WILLIAM A. SMITH
OF THE BOYS’ BRIGADE
by
F. P. GIBBON

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CHAPTER ONE

BOYHOOD AND YOUTH

On a wild and rocky coast about twenty miles west of John o’ Groat’s stands the house of Pennyland, where on the 27th of October, 1854, William Alexander Smith was born. He was the eldest son of Major David Smith and Harriet, daughter of Alexander Fraser, merchant, of Glasgow.

The Smiths of Pennyland were of soldier stock. David Smith had served as ensign of the 7th Dragoon Guards in the Kaffir War of 1849-1850; and after marriage and return to civil life he joined the Caithness Volunteer Artillery Corps, in which he rose to the rank of Major. David’s father, William Smith of Pennyland, had a long record of service in the 78th Highlanders of which regiment he was for some years Adjutant. He took part in many campaigns, his last being in 1815 under Wellington.

Pennyland House is only half a mile from Thurso, on the road to Scrabster, whence the steamer sails daily to the Orkneys. Thurso is a town of less than 4000 inhabitants, situated in a dip in the coast where the Thurso River (Thor’s River) runs into the sea. The windows of Pennyland look out upon one of the finest prospects of the northern coast. In front lies the long stretch of the Orkney Islands, with the Old Man of Holy keeping lonely watch over the entrance to the Pentland Firth; to the right the land sweeps out into the precipitous rocks of Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of Scotland, but a few miles away across the bay; to the left a wide expanse of sea, with Iceland as the nearest land. Many a wild and stirring scene have the windows of the old house looked out upon, when some doomed vessel was driven on the rocks at the “Needle Ee”; and to-day there still stands, by the north gable, the figurehead of the brig, Henry Pochard, whose shipwrecked crew found shelter and hospitality under the roof of Pennyland. This incident was one of the lad’s earliest recollections.

W. A. Smith was one of a family of three sons and one daughter. He was educated at the Miller Institution, known as “Thurso Academy,” and neither masters nor schoolfellows predicted that he would achieve greatness. “We boys knew Willie Smith as a young fellow of great good nature and the embodiment of honour and fair play,” said his friend, W. R. O. Campbell, and Robert Campbell mentions that “the only outdoor game for Thurso boys in those days was shinty – a rough-and-ready form of hockey – played on the sands, and Smith was very keen on this. Even in those far-off days, W. A.’s military instincts were very marked, and he was a born leader of boys.
It is commonly supposed that Smith founded The Boys’ Brigade in Glasgow in the year 1888, and the 1st Glasgow proudly claims the honour of being the original Company. But Thurso people dispute this claim of place and date, stating that in 1865 Willie Smith, then eleven years old, formed a company of boys for drill and discipline! About a score of boys joined; and a veteran Sergeant of the Artillery Volunteers accepted with enthusiasm the post of Instructor, and drilled the lads to their hearts’ content. But something was lacking. What are soldiers without arms? A council of war was held, and one of the boys produced an advertisement of the very weapon that they wanted – mahogany stock, steel barrel, breech-loading, guaranteed workmanship – at the price of one shilling and a penny, with the possibility that the odd might be knocked off for an order of a dozen or more. It was a glorious prospect. A subscription list was opened at once, and the boys contributed as they were able. In a very short time a sum sufficient to purchase a dozen “rifles” was raised, and the council of war decided to despatch the order for the first consignment.

But here crabbed age intervened – as it so often does – to damp the ardent joys of youth. Robert Campbell, aged thirteen, though too old to be a member of the company, had been admitted to the secret, and, with the suspiciousness of age, advised that it would be well to see a sample before sending the whole of the accumulated shillings. Boyish impatience to see and possess would have disregarded the advice had not the leader insisted on a policy of caution. One of Smith’s traits with which B.B. officers became familiar – sometimes with amused admiration, sometimes with temporary impatience, but almost always in retrospect with keen approval – was the uncommon blend of fiery enthusiasm with the canny cautiousness that held enthusiasm in leash. Willie Smith wanted this lovely weapon as ardently as did any of his playmates. But he took the advice, and sent for a sample. It was all that the advertisement had stated; but one thing had been omitted from the alluring description, and that was the size. The weapon which they had hoped to equip the corps was little more than six inches in length!

