

W.A.S. and the Immortal First

11/3/33.

Captain Barron and Officers of the Boys' Brigade.

To me it is both an honour and a pleasure to address you this evening, more particularly seeing the subject is about this outstanding figure and his monumental work. This year of Jubilee when our attention is to be specially directed to this most winsome personality and the amazing success of the movement on behalf of the youth of past and present generations, I am happy to associate myself in paying a humble tribute to the great souled and high hearted W.A.S. - my Superior Officer for 6 years in the 1st Glasgow Cos. "the Immortal First" and my friend of many years standing. I confess that is a formidable task altho' a joyous one. Tendely do I lay my wreath of remembrance at his feet.

You will pardon me if in my talk the personal pronoun bulketh rather largely. In the circumstances that ^{could not} cannot be avoided. Sir W.A.S. and I spent happy years together in the 1st Glasgow. On my transference from Glasgow to S. Yorkshire, one of the gifts presented to me - a gift I shall fondly cherish to my dying day was a handsomely bound copy of the Bible, with the B.B. ^{crest and} motto on the front-cover, and an inscription on the fly leaf inside, in these words "To Lieut R. Russell on his leaving the 1st Glasgow Company Boys' Brigade, in remembrance of Six happy years of service together"

Then you will bear with me if I devote some time to setting forth as clearly as I can the back ground of the subjects of this talk.

In No. Woodside Road Glasgow there stands a Mission Hall erected by the Free College Church. The buildings

were considered to be the most complete and up to date
of any similar buildings, then belonging to the Church.
The Mission was controlled, organised, and staffed
by the Office Bearers and a large number of both
male and female Members of that Congregation.
There was no shortage of willing workers to under-
take the claims of the Mission, and no scarcity of
finance to meet all demands. It was my peculiar
pleasure to be one of the Teachers in the Sabbath
School. I could give a list of young men and women
engaged in the Mission work, and who in after
years rose to heights of Eminence in their Special
callings - The Church, the Bar - business and high
Government offices. ^{some pioneers in the outposts of the Empire} One of the young men of this
Congregation - most devoted and far seeing, was
Mr. W. A. Smith. His work was that of teacher of the
Sabbath morning Boys' Bible Class. Struggling with
the problems of how to keep an unruly set of boys
quiet and interested for an hour and also how
to retain hold of them after they had reached the
age of 14 years, when they considered themselves
too old to attend Sunday School, there evolved
from his mind, the happy idea that if these boys
could be brought under discipline and banded
together with Esprit-de-Corps, the task he had
been wrestling with would be solved and the
boys would leave habits which would endure
throughout their lives. This idea occasioned him
much searching of heart, and in his Extremity, he
time and again asked that God would guide
and direct him aright in working out the problem.
He also laid the Scheme before his Minister - the

Rev. D^r. Reith, (father of Sir John Reith of the B.B.C.) who with that Christian courtesy and noble-hearted graciousness - so characteristic of him - listened with sympathetic interest as the scheme was unfolded to him. Rising from his chair, D^r. Reith passed over to Mr. Smith and placing his arms over Mr. Smith's shoulders said "My dear Willie, yes, that is God's work and he summons you to do it. Go to it and the blessing of God ^{will rest} upon you and your Efforts. I see it to be His way and He won't desert you". These may not be the exact words used by D^r. Reith, but certainly the gist of what he said. One wonders what Mr. Smith's feelings were as he left the Manse in Dyadoch Street that night and turned his steps homewards. One wonders and can only guess. He had dreamed dreams and seen visions. Were these to take visible form? This we do know, then and there the birth of the BB took place.

The days and weeks that succeeded that birth were full of thinking and planning. Preparatory to the taking of the final step of launching on the world this new movement, a movement which was destined to capture the imagination, the love - and devotion of hosts of workers for the ingathering into the Kingdom, and the equipping as useful citizens, of countless thousands of our boys all over the Empire and beyond the seas. For did Mr. Smith not inspire the adoption of the terms of the Boys' Brigade Object, and its Motto - an Object and Motto which have never been altered. "The advancement of Christ's Kingdom

among Boys and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline Self-respect and all that tends toward a true Christian manliness" "Sure and steadfast" set round on anchor. There was ^{the basis of} a sure foundation, and on that rock he resolved to build a superstructure which ^{was to} stand the test of time and Eternity.

