally enough, were making something of a fuss of me as an old friend. I told Miss Clapham that I felt that I had a perfect right to be present; I should do her no harm.

I attended these meetings regularly every night for a few days.

On the Saturday afternoon a telegram reached me ordering me to Manchester at once, and saying that I was announced to preach the next day. I had a very sore throat, and I knew that we had no station in Manchester. I replied by another wire that I was not fit to preach or sing, and that I should stay in Bolton until Monday, resting myself. On Monday evening I again attended a meeting of the mission in Bolton. To my surprise, whom should I see there but Mr. Ballington Booth. Miss Clapham, it appeared, had gone to Manchester to consult Mr. Ballington Booth and his mother, who was in Manchester at that time, and to complain of my presence at her meetings. Throughout the whole of the meeting Mr. Booth made no reference to me, never spoke to me, and seemed determined to go away without speaking to me. I placed myself against the door, resolved to bring him into conversation, and when he saw that he must say something, he took hold of me by the arm, and pulling me a little aside he said, "Gipsy, we can do without you." I replied, "Very well, so you shall." I am quite willing and ready to admit that I blundered there. I had no right to take any notice of what Mr. Ballington had said to me. He was not the superintendent of the mission. He did not engage me to work in it, and he had no power or right to dismiss me. But I was a boy and inexperienced and I felt deeply hurt. Sorrowfully I went home and sent in my resignation.

The incident caused a great deal of excitement in Bolton, and many of my old friends, some well to-do people among them, besought me that I should preach to them before I left the town. I preached for six weeks to crowds of people in the Opera-house. But I was very miserable all the time. I knew I had done wrong and I felt it. I knew that the step I had taken was not the right step, and I felt that I was not in the place I ought to be. I resolved to bring matters to a head, and traveled to Newcastle to see Mr. Booth. I asked for an interview with him, which was granted readily. I told him I was sorry for the step I had taken and for the pain I knew I must have given him. I might have had provocation, yet I had acted wrongly, and I asked him to forgive me. Mr. Booth, from whom I personally had never received anything but kindness, treated me like a father and forgave me freely. He advised me to leave Bolton at once, to go home to my father for a few days, and then to report myself at headquarters, where I should receive further instructions.

I was reinstated as Lieutenant Smith, and stationed at Plymouth. My superior officer was Captain Dowdle. Just about this time, early in 1879, the

Christian Mission was in a transition state and was being transmuted into the Salvation Army. The old Christian Mission Monthly Magazine had been replaced by the Monthly Salvationist. The new name for the movement meant new methods and titles for the workers. While at Dovenport I was promoted to the rank of captain.

I was married to Miss Pennock, daughter of Captain Pennock, of the mercantile marine, at Whitby, on the 17th of December, 1879, at a registry-office. I started my married life with an income of 33S. a week, but I had besides a furnished house rent free. I do not think I shall ever know in this world how much of my success is due to my wife, her beautiful Christian life, and the unselfish readiness with which she has given me up to leave her and the children for the work to which my Master has called me. She knows and I know that I am doing my life's work. When He comes to reward every bit of faithful service done in His name and to give out the laurels, my wife and children will not be forgotten. God has given us three children. The eldest is Albany Rodney, who was born in Newcastle the last day of 1880; then Alfred Hanley, born on the 5th of August, 1882; and Rhoda Zillah, born on the 1st of February, 1884. My eldest son is a sailor boy; my second is a student at the Victoria University, Manchester, a local preacher on trial, who hopes to become a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry; Zillah is at home. When she was somewhat younger, she once said to me: "Some little girls have their daddies always at home; mine only comes home when he wants clean collars." On another occasion she said to me, "Daddy, if you really lived with us you would be happy." My wife and children feel that my work is theirs, and that they must not for a moment say a word or do anything that would in the slightest degree hinder me. Wisely and lovingly have my dear ones carried out this principle.

My first charge after my marriage was at Chatham. This station, which was several years old, had never been a success. If it had, then it had fallen very low. I was sent down to end it or mend it. The General had visited the town and knew the situation exactly. I shall never forget the reception that my congregation, numbering thirteen, gave me on the first night. There had been dissension among them, and each of them sat as far away from his neighbor as possible. I saw there was something the matter somewhere, and resolved to set it right if it were possible. I sat down and looked at my frigid congregation for quite a number of minutes. The thirteen isolated items were meanwhile exchanging glances, mutely inquiring of each other what was the matter, and what they were waiting for. At length one man more bold than his neighbors arose to tackle me, wanting to know what I meant by not beginning the meeting. "I am getting to know," I said, "what is the matter with you. I am studying the disease—am feeling your pulse. A doctor does not prescribe until he knows what the disease is." There was another dead silence, and at length I began the service. But my troubles were still to come. One old man, who had gazed at me in consternation and suspicion all through my address, said to me:

"Who sent you here, my boy?"

