

RED CROSS KNIGHTS OF THE SALVATION ARMY.

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BY "FIDELIA."

We have all heard much of "Christian England," with its noble cathedrals and abbeys, its rich ecclesiastical heritage, its generations of culture, its Christian lives of gentle and ideal beauty. But we are less familiar with the "Heathen England" growing for generations side by side with it, under the shadow of its many churches. That heathen England is nevertheless very real, very coarse, very brutal, constituting an aggregate of gross ignorance and vice, which is like a mass of seething corruption in the midst of a fair and lovely garden. In this heathen England, the old traditions of Christianity have been utterly lost, the men are debased and brutal, often as cruel as their own bull dogs; the women have a crushed and down-trodden semblance of womanhood, and the children, alas! a wretchedly stunted and morally deformed childhood. The blessedness of home is unknown, and if, as Dickens delighted to show in his pictures of its abnormal life, "some flow rats of Eden they still inherit, it is no less certain that 'the trail of the serpent is over them all.' In England there are sharper contrasts than any seen even in America. Between the refined and happy homes of luxury and culture, "sweetness and light," and the dark cellar and garrets where wretched men and women, and almost as wretched children, drag out a miserable existence, revealed as

"They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,"

there is "a great gulf fixed." Little wonder if the eyes that look hungrily from the dens of St. Giles' and the Seven Dials to the beautiful homes and parks where "noble lords and ladies ride," should often smoulder with the baleful fire of jealous hatred and sullen despair, the certain inspiration of Chartism and Nihilism.

Into this *Inferno*, of which it might almost be written, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here," many pitying eyes have looked, and ministering angels have descended, laden with Christian hope and consolation. And yet, on the mass, but little impression has been made by all the "Missions" which Christian philanthropy has instituted. Into the gloom and misery, nearly twenty years ago, one man, fired with the ardour of a Red Cross Knight, looked, and as he looked in ineffable pity, there dawned upon him the conception of a new crusade against these powers of darkness,—a crusade to be fought with no mortal weapons, but with certain pieces of armour described in an ancient book, the "breastplate of righteousness," the "gospel of peace," the "sword of the Spirit," and all used in the unquerable and unfailing might of Christian love. These alone were to be the only weapons for either offence or defence. Even where, opposed by physical violence the crusaders should have to march through mob-fire of mud and stones, accompanied by hootings and revilings and brutal assault, the assaulters were to be met simply by Christian endurance, meekness and love.

The man on whom this noble conception dawned, and gradually grew into more tangible shape, was William Booth, now known all over the world as "General" Booth, of the Salvation Army. Beginning his ministry in the Methodist Church in 1853, at twenty four years of age, he laboured so successfully as an evangelist that, in 1861, he resigned his ministry in that church rather than give up what he felt to be his special life work as an evangelist, and settle down to a pastoral charge. He held services wherever he found an opportunity, crowds assembling to hear him, and whole districts being stirred by his intense and powerful preaching. In 1865, being in London, and deeply impressed by the sense of the dense masses of degraded heathenism around him, he began his evangelistic work by preaching in the open air in one of its lowest quarters, in the Mile End Road. And as he studied the character and the needs of the people, the idea of the new crusade took a more definite form in his mind, and has since been marvellously carried out in the organization which we now know as the "Salvation Army." For a long time, some ten or eleven years, the crusaders had no such name, "no military titles, no bands of music, no tambourines, no blood and fire bills," but the spirit of the fighters was the same, and these peculiarities of outward form were gradually superadded, as their usefulness in promoting the Army's objects commended them to the shrewd and active mind of the organizer and commander of the force, who is certainly a good reader of human nature. People accustomed from infancy to an orderly and solemn service, liturgical or otherwise, cannot understand why such "fantastical" accessories should be introduced into any religious service. But it is because "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives." To a half "civilized heathen," such as abound in England, and unhappily in America too, the decorous and solemn service as far above his present stage of spiritual development as a concert of "classical music" would be beyond the comprehension of a Kafir. And that is one reason why the Churches have failed to gather in the "lapsed masses." For not only