And so on the 4th October 1883, the first Company of the BB. was formed. With the aid of two close friends - the brothers J.R. and J.B. Hill a company of some 30 boys proceeded. One indispensable condition which Mr. Smith insisted upon in becoming a member of the Company was regular attendance at the Sabbath morning Bible Class. This class, conducted by the Officers met at 9³⁰ AM. and it is a remarkable fact that seldom was a member absent. Except on account of illness. We used to wonder how many of the boys had put in ^{an} appearance minus their morning meal. Little did I dream then that in a few years I would become one of the Officers in that company and thereby form a close friendship with Mr. Smith - a friendship which lasted as long as he lived.

It is remarkable that in the inauguration of all new movements, there has always arisen a certain amount of adverse criticism ^{amounting} ~~desirably~~ in some instances to open hostility. This new venture was not. Except from a certain amount of opposition this came chiefly from sources considered of a pacifist nature. They contended that in drilling boys, there was being inculcated

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the spirit of militarism. They passed judgment on the movement through lack of inside knowledge of its workings. I well remember the first occasion I witnessed a march out of a Company. Remarks made by certain passers by. If ~~as~~
rather made me feel angry. My whole heart went out ^{to} the self sacrificing Officers who in the renouncing of their leisure time were devoting the same to the uplift of the boys under their command. But the loving care with which Mr. Smith bestowed on the venture, with a steady adhesion to the high object involved, gradually broke down the opposition. So that by the end of the first session of the 1st Glasgow he rejoiced in the fact that the venture begun in faith and high hope was well founded and that immense possibilities loomed before him in the future of his Brigade. He heard the cry and the challenge of the boys and right-loyally did he answer it.

Hoc erat in votis: "This was the very thing I prayed for." Despite many difficulties in those early days, the movement gradually spread. In 3 years the number of companies had reached a total of 61. and as ^{each} succeeding year saw the number of companies increased, it was considered necessary to secure Brigade Head Quarters and appoint a whole time Brigade Secretary. In 1888 Mr. Smith gave up his business and became Brigade Secretary, the first Brigade Head Quarters being opened at 68 Bath Street Glasgow. From then until the curtain over his

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life was ~~re~~^{10th going down on May 1914, did he give "his undivided attention and the benefit of his unbounded zeal and far seeing judgment to the work and welfare of the Boys Brigade". It is common knowledge that in 1909 Mr Smith did not pass unnoticed, for he received the honour of Knighthood at the hands of King Edward the VII. In common with a multitude of others I wrote a note of congratulation on the "and well merited signal honour" which had come to him. He answered my letter in his usual characteristic way. He said he deeply appreciated the honour which had come to him, and thro' him to the Brigade; and added "I do not covet earthly honours. I desire above all the commendation of my master whose I am and whom I serve". How generous he was towards others who had some honour conferred. In my case when I received a commission and appointment as one of H.M. Justices of the Peace, he wrote me a congratulatory note to warn from repeating what his comment on same was. It was most generous.}

I have already said that at the close of the first session of the 1st Glasgow, there was just cause for thankfulness in that the inauguration of the movement had been an unqualified success. Year by year all through those 50 years the 1st Glasgow has maintained an excellent record and to day it is stronger in point of membership than ever it was. All its organisations - and they are numerous - are in a singularly healthy condition. It may not be

generally known that in connection with the Company there is an annual gathering of former officers and old boys. Every officer and boy passing out of the Company is requested to notify any subsequent change of address, so that yearly a message may be sent him from the Company and an invitation to attend the annual reunion. The last gathering was held on Tuesday 24th January last ^{when} I had the pleasure of being present. There would be fully 300 ^{who} sat down to "High Tea". I can conceive of nothing finer than this annual meeting in preserving that fine spirit which pervades the active members of the Company, and maintained by those - many of them now fathers and some even grandfathers - who have passed out from its ranks.

What has contributed to the Company's success?

A The Suitability of the suite of rooms in which all its activities find full scope, and this free ^{from} financial liability. The Buildings consist of a large Hall for drill and other purposes - a lesser Hall for Bible-class, Lectures, Socials &c. There is also a library. On second floor there are several rooms for small classes, reading and recreation. Ample Kitchen and storage accommodation and a janitor in residence. So much depends on ample accommodation for the successful carrying on of the work that I suspect the absence of same must be a matter of great concern to many officers.

B Its officers.