Early in 1868 Major David Smith, who had gone to China on business in connection with the Labuan Coal Company, of which he was a director, died in Swatow, William being then thirteen years of age. Mrs. Smith decided to sell the Pennyland property and remove to Thurso, and she accepted the offer of her brother, Alexander Fraser, to take the eldest boy into his home, and later into his warehouse, in Glasgow. In May she and the four children left Thurso by steamer for Glasgow. They spent the greater part of the summer in Callander; and when, in October, the others returned to Thurso, Willie went into his uncle’s warehouse, as it was then too late in the term to enter school.

At the beginning of January, 1869, he became a pupil in a private school with the ambitious title, “The Western Educational Institution,” but more widely known as “Burns’ and Sutherland’s School,” and remained there until late in May, his schooldays ending at the age of fourteen and
a half. In this first and only term he took seven prizes! A schoolfellow, F. P. R. Ferguson (one of Smith’s chief colleagues in the early days of The Boys’ Brigade) mentions the peculiar cut and rough material of the Thurso boy’s clothes which marked him as a “foreigner,” and aroused the curiosity and derision of his schoolfellows. But young Smith soon made his straightness, frankness, and abundant common sense. Even at this stage he displayed the enthusiasm in everything in which he was interested, and the “go” to carry it through to a successful issue, that marked his later career. At games he was not distinguished above the average boy.

Another boyhood friend, the Rev. James Ferguson, recalls how he was “at once attracted by the new boy, by his manly bearing, his handsome countenance and form, his musical northern accent, and we formed a friendship which became firm and lasting. My recollection is of Will Smith’s physical strength and gentleness, of the chastity and purity of his nature, of his dauntless courage and fine courtesy, and his longing for a soldier’s life.”

In October 1869, a few days before he became fifteen, he entered his uncle’s business. Alex. Fraser & Co. were wholesale dealers in “soft goods,” shawls being one of their principal lines, and South America their chief market. The warehouse was in Princes Square of Buchanan Street, and “Uncle Alick” and “the aunts” (the three Misses Fraser) resided at 28 Hamilton Park Terrace, Hillhead. William Smith’s first Glasgow home was “back to back” with 13 Belmont Crescent, the home of his later years.

Though now a man of business, he did not consider that his education was completed – or, possibly, his uncle had something to say on this point. A note-book in which the boy made occasional entries of important events records that, “I attended a French class at Chardenal’s from about the middle of October.” Another entry, in May, 1870, states: “I got first prize at the French class. Uncle and Aunts went to Callander for the summer and I went to lodgings for the first time at Miss Ritchie’s.”

August 1st, 1870. “I left Granton with Kenneth Manson by the steamer for Thurso at 4.30. Dense fog most of the way. Found them all well at home. Had very pleasant time, and left home for Wick with Mamma by the Defiance. Spent the night at Aunt Margaret’s, and left for South by St. Magnus on Tuesday the 16th, and resumed work on Thursday.”

He spent occasional week-ends at Callander, until his uncle return to Glasgow, and during the winter the French lessons were resumed.

May 19th, 1871. “Annual migration to Callander, and I went into lodgings at Miss Ritchie’s again. Out at Callander pretty often on the Saturdays.”

Mr. Fraser was an ardent fisherman, and under his tuition the nephew soon became an adept, and he “enjoyed the sport enormously.” Many happy summers were passed on the Leny Water.
at Callander and the adjacent lochs of Vennachar and Lubnaig. His other favourite recreations were walking, climbing, skating and sailing.

*September 4th*, 1871. “Left Granton to spend my holidays at home. Went ashore at Wich and met Kate, and both went up with the steamer in the evening.”

*September 15th*. “After a very happy visit to home, I left on the 15th by the coach in the evening, arriving in Glasgow next evening.”

That winter he attended a Spanish class and “was kept pretty close at work till end of year.” In January he took part for the first time in the Soirée of the Glasgow Caithness Association (of which he became president later) and “met a great many Thurso people.”

This year he cut short the holiday at Callander in order to spend some days with his friend, F. P. R. Ferguson, at Ardnadam, on the Holy Loch, where “we had some splendid yachting, which I enjoyed very much.”

In the autumn of 1872 he joined the Glasgow Y.M.C.A. and attended the lectures, two of which were given by H. M. Stanley, the famous African explorer, and the Spanish lesions were resumed. A sentence in the note-book records that, about the day of his 18th birthday, the most important event of the year occurred – “I got to know Pearcie and the rest of the Sutherlands.” The full significance of this rather cryptic entry will be seen later.

It was when he was nineteen years of age that William Alexander Smith made up his mind on the things that matter. Fortunately his diary of that year has been preserved. The entries are made in a style familiar to his friends of later years; they are concise and “non-committal.” There is no clue to the writer’s thoughts or emotions, other than the fact that certain things are considered worthy of note. Among these are the following:

1874 February 12.
“Heard Moody and Sankey for the first time.” (This is the one entry written in ink; the rest is in pencil only).

