

PEOPLE WE MEET.



COMMISSIONER EVA BOOTH.

"THIS makes yer feel like livin'." I overheard the words and turned amusedly to note the speaker,—a blunt featured good natured looking girl, wearing a white gauze veil and flower-bedecked hat. Her eyes were ashine, her lips parted, showing strong irregular teeth, her reddened hands rubbed restlessly together in sympathetic excitement with the stirring unconventional scene.

A flare of flags, a fantasy of costume; bands, babies and banners; singing, hand clapping, volleys of amens and fervent exclamatives; a pavilion thronged with poke bonnets and scarlet jerseys, galleries tiered to the roof with faces, and over all, the pale yellow of a late June twilight.

"I tell you this is livin'";—again the words reached me, with reiterated emphasis; but whatever more may have followed was lost in the renewed blare of trumpets, waving handkerchiefs, and "bless-the-Lord's" which greeted the appearance upon the platform of a tall slender young woman, in the conventional Army dress.

She stood among the gaily-gowned soldiers, —who had attired themselves in costumes especially unique to do honor to the occasion,—flushing, smiling a little within the depths of the big bonnet; yet holding herself with a certain pathetic gravity, until the vociferous plaudits quieted into stillness, and she was permitted to receive and answer the more formal address of welcome from Canada's Salvation Army. For the slender young woman was Miss Eva Booth, the youngest child of a remarkable family, and the new Canadian commander of a most remarkable religious organization.

Having met many members of the Booth family and remembering the strong personalities of each; moreover realizing to some extent what an unusual position this young woman will occupy in our country,—I studied her interestedly on this first evening of her arrival in Canada, with

view of discovering what possibilities lay within her.

As she stood so slenderly, in her close fitting garb, I marked her resemblance to her father.

She is like him in the large nose, the firm predominant chin, the square perceptive brow, the tall spare form: with rounded shoulders. This youngest daughter of the general's is her father feminized and spiritualized, plus a certain tender sweetness probably inherited from the saintly mother.

It is a characterful face indicative of keen perception, determination, good judgment,—yet it is also essentially womanly in the appealing brown eyes and sensitive lips. The charm of Miss Booth's personality is upon her audience before she speaks a word, whether it consists of one or a thousand; but one recognizes that it is a double charm—of leader and woman combined.

She is not eloquent;—but she has all the fervor and impassion peculiar to the daughters of this exceptional family. Her voice has the musical English softness, while words, tone, and gesture are exceeding womanly.

Very simply she stood before this army of toiling soldiers,—men and women of the underworld, as their furrowed faces and labor-worn hands showed,—and in the spirit and faith of a veritable Joan of Arc announced herself, not boastingly but in all sincerity, as their "God-appointed leader."

It was marvellous to hear it; and yet more marvellous that with the hearing came a conviction to those who listened that she spoke not only what she believed, but what is true.

"My people," she said, "my Canadian people, given into my care for a little season. I do not know you yet, but already I love you with the especial affection we have for our own. I love you; I will bear the responsibilities of caring for you, as best I may,—and you will love me and help me. Before God I accept this charge."

And thus this young gentle-voiced woman took command of eleven thousand Canadian soldiers. And this command means much more than spiritual oversight. It means control and management of the financial affairs, charge and guidance of social relationships, and the greater spiritual responsibility of one who is practically the head of this "church of the underworld."

This, also, over a body of people, who are vowed to a voluntary obedience and devotion to their leader, which is unequalled by any other religious body.

A day or two later we sat chatting together in Miss Booth's private office at the Army Headquarters. She was wearied with the exertion attendant upon her installation and suffering from a severe cold caught in crossing the ocean; but the attractive personality endured even under this disadvantage.

The same combined with executive strength, beauty of earnestness, thoughtful judgment, modest speech, and mark of high resolve;—it was all there, but with it also a brightness and certain natural joyousness that enhanced the womanly charm.

We chatted for an hour in easy confidence,—of Miss Booth's life as a child, of her work during the past four years as commander of the London soldiers. There are twenty-one thousand in that great city, and they are truly

of the underworld.

It was the prettiest point in our conversation when she turned to me and said wistfully, "They tell me that here—in Canada—I shall find no 'Ragged Jackets' among our soldiers. Is it true? It seems to me I could not live without having 'Ragged Jackets' to help."

"If 'ragged jacket,' signifies extreme destitution and vice, I'm afraid you will not find many in Canada;—at least I—of course—I am glad you will not," I answered smiling. "We are very respectable, in a general way. But you will find plenty of non-church goers among the working people." I hastened to add, as her face fell a little.

"Why" she asked.

"Oh, because patched garments, and old shoes are rendered more distinctly shabby beside crimson cushions and stained windows." I answered lightly.

We spoke of the recent secession of the American Booth's, and to my query whether these sudden orders of removal were not arbitrary but unwise, Miss Booth answered, with deep unquestioning conviction, that obedience to authority is the first vow of the organization, and indeed, that the existence and success of the army depended upon it.

"The sons and daughters of the General must be as amenable to authority as any other officers. And it is an understood thing that these charges are given only for a time. Twenty-three other officers received their orders of transference at the same time. It was impossible to make exception in any one case, for we all alike were loath to leave the charges that had been ours for years, and that we had come to love," said Miss Booth.

She told me something of her London experiences,—how she had worked her way up in the ranks, gaining training and experience—not only in rescue work but also in matters of executive control. Like the humblest officer, in the smallest outlying district, she had endured poverty, meagre fare, rough hard work,—all in the discipline of the army. "The first lesson we are taught is to endure hardness as good soldiers," she said.

I sat watching the sweet face, young, yet so characterful; I noted the slender, almost attenuated figure, then suddenly asked a last question.

"Miss Booth,—these are great responsibilities for a woman. Do you not sometimes wish that they had not been placed upon you? Do you not often long for the simple sheltered home life whose four walls hold all of a woman's care and love?"

"Sometimes—when I note the lines in my forehead—and realize how care-free and young other women of my age are, I sigh a little" she said with sweet womanliness. "But" and the brown eyes shone, "the passion of my being is in my work,—and the joy of it is so great that,—oh" she cried with sudden break and outreaching gesture, "I do hope that Canada will be good to me: for I am alone—away from father and friends."

It was not melodrama,—none of the Booths are given to that, unless it be the high-strung La Marechal. It was simply a natural and unstudied yearning of a home-sick woman.

There was a moment's silence in the little office, then she lifted her eyes. "No, not alone" she said sweetly. And presently, smiling, "as for home life, I have three dear little adopted children. They were waifs and strays, but now they are all my own. You must come and see them some day."

"She'll do." I said in underbreath, as I left her. "She will command the love of her soldiers. And Canada will be good to her, or I do not know my country."

FAITH FLINTON.