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of course, the fact that W.A.S. was Captain was always an attraction. During the first seven years he was able to enlist to his aid several young men of superior standing and influence. There were the Brothers Hill who rendered noble service in the interests of the Company from the very beginning and for a few years thereafter. Then there were the Brothers Alexander & Stephen and Fred J. Stephen, then the prospective Cyclo Ship Builders, and for some years now have been the owners of the Lethbridge Shipbuilding Yards. About 1890 Mr. Smith began to promote as officers certain of those who had served in the ranks. It was my good fortune to be associated with them and never did officers enter upon their duties ^{as} enthusiastically as did Willie Wyllie - Band Master. Jimmy Nicolson Gymnastic instructor and George Dr. Gym-
assistant to all old boys.

The Chaplain.

The Rev. George Reith, A.D. Minister of the Free College Church - father of Sir John Reith of the BBC took a deep and practical interest in the affairs of the Company. He was my minister and frequently when visiting the Manse, Dr. Reith talked about the Company and its work. With the constant demands made upon him in the oversight of so large a congregation, one wondered how he found the time to visit and address the boys as he did. But he recognised the large field of immense possibilities there lay behind the work and gave of his best.

I should also like to refer to Principal Sir George Adam Smith of Aberdeen University and the late Principal Flown, Glasgow. They were deeply interested in the work of the Brigade and gave unceasingly all the help they could give towards the advancement of the work.

towards its moral and spiritual uplift.

⑩. Professor Henry Drummond D.D.

There never was a more loyal and sincere friend of the Boys' Brigade and the 1st Glasgow in particular, than this Prince in Israel.

D.Drummond was Professor of Natural Science in Glasgow. He exercised a tremendous influence over the young people of his day, and it was a special treat when, as he occasionally did, he paid a visit to the Company. He, it was, who christened the Company with that designation which has ever since survived "The immortal first". He had the heart of a little child and could with perfect naturalness enter into games with the boys - himself the biggest boy of all. It was he ~~himself~~ who wrote several delightful little books - perfect classics - ostensibly to be issued as Christmas gifts to officers and boys of the 1st Glasgow. Such books as "The greatest thing in the world", "Boys' Second innings", "Pax Novescum" and others. Sitting beside him at table one evening, he suddenly turned and said "You are a fortunate young man to be an officer in the 1st Glasgow. That Company will become famous as the pioneers in a great work for the Church - the nation and the Kingdom of God. How prophetic a saying!" ^{I should also like to mention the names of Principal Sir George Adam Smith & Principal E M Smith} ~~of Principal Sir George Adam Smith & Principal E M Smith~~. That gracious lady was wholeheartedly interested in the Company. To her I attribute much of the success which attended her husband's endeavours. She was eminently wise and

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sympathetic - Her ready sympathy - her friendship and abounding hospitality endeared her to every one. She was never satisfied until she knew the boys by name, and most of the homes they came from. It was her custom each session to invite the boys, by squads, to her home and entertain them to tea and games. This she continued to do until her lamented death in 1898. How delightful it was to watch her making friends and gaining the confidence of the many shy boys gathered round her.

One thing I must record. No party ever ended without family worship. I was present at many occasions at such gatherings and as we knelt down in prayer - it seemed so easy to do so - one realised he had entered the very presence of the Most High.

Now what was the secret of his success.

1) His commanding military bearing.

He came of soldier stock, his father being Major David Smith of the 1st Dragoon Guards, latterly of the Lothian Volunteer Artillery. He was passionately fond of what was then termed "Volunteering". He was an officer in D Company of the 1st Lancashire Rifle Volunteers. As a member of the University Coy of the same Regiment, I well remember his well set up figure as he paraded mounted on horse-back. This regiment was considered to be the crack Volunteer regiment in Scotland. He felt that what could be done in the direction of discipline with "grown ups" in his Volunteer Coy could be done among boys.

2) His keen and penetrating look.

No one could afford to play the part of a fraud in his presence. His eyes seemed to pierce through all pretence and sham. And yet there was in those eyes a boy's benignity - a yearning after what was best - not the dross - in everyone, that almost instantly he won the heart and confidence of his visitor. On leaving his presence one realised he had been in the presence of a sage and wise counsellor and a truly ^Quan gentleman.

3) His almost Supernatural Knowledge

of the Psychology of a boy.