1874 April 12.
“Joined the church.” (Two months had elapsed, for Smith agreed with Isaiah’s dictum that “He that believeth shall not make haste”). The church referred to was the Free College Church, in which his uncle was an office-bearer.

1874 April 22.
“Appointed Lance-Corporal in 1st Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers.”
1874 Sept.
“Called on Mr. Reith reproposed Young Men’s Society.” (This Society was started a few weeks later).

The entry of February 12th recalls from the past the notable scenes of the great mission of Moody and Sankey, the American evangelists. Sir George Adam Smith has described in his Life of Henry Drummond how in Glasgow the Crystal Palace, as it was the called – a building of glass – was crowded night after night with five thousand people, many being turned from the doors. At a later date Smith expressed distrust of some of the sudden conversation of the evangelistic mission type and dread of the reactions, and he always had a dislike of pledges. Yet there is little doubt that the young man was greatly moved by the message of D. L. Moody, and that this was the deciding factor in influencing him – and he was one of a goodly company – to devote his life to the service of his Saviour.

The diary entry of the 22nd April is also noteworthy for its reference to the 1st Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers, a very famous corps – now the 5/8th Battalion the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).

In those days of officers of the 1st L.R.V., without exception, were drawn from the ranks, adn this battalion was to supply many men who, entering into the work of The Boys’ Brigade with enthusiasm, helped the Founder to form its sound traditions. Colonel John A. Roxburgh, President of the Brigade from 1919 to 1933, was then captain of “A” Company; and H. Arnold Wilson, now Honorary Brigade Treasurer, made the acquaintance of the B.B. through joining Smith’s Volunteer Company.

But this is anticipating. Smith joined “C” Company of the 1st Lanark in 1873, gained his first stripe in April of the next year, became Corporal, and passed his sergeant’s examination in 1876. In the following year he was selected for a commission in “L” Company.

Whatever his hand found to do William Smith did with all his might. From the first he meant to be thoroughly efficient soldier, and, later, to make the unit that he commanded the smartest and most efficient of the battalion. He threw himself into soldiering with the ardent, but quiet, serious and restrained enthusiasm which The Boys’ Brigade came to know so well.

By the close of the year 1881 the claims of business forced him to resign his commission, but two years later he was able to rejoin. He was then posted to his original company in his former rank.

Lieutenant Smith was a disciplinarian, a good drill and stickler for correctness and smartness of uniform and accoutrements. There are always members of the “Spit and Polish” school who seem to regard superficial smartness as an end in itself. They have been brought up on the theory that the smart battalion will stand fast when the slovenly one will give way, and they
accept it without understanding. Smith knew that this theory was generally correct, but he also knew why. He understood that as slovenliness destroys self-respect, so smartness, correctness, and cleanliness not only stimulate the right sort of pride in the individual, but also discipline and esprit de corps will carry men through when individual courage and effort, without corporate trust and reliance, will fail.

This is to say that he understood men. He won their admiration and esteem, and they responded.

“The men of his company worshipped him,” said one who had served under him in the Volunteers. “Quite recently four of us old members of C Company chanced to meet, and we recalled with admiration his soldierly bearing and considerate discipline.”

“Half a century ago,” wrote a former private of L Company, “William Smith came to us as subaltern. Very quickly we of the rank and file realised that in our new officer we had got a Man! I remember him well – tall and erect, his fresh-coloured face always lit up with a pleasant smile. He was in every respect an ideal officer.”

A few years later, by appealing to the same instincts in Boyhood, he brought about a revolution in methods of dealing with boys, and provided new and unthought-of outlets for boyish energies and boyish capacities, increasing the happiness and well-being of Boyhood to an incalculable extent. There is now hardly a town in the United Kingdom, or, indeed, a country in the world, in which there is not some organisation for boys and for girls which owes its inception directly or indirectly to the genius and common sense of the young Lieutenant of Volunteers.

It was his twentieth year that the diary not, “Called on Mr. Reith reproposed Young Men’s Society,” marked his first step in the active work of the Church. He had joined the Free College Church a few months previously, the minister “under” whom he “sat” being the Rev. George Reith (father of Sir John Reith of the British Broadcasting Corporation). The next step was to become a teacher, and in due course secretary, of the Mission Sunday School in North Woodside Road, where the 1st Glasgow Company of The Boys’ Brigade still meets.