are such services "beyond them," but they are also utterly unattractive to them. And just as the church of the Middle Ages appealed to the fancy of half savage nations by its processions and pageantry, its pictures and object lessons, and as ritualistic London clergymen to-day use some of the same means of attraction, so the Salvation Army put on its military paraphernalia to gather men and women together by the sound of drum and tambourine and lively choruses, and then preach to them the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. For, this and nothing else, is what they do teach, no more outward obedience to an organization, no complicated system of theology, but the simple elementary truths, acknowledged by all evangelical Christians, that sinful men need a Saviour, and that Christ is the Saviour they need, to deliver them from the guilt and the power of sin. This is true of their teaching every where, in the New World and the Old. As an English paper describes it. "The whole points of the creed of the Salvationists are. Man is a sinner, Christ is a Saviour. He died for every one, therefore He died for you. He saved me, therefore He can save you. Come, then, to the Fountain, it is free, without money and without price. The changes are rung upon these few points again and again, but they are never reasoned about. It is so, that is all, if you believe, you will be saved, if you disbelieve, you will be damned." Thus, as a system of theology, may seem very bare and crude to the lovers of long and metaphysical formulas like the Athanasian Creed or the Westminster Confession. It must be admitted however, that it is enough to live and die by, as the experience of millions has proved.

But though the "Army" fights with only spiritual weapons, "in love and the spirit of meekness," this can by no means be said of the assailants it has frequently encountered. This record, given on their own official authority, speaks for itself. "During the year 1882, 669 of our soldiers, to our knowledge, have been knocked down, kicked, or otherwise brutally assaulted, 391 of them being men, 251 women, and twenty three children under thirteen: No less than fifty six of the buildings used by us have been attacked, nearly all the windows being broken in many cases, and in many others even more serious damage being done." This assaulting process has continued through the nineteen years during which the crusade has been going on, though for most of the time it was not marked by any of the peculiar features now regarded as its distinguishing characteristics. The Christian bearing of the soldiers under fire has been frequently acknowledged, as it is in the testimony given by the Mayor of Bath to the Home Secretary. "The reports received by the magistrates from the police indicate that the 'Salvationists' keep themselves strictly within the law. We find that even when struck, assailed with foul and abusive language, and their property broken and destroyed, the 'Salvationists' do not retaliate. And to understand what they have had to bear, it is necessary to understand something of the brutality of an English mob, perhaps the most stupidly brutal kind of mob in the world." With such a record, for one year, as that just quoted, who shall dare to say that there was not need for the Salvation Army? And again and again it has happened that the ringleaders in the attack have been forced by the constraining power of Christian love to join the ranks they had been attacking with bitter animosity. After a barbarous *melee* at Crediton, in which several officers of the "Army" were severely injured, the confession was made at the next visit, "Last time you were here, Major, I helped to stone you, but now, thank God, I am saved!"

But not only have they to suffer at the hands of the populace, they have had, again and again, to suffer at the hands of the authorities! In some cases, indeed, the local magistrates have firmly defended them against attempted oppression by a lawless rabble, but in others, underlying prejudice and the animosity which in some minds is always excited by any form of aggressive Christianity have taken advantage of the most pretexts of local by laws, broken by a quiet march through the streets, to condemn them to a longer or shorter imprisonment, in default of the fine which they will not pay. For to pay the fine would be to admit the right of the magistrate to punish them for acts which they maintain to be perfectly lawful and within their privileges as British subjects. And no Roundhead or Puritan could have been more staunch in resisting every infringement of such rights and liberties than are these poor men and women of humble callings, but heroic hearts. For not only have men suffered in this way, but tender and delicate young women also have been thrown into prison on frivolous pretexts of obstruction, and while there treated as common criminals with more or less barbarity. Their rights, thus defended by themselves, have been further indorsed in the House of Lords by such men as the late Archbishop of Canterbury and Chief Justice Coleridge, the latter saying that "he took it that every Englishman had an absolute and unqualified right to go about his business and perform legal acts with the protection of the law, and he apprehended that walking through the streets in order and in procession, even if accompanied with music and the singing of hymns, was absolutely lawful, in the doing of which every subject had a right to be protected."