"The Rev. William Booth, the superintendent of this mission."

"Well, you won't do for us."

"Why, what have I done? Why do you not like me?"

"Oh," said the old man, "you are too young for us.

"Is that it?"

"That is it."

"Well," I said, "if you let me stop here awhile I shall get older. I am not to blame for being young. But if I have not any more whiskers than a gooseberry, I have got a wife. What more do you want?"

I held up the book containing the names of the members, and I told the people that I had authority to burn it if I liked. But I had no desire to do this. I wanted their sympathy, prayers, and cooperation.

I showed the people that I meant business—that I was eager for the help of those who were of the same mind, and as for the others, they must cease their troubling or betake themselves elsewhere. The result was as satisfactory as it was sudden. Harmony was restored. The individual members of the congregation no longer sat far apart. The people of the neighborhood got to know of the change in the relation of our members to each other, and came to our chapel to see what was happening. The congregation grew apace, and when I left, after nine months' service, the membership had risen from thirty-five to 250.

At Chatham we had some difficulties with the soldiers and sailors. They took a strange and strong aversion to our work, expressed by throwing things at us. I believe that the publicans were at the bottom of the mischief. The civilian population did not help us, but simply looked on enjoying the fun while we were being pelted and otherwise molested. But one day a gentleman came from London to see me and discuss the situation. He refused to give me his name, and I have never been able to discover it. He asked me if we were conscious of saying anything to aggravate the trouble, and I said no, we had no desire to pose as martyrs and we were not seeking a sensation. The result of the interview was soon manifest. We had soldiers and sailors among our members, and great was our joy when some of them came to us one Sunday morning and told us it would be all right now. Early that morning the soldiers were called out on parade, and a letter from headquarters was read stating that if any soldier was found interfering with the open-air services of the Salvation Army in the town he would be tried by court-martial. Something similar must have happened in the case of the sailors, because from henceforth we had no trouble at all. This was particularly gratifying to me, because I had never complained to the authorities of the treatment we had received. I recognized it as part of the cross we had to bear, and was resolved to face it out and endure it to the end for the sake of the Master.

I could narrate many incidents of my Chatham work. There was one case, at once sad and comical. A poor, ignorant man—very ignorant—attended the services regularly for weeks. One night, as he was passing out, he said to me: "I am fifty years of age, and have served the devil all the time. But I am giving him a fortnight's notice." I reasoned with him, and urged immediate decision. "Oh no," said the poor man, "I would not like to be treated like that myself. I am going to do to others as I would like to be done by. But I have given the devil a fortnight's notice." When a week had passed, as the poor fellow was again

passing out of the hall, he held up one finger to signify that the devil had just one week longer of him. When the notice had expired the devil was dismissed, and the man who had been in his service for fifty years entered a service which he liked much better, and which he has never left. He was for years a true and humble disciple of another Master.

At Newcastle, which was my next station, we had many conversions, as we always had. I remember well the case of a man whom his mates called "Bricky" – he was such a hard, tough customer. Bricky, with some companions, came to our meetings – not to be edified, but to scoff and sneer. I picked him out among the crowd and went to speak to him. He said:

"I am a good churchman; I say my prayers every night."

"Do you know the Lord's Prayer?"

"Of course I do."

"Let us hear it, then."

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want," etc. I did not seem to have made any impression on Bricky. I invited him back, and he came this time without his companions. I regarded that as a good sign. He came again, and yet again. I saw that a work of grace was proceeding in him. He began to feel the burden of his sins and to hate them and himself too. Finally he gave himself to Christ. He was changed from a drunken, swearing, gambling sot into a new creature, and was used as an instrument for the salvation of many others.

A few weeks after his conversion, as he was coming one night to the meetings, he passed the theatre, where a pantomime was going on, a theatre that he had been in the habit of attending. At the door he met a good many of his old companions, and they said to him:

"Bricky, we have not seen you for a long time. Are you coming in tonight?"

"No, I cannot come. I am serving a new Master."

"Oh, but have you seen the transformation-scene this year?"

"No," said Bricky. "I have not seen it, but I have felt it."

A man and woman who had lived together for many years unmarried came one night into our meeting at Newcastle. They did not know of each other's presence there. Neither knew what was passing in the mind and heart of the other. At the end, in response to my invitation, they both came forward among the penitents and I dealt with them.

Even while they knelt there before God, confessing their sins and seeking His salvation and strength, each was ignorant that the other was among that little company. But presently, of course, the situation was revealed to them, and the look of surprise and joy on their faces was a sight that will never be forgotten by me as long as I live. They told me their story, and I asked what they meant to do. They said, "We cannot go home together to-night; that is certain." I asked them if they knew of any reason why they should not be married. They said there was none; and they ate their wedding-breakfast at our house. After this both led beautiful lives, adorning the grace that had wrought this miracle in them.