The Young Men’s Society was started as the Woodside Morning Branch, Y.M.C.A. Among the other members were two brothers, James R. Hill and John B. Hill (who afterwards became the first lieutenants of The Boys’ Brigade) and young James Moffatt, whose translation of the Old and New Testaments were to become world-famous. Moffatt subsequently became president of the Branch, and Smith remained a member of this class until the starting of his Company Bible Class, which had to be held at the same hour.
An Evening Meeting for young men was also held at the Woodside Mission, and of this Smith became president, and in due course the Old Boys of the 1st Glasgow Company joined the class.

We turn to another decision made by the young man about this time, a decision in which he was truly blessed.

The “Pearcie” of the note-book of 1872 (“I got to know Pearcie and the rest of the Sutherlands,”) was Amelia Pearson Sutherland, elder daughter of the Rev. Andrew Sutherland, Presbyterian Chaplain to the troops at Gibraltar. On the death of Mr. Sutherland the widow, with two daughters and two sons, had returned home to Glasgow, and Smith and the young Sutherlands had struck up a friendship. Smith, then barely eighteen years of age, had been immediately attracted by the elder girl, then in her sixteenth year, and in a very short time he had decided that he must win her for his wife. Somehow he contrived to learn whatever she was likely to be, and it generally happened that he was there, too. Miss Sutherland was very musical; Smith was not. She sang charmingly; he did not, but to the amazement and apprehension of his friends he joined the Church choir of which she was a member – and sang out of tune.

His schoolfellow, the Rev. James Ferguson, has written of these days, “I remember one evening when, with Andrew Sutherland, I was Willie’s guest at his uncle’s house at Callander, and we set out to walk to Loch Katrine in the evening. The golden August moon rose upon us, and we finished the twenty-mile walk in five hours. The splendour of the scenery, the glory of sunset and moonrise, the warmth of the summer air, and the cheerfulness of the talk remain a delightful memory. We shared the same bed that night and talked ourselves to sleep, discussing – of all things! – the course of Spanish politics. Spain had a curious attraction for him, and later one saw that there was more than one reason for it. There was a girl who had been brought up in Gibraltar, a lovely girl whose dark eyes seemed to speak of Spain, and who was wont to sing the Spanish folk-songs with quaint and bewitching ease. Willie Smith fell in love with her, wooed and won her. It was sheer romance, the course of which fascinated his friends, and remains as beautiful as a beautiful thing in memory.”

The young man’s devotion was too marked to escape the notice of the Sutherland family. For a time it might be tacitly ignored as a “boy and girl” fancy, both being so young. But Smith, as ever, was deliberate and consistent, and in due course it became clear that on his part it was no passing fancy, but dead earnest. Mrs. Sutherland, because of her daughter’s youth, would not consent to and engagement; but though the consummation of his hope was long delayed, Smith’s mind was made up. A characteristic familiar to all his friends was his “masterfulness.” But it was a very attractive form of masterfulness, born of strength and clear vision, persuasive and never overbearing, never inconsiderate or contemptuous, and this it was that helped make
him so great a leader of men and boys. His decision was formed; he could wait. So, instead of sitting down to mope, he applied himself with diligence to the things which he had set his hand.

For some years Smith lived with his uncle and assisted him in the business, to which, as he gained experience and business capacity, he brought ideas and suggestions not always to the tastes of the head of the firm. The younger man was convinced – though of course he put in very differently – that the seniors did not keep abreast of the times, and that he had allowed the business to get into a rut. Mr. Fraser, for his part, was content with things as they were, and had little patience with new-fangled notions. He has no intention of opening out in fresh directions, and he regarded new ideas with suspicion and dislike.

Moreover, Mr. Fraser objected strongly on principle to his nephew’s connection with the Volunteers, and made no attempt to conceal his feelings. Their difference became so acute that Smith had to choose between resigning from the Volunteers or leaving his uncle’s home and business. He chose the latter, and in partnership with his brother Donald, who had followed him to Glasgow, and had also been working for Mr. Fraser, he founded the firm Smith, Smith & Co. in West Nile Street. A little later his friend James G. Findlay became a partner, and the name was changed to Smith, Findlay and Co. Smith went to live in Kersland Terrace, where he made a home for his mother, who remained with him until his marriage, when she returned to Thurso.

The decision to part from his uncle, whom he respected, and to whom he was every grateful for much kindness, was not made lightly. It was, in truth, a great grief to him, though he allowed no bitterness to enter into his thoughts, nor in his speech did he blame his uncle for the estrangement.