To use a common place saying, he could see a boy through and through. He knew the difficulties of mind and body that beset the life of a boy entering upon the adolescent period.

one writes of another.

"Quick in discernment, charitable in judgment - Sympathetic
in nature he made himself an invaluable ally to those in
need of help."

17 He knew the tremendous pull that was being exercised ^{on} of the boy's imagination and desires and of the vital need of having the same led into a healthy environment. To that end he placed himself along side the boy and unconsciously passed on to him the help, and guidance he most needed. His sympathy showed itself in a two fold way.

- a) His advice was of the most simple, gracious and stimulating nature - *
- b. He could find openings for him in business, trades, professions even. He spared not himself in securing positions for large numbers of boys - both from his own and other companies - his approach to Employers and others being easy and invariably fruitful. He was so well known and trusted by Employers and others, that seldom a boy appealed to him in vain. And the world is the richer for that to day.

4) His unswerving loyalty to Jesus Christ.

As a young man - not yet out of his teens - he came under the influence of the American Evangelists - Moody and Sankey. during their mission to this country in the Early Seventies. Like so many more during that memorable campaign, he was led to devote his spare time to the extension of his Lord's Kingdom. And who shall say he devoted one hair's breadth from that service. In the common round he had been gripped by Jesus Christ, and ever after his passion was to win the souls of the boys.

~~Quick indiscernment, charitable in judgment, sympathetic in
nature he was an invaluable friend to all who sought his aid.~~

to the service of his Christ. What nobler service could any one dedicate self to. It is the same to day but in a more acute form. The call is urgent and insistent, and at our peril, we dare not pass it by. "It were better that a mill stone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the depths of the sea" than that one of these young ones should be lost.

But Captain Smith did not wear his religion on his coat sleeve. Oh no. His was a manly, robust religion which found expression in the common round of every day life. It was never-the-less deep, abiding, radiating. One recognised it immediately one entered his presence.

④) His generosity. Had Captain Smith been more a man of the world he would have followed the business life he started upon, and in all likelihood would have become one of the merchant Princes of Glasgow. He renounced that way, in answer to the call of the youth of his day and generation. Still with his limited means, he ungrudgingly gave when opportunity presented itself. It seems almost a violation, an indecency, to refer to it, but I have known instances where financial help was given, and in a manner which did not inflict on the recipient any embarrassment. The givers right hand telling it not to the left. There is an Italian proverb "what you keep to your self you lose - what you give away you keep forever" was this Capt. Smith's motto, I wonder? His was a unique personality - he always remained in

the background'. with him there was no self advertisement.

b) His humour.

It is said, I quote the words, that the saving grace of humour is a priceless asset and a feature in the character of outstanding individuals. In the case of Captain Smith that was so. In the quiet of an evening hour he could tell stories - not only of others sometimes of himself which sent his hearers into fits of laughter. His eagle eye could see in the movements or sayings of folks young and old something humorous and at a fitting opportunity relate them much to the amusement of himself and others. To spend a fortnight with him in Camp was a time of great joy - ^{"He was then the big boy"} Embowing whole heartedly into the fun that characterised those red letter days. My evenings at his home were generally occasions of merriment and fun - with his two boys - then quite young - Stanley, the Present Brigade Secretary and Douglas the Present Captain of the 1st Glasgow, we had delightful times. One instance of his humour I must relate. I had told of it before. My family consists of four boys. On the birth of each one he sent Mrs. Russell and myself a message of congratulation. The telegraphic message he sent on the birth of the fourth son was as follows. "Heartiest congratulations. From fours" W.L.S. So like him - great hearted - generous - loveable friend.

And so I close. My superior officer - my captain.
I salute you, and in fancy I receive back its
acknowledgment accompanied by that gracious
look of recognition. Not farewell, for that
resonant form still moves in and out the
ranks of the Immortal First and throughout
the Brigade. My friend - not farewell but
for the present au revoir. adieu. In the silent
evening hours of these past days we have
been much together - spirit-speaking to
spirit - And with it all there has been
imparted ^{to me} a firmer faith, and brighter hope,
and a fresh assurance that when the shadows
of the evening close in ~~sorrow~~ and the
sound of the waves whispers in my ears,
I shall see you face to face at the breaking
of the dawn.

"Omnia vincit amor nos et cedamus amori"
Love overcomes all things and even we succumb
to love.

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On William A. Smith

and
The Immortal First
(By A. N. Russell.)