In some cases the authorities had endeavoured to have the Red Cross Knights put down by law, for the strange reason that they had been assaulted by the organized mob calling itself the "Skeleton Army," on the ground that their peculiar proceedings provoked such violence. This attempt to visit the sins of lawless rioters on peaceful citizens was, however, very decidedly quashed by the English justices before whom the appeal came. Mr. Justice Field, in giving judgment, put this legal point very clearly. "Was it unlawful to do a lawful act merely because others made it the pretence for raising a riot? What right have others to resort to force to prevent persons from doing what is lawful? It would come to this, that persons were to be punished for doing lawful acts merely because it led others to act unlawfully and create a riot. The authorities do not support or justify any such view of the law. He further met the suggestion that a continuance of such processions would lead to a continuance of disturbances, by expressing the "hope that when the opponents learned, as they would now learn, that they had no right whatever to interfere with these processions of the Salvation Army, they would refrain from disturbing them." "It was usual," he dryly remarked, "in this country, for people to obey the law when it was once declared and understood, and he hoped that it would be so in this case. But if it were not so, he presumed that the magistrates and the police would understand their duty, and would not fail to do it, and that they would not hesitate to deal with the disturbers and the members of the 'Skeleton Army' as they had dealt with the members of the Salvation Army in this case."

So British liberty and fair play won the day over prejudice and mob tyranny, and the Salvation Army, even in the matter of its processions and music, was taken under the protection of law. But the Army had still another enemy to encounter,—the unseen spirit of slander. Attacks on the financial honesty of its General, vile slanders against the moral character of its soldiers, especially against the young women engaged in the blessed work of "rescuing the perishing," were circulated, even in religious journals, and believed by thousands. Again and again refuted, they start every now and then into life again. One of these slanders was repeated, on hearsay, by two English bishops, and formally refuted by General Booth himself, in what he calls his Exeter Hall Address, with such a pointed denial as should have led the episcopal accusers to withdraw the charge as publicly as it was made. Possibly this would have been deemed incompatible with episcopal dignity.

In general, however, the dignitaries of the Church of England, as well as her clergy, have extended to the Red Cross Knights of this century much greater toleration and kindness than their representatives of a former one showed towards their predecessors, the Whitefields and Wesleys. This has been due partly to the growing comprehensiveness and catholicity of the church herself and the wisdom learned by past experience, and partly to the feeling that this crusade is a kind of guerilla warfare, not interfering in any way with the regiments of the line, but rather giving them its aid through an unknown and difficult country. Not a few also, both of English prelates and clergy, are animated by the apostolic spirit which led the late venerated Primate of England to say that "the one impossible, intolerable thing would be to sit still and do nothing in the presence of this great call for increased activity." His successor, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, actually came as the representative of convocation to confer with the "General," and spoke most favourably to his clergy of the headquarters and the training barracks, which he inspected. Even the *Times* in a remarkable article, in 1882, took up the cause of the crusaders, and remarked that, "A cloud of episcopal witnesses to the merits of General Booth's undertaking is a suggestive sign of the times. The Church of England has taken example by the sagacity of the Church of Rome in refusing no aid which religious fervour is willing to offer. It has taken warning from the mischiefs of its own conduct in expelling from its fellowship the followers of Wesley and Whitefield. As well from an increase of comprehensiveness as from a conviction of its need of strength and substance, it is ready to welcome help which it would formerly have vehemently repudiated. A contribution by the Archbishop of Canterbury towards the purchase of space in which ten thousand may attend the ministrations of General Booth, and formal recognitions by many other prelates of the gratitude of churchmen for the work the Army is doing, are testimonies that the church wants help, and that no false pride prevents it from accepting help."

Such a testimony from the *Times* shows at once that the "world moves," and that the crusade of our Red Cross Knights has, on the whole, been conducted in such a way, and with such results, as to win the sympathy and co-operation of those to whose natural predilections its methods would be most distasteful. The "capture" of the Eagle Tavern in London was one of the exploits of Christian daring which insured the sympathy and gratitude of all who "loved good and hated evil," and deserved a better sequel than it has more recently had. This well-known and seductive haunt of vice was for sale, and was purchased for the