As Mr. Fraser advanced in years, Smith seized every opportunity to show him kindness and attention, and was assiduous in making such opportunities. To feel compelled to act in opposition to his uncle’s convictions had been painful, but he made all possible allowance for the rigidity of a man of more than middle-age. It is characteristic of his strength and delicacy of mind that he never allowed his sons to imagine that their great-uncle had ever acted otherwise than with the greatest kindness and consideration towards him, and it was not until after their father’s death that they learned of the estrangement.
CHAPTER TWO

THE INSPIRATION

William Alexander Smith had been brought up in a Christian atmosphere in his own home and in his uncle’s house. In Thurso he had attended the Parish Church, and in Glasgow he had accompanied his uncle to the Free College Church, and for some time he had been a worker in the Sunday School.

His attitude towards religion had been quickened by the words and example inspired by God could, and often did, bring one suddenly and strikingly to a realisation of the need to be born again, to bring Christ into one’s life, and to give that life to His service. But he also believed that the ordinary man or woman receiving such a message needs to meditate and ponder, to examine oneself honestly, to pray for guidance, help and strength, remembering and guarding against the undoubted fact that hasty, emotional impulses are generally followed by equally swift reactions.

He realised, too, how easy it is to work upon the facile emotions and the glorious idealism of boyhood, with disastrous effect upon after-life; and he consistently discouraged the many young teachers who in later years became under influence from employing too emotional methods. One of his B.B. Lieutenants gives and illustration: “Smith hated sensationalism in religion. During the mission of Chapman and Alexander in Glasgow (about 1912) they invited the Battalion to a special meeting. He had been enormously impressed by Dr. Chapman’s power as preacher and evangelist, and they met frequently. He agreed on one condition – that there should be no invitation to the boys to profess conversion publicly, nor any ‘Inquiry Meeting’ afterwards.

“Carried away by the emotionalism of the mission, I urged on Sir William the desirability of getting the boys to make a definite decision Christwards. I’ll never forget his reply. ‘L——,’ he said. ‘By using the necessary means I could get every boy in the company to profess conversion, and it wouldn’t be worth the breath expended.’ He always saw far into the future, and dreaded the inevitable reaction which follows such emotionalism.”

So it may be said confidently that before the day in which he first listened to Mr. Moody’s preaching, he had already heard the call of his Master, had felt the desire to follow in His footsteps, and was hesitating as to the first definite step, with all the attractions and pleasures open to youth pulling this other way, and urging him to delay the start. Moody’s message was the call to do it now, the bringing home to him the realisation that delay was disloyal, cowardly, and self-indulgent.
Therefore he had devoted himself deliberately, and with much thought and prayer, to the work of teaching the boys of the Woodside Mission, and he did so with the rare blending of enthusiasm and thoroughness that characterised everything he undertook, and also with a love of boys and a sympathy with boy-nature which – thanks to him – is much more common now than it was then. But he was not satisfied with the results. As is usual in Sunday Schools, and perhaps in Mission schools especially, much of the time that should have been given to teaching was wasted in efforts to secure order and attention. The boys attended because they were sent there by parents, and their lack of interest was obvious. The man or woman of exceptional personality will always interest and control boys or girls. Unfortunately few of us posses this great gift. Smith had it, but most of the boys’ classes in the school declined to be controlled, and had not even a nodding acquaintance with discipline.

“Can’t you make some use of your Volunteer methods in the Sunday School?” said his partner, Findlay, one day when Smith was deploring the unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The question may have been only half serious, but it gave an idea – the germ from which sprang The Boys’ Brigade. Smith saw that there might be more in it that his partner imagined.

Why should it be so easy for a man to control a hundred other men on a Saturday afternoon, and so difficult to control a mere handful of boys on the Sunday? He thought it out, and the answer that came to him was, “Discipline and esprit de corps.”

He realised that in order to gain the esprit de corps which, when rightly guided and controlled, brings out, develops and stimulates unselfishness and the instinct of self-sacrifice that is so strong in youth, the individuals must be banded together in some association in which they have common interest with some distinctive title or badge or uniform to mark it as their own. The boys of a Sunday School do not usually develop the team spirit, because the common interest is insufficient. The school meets for an hour each week; the attendance is irregular in the case of the older scholars; and they are listeners only, not active participants. They engage in no form of work or play in which teamwork is called into action.

Thus came into being the Great Idea that was destined to revolutionise the methods of what is now called “Work among Boys.” Or, it might be more correct to say, “destined to initiate” work among boys on a grand scale, and to open the eyes of the nation to the importance of boyhood, the charm of boyhood, the amazing possibilities of boyhood, and to effect a revolution in Sunday School methods. Where is the Sunday School now which considers that it is enough to give a boy and hour’s religious teaching weekly and that is not necessary to pay any regard to his everyday interests?

The present generation may treat as an exaggeration the statement that in the last decades of the nineteenth century the prevailing idea about boys was that they were a nuisance to be
suppressed, and that one good method of dealing with them was to get the police to “run them in.” William Smith held the unorthodox view that it was a good thing for boys to be alive, to be brimming over with high spirits and love of fun. He understood that boys damaged things and annoyed people because the tremendous energy of boyhood had insufficient outlets, and was not properly directed. He said to himself, “If I can help control these activities and direct them into right channels the boys will enjoy themselves far more than when running wild; and instead of becoming mere hooligans and loafers\(^1\) they will gain manliness; and, more than that, they may be led to the service of their Master. He saw in boyish high spirits a great asset that could be turned to good account and be made far more helpful to Sunday School and Church than the prize-rewarded Good Conduct that comes from mere dullness and lack of spirit initiative. He saw in boyhood a means to advance the Kingdom of Christ, and he realised that the first step was to provide real interest. High spirits, energy and the love of fun must be directed. “Larking” is all right in its place – *dulce est desipere in loco*, said Horace, and in *Ecclesiastes* we are told that there is a time to laugh and a time to dance – but life means something more than one grand lark. Duties and responsibilities must provide a good proportion of the interest, play can be enjoyed far more in the intervals between duties than when it is continuous.

\(^1\) “He saw,” says one of the original members of the Brigade, “the multitude of boys standing aimlessly at street corners, with nothing else to do and nowhere to go in those days.”

How was all this to be done? Why, to start with, by the “let’s pretend” methods of childhood. Literal-minded people scoffed then, and scoff now. They do not see the world of difference between “pretending” and “pretence” – how wonderful the possibilities of the former, how ignoble the latter.

Some eight years later the results of the experiment was referred to by Professor Henry Drummond. “The Greeks and Romans knew a little about the Boy, but he was lost; then he was found about the Reformation time, and lost again for hundreds of years, when Dr. Arnold of Rugby rediscovered him, and made it plain to the English-speaking world that a man could spend his life to no better purpose than in trying to educate and elevate boys. Dr. Arnold discovered well-dressed boys; William Smith through The Boys’ Brigade, discovered the working-boy.”

He laid before the Mission authorities his scheme for banding together the boys of the school above the age of twelve into a “Brigade,” in which they would be taught elementary drill, physical exercises, obedience to the word of command, punctuality, and cleanliness. It would be something they could regard as distinctively their own, to which they would become attached, and of which they would be so proud that they would be ashamed to do anything that might bring discredit upon it. Thus would be engendered that esprit de corps which public-
school boys acquire as a matter of course, but which was almost entirely lacking in elementary schoolboys. Organised games would follow, and he believed that the outcome would be discipline and order in the Sunday School, the retention of the older boys (who in the ordinary course would cease to attend as soon as they became wage-earners), and increased interest in school and church.

Permission was reluctantly given for the experiment to be tried. Smith’s friends and colleagues dealt out chaff and discouragement; but he could always stand chaff and return with interest, and discouragement was s stimulant to a man who was at his best when confronted by obstacles. At this period of life is path seems, indeed, to have been strewn with obstacles. His uncle’s prejudices had forced him to leave the business, to the control of which he would have succeeded; and his brother Donald’s business incapacity had hampered him in the new venture. But he had overcome these difficulties, and his steadfastness and persistence were gradually removing other barriers, and marriage with Miss Sutherland was now within sight. He certainly was not a man to be deterred from his purpose because the path was not smooth and easy.

While the idea of the Brigade was taking shape in his mind he had confided in a fellow-member of the 1st Lanark – James R. Hill – who was also a teaching in the Sunday School. He at once grasped the possibilities, and gladly agreed to help. It would be well to have a third officer, so John B. Hill – also a teacher at the Mission and a member of the Volunteer company – was brought in. Never had leader more loyal colleagues.

The brothers Hill gave invaluable help while they remained in Glasgow, but n 1886 both abandoned their business careers to study for Holy Orders. Canon John B. Hill, until recently Vicar of Horbury, near Wakefield, took part in the Brigade’s Jubilee in 1933. James R. Hill died in 1904, being then Vicar of Lightcliffe, Yorkshire. While at Oxford he formed the 1st Oxford B.B. Company in connection with St. Peter-le-Bailey Church, and later the 1st Brighouse. Thus the interdenominational character of The Boys’ Brigade actually started with its first company, which originated in a Mission of the Free Church, with a captain brought up in the Church of Scotland, and two lieutenants who became incumbents of the Church of England.

Canon John B. Hill tells how the three young men met in the summer of 1883 to discuss organisation, rules, and other details:

“My brother and I had rooms in Woodside Quadrant, and Smith often came in to talk things over. His signal was to whistle Within a Mile of Edinboro’ Toon [their regimental march]. I can hear him now bounding up the stairs, two steps at a time. Those were happy evenings, and it was on one of these occasions that he said, ‘This is going to be a great thing; let us put it into God’s hands.’ We knelt down and committed the future of the scheme to God, asking His blessing on it.”

So The Boys’ Brigade had its baptism in prayer.
Though there was even then a glimpse of something far greater than a “Brigade” confined to the Woodside Mission, none of the three dreamt of an organisation embracing boys of every continent; nor of its being the pioneer and model of other movements for boys and girls, for they were humble-minded men.

Smith came to those meetings – as he came to every meeting small or great in later life – with every detail thought out and set in order. They decided upon the name – The Boys’ Brigade, the Crest, and anchor with the words *Sure and Stedfast*, the Motto, *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy Youth*, and, above all, the Object – the inspired phrase so familiar now to hundreds of thousands of boys and men in all quarters of the world:

“The Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among Boys, and the promotion of habits of Reverence, Discipline, Self-Respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness.”¹

¹ The word “Obedience” in the definition of the Object first appeared on the title page of “The Boys’ Brigade Gazette” for October, 1893, the addition having been made at the Annual Meeting in Glasgow the previous month.

The *Constitution* then framed lays down that “all Boys between the ages of twelve and seventeen shall be eligible for membership of the Brigade, and in applying for their membership cards they shall fill up a form of application, agreeing to comply with the Rules of the Brigade, and expressing a desire to be true to Christ in their lives, and to help other Boys to be so. Strict discipline shall be enforced, and all members must submit to the authority of the Officers and Non-commissioned Officers placed over them.” The last sentence contained the one and only “Rule” of the original “Brigade.”

They discussed methods, organisation, finance, uniform, badges and other details. The question of military titles afforded scope for chaff, as they realised that there was no limit to the degree of rank to which they might appoint themselves on the spot. Gifted with a sense of humour, they agreed that, however the Brigade might develop, the only ranks should be Captain and Lieutenant.

In the first session the boys had no distinctive equipment, the belt, haversack and “pill-box” cap being introduced in the second session. The officers, however, sported a small red rosette pinned to the lapel of the jacket, and this gained for them the derisive epithet, “the butterfleemen.”

It is interesting to look back upon these days of the eighties, and, in many parts of the country, of the early nineties, when the sight or sound of a company of boys parading with (or without) a bugle band would bring crowds from the side-streets at a run; when the boys would have to endure jeers and taunts, and even mud and other missiles, when their uniform caps would be
knocked off and kicked about, simply because it was an innovation – and innovations offends the unco-guid and the hooligan alike.

One can only faintly imagine the consternation and amazement which would have been aroused then by the now familiar sight of a parade of girls in uniform!
CHAPTER THREE

THE BOYS’ BRIGADE LAUNCHED

The Boys’ Brigade was launched in the Free College Church Mission, North Woodside Road, Glasgow, on the 4th October, 1883, with a crew of three officers and twenty-eight boys, Smith being captain and the brothers Hill lieutenants.

Of course some of the boys joined for the fun of a new experience, and to give play to the barbarian instinct to guy whatever is new. But they were up against a man who understood their little way thoroughly and probably derived more amusement from their antics than they did themselves. Instead of displaying the expected annoyance, he was quite friendly, though invariably firm. It was hopeless to attempt to score off him. This was embarrassing. Some departed, but others who had come to scoff were soon numbered among the keenest members.

As is well known to experienced workers among boys, the normal boy always tests the person over him, and plays every variety of trick to get the better of him and reduce him to impotence. If he succeeds, he has no further use for the man; if he fails and is made to realise that the man is master, he is attracted by the dominant personality, and is ready to follow with dog-like fidelity. Boys have a way of producing a state of chaos, but, having achieved it, they lose all interest, for slackness is really abhorrent to them. They want to throw all their exuberant vitality into whatever they do; but as it is sheer waste of energy to go on doing this where it meets with only flabby resistance, the excitement soon palls, and they go elsewhere. They infinitely prefer strictness to slackness, if the strictness is blended with justice and an understanding of and sympathy with boy nature. As the officers possessed these qualities, and also showed an interest in their work, their play, and their homes, most of the boys stuck to the Brigade.

Fifty-nine names were taken in the first three weeks. Strict discipline was introduced at the start. No boy might fall-in if a single minute late, and no one was allowed to miss two consecutive drills without a satisfactory reason. This strictness was a staggering novelty to boys accustomed to think that “eight o’clock prompt” meant any time between eight and eight-thirty, and it soon had the effect of weeding out the slackers. But it greatly enhanced the importance of the Brigade for the others. When the time came in November for formal enrolment, thirty-five boys filled in the forms of application accepting the conditions of membership, and received membership cards.

The Boys’ Brigade was no in being.
In December an examination for promotion was held. First a practical examination in drill open
to all boys over fourteen, and then a written examination for the twelve boys who were highest
in the practical. Marks were added by the officers according to their estimate of the candidate’s
conduct, character and general suitability to wield authority and bear responsibility; and the
following had the honour of becoming the first Non-commissioned Officers of The Boys’ Brigade:
Sergeants Wm. H. Wylie and George Mill;
Corporals John R. Jarvie and John Tennant;
Lance-Corporals Robt. Paterson and Alex Dowie.

The Brigade was then divided into six squads, each under the charge of one of the N.C.O.’s.

The First Inspection was held in the Mission Hall on the 24th March, 1884, the Inspecting Officer
being captain H. A. Ker, 1st L.R.V. Though arms, uniform and a band were at this stage but a
vision of future possibilities, the parade made a very good impression on the Inspecting officer
and on the large gathering that had been attracted by the novelty.¹

¹ MUSTER ROLL AT THE FIRST INSPECTION.

Captain Wm. A. Smith. Private George Hamilton
Private Hugh Baird. Private Wm. Tunna.
Private Ernest W. Denney. Private James T. Walker
Private Alex. Fraser. Private Samuel Watson.
Private George Fulton. Private James Wright.
Private Carl Gillie.

Three days after the inspection the first “Annual Soirée” was held, the boys paying sixpence
each. All who were present at the inspection took part in this.

The Boys’ Brigade was then barely six months old, and already there were some who foresaw
that it would soon be a brigade indeed, and not a single unit. It had effected such an
improvement in the school that the opposition to it was melting away, and other Sunday School
had begun to take notice. But who could have foreseen that twenty years later more than
12,000 boys of the B.B. and its offspring – a select few only of the number who longed to be
present – would march past the then Prince of Wales on the Horse Guard Parade, commanded
by William Smith, and headed by the original company?
It is remarkable that after fifty years of growth and experience the essential methods of The Boys’ Brigade remain practically unchanged. This is not through lack of experiment. Companies have strayed from the track, and for a few months, or even a few years, have flourished as a green bay tree; and then one “went by, and lo, they were gone.” Or, perhaps, they may have seen in time the error of their ways and, chastened and wiser, have acknowledged that Smith knew more than they about boys. But though fundamental methods have remained unchanged, there has been continuous development, with full scope for individuality without leaving the traditional lines. There could be no greater tribute than this to the wisdom of the Founder, and to his understanding of Boy nature.

It was in December, 1884, that the Brigade Sunday morning Bible Class was started; and in the course of this session the opportunities for recreation were greatly increased. The Brigade had now proved to be so helpful to the Sunday School that the authorities consented to place at its disposal two room – a small one for bagatelle and a larger one for draughts and other games and reading. These were open every week-night, and Hugh Baird, who joined on the opening night, tells how Mr. Smith took him one day to a sports-outfitter’s shop to choose those games which he, as a representative boy, considered the most attractive and suitable.

To give an additional interest to drill and physical exercises, and to develop smartness and a good carriage and bearing, dummy “rifles” were introduced. At first these were mere wooden stocks, fashioned by Mr. Small, a joiner, whose son was a private in the Brigade, and they were presented to the Company by friends in the congregation. In due course the metal parts were added; but never at any time has a weapon capable of being fired, or use as an actual “arm,” been sanctioned in The Boys’ Brigade. Smith always advised officers of new companies not to get rifles in their first session. They were not essential, and the company might find that it could do without them. Another innovation was the starting of a flute band.

It was in the course of his second session that the familiar B.B. “uniform” came into being. This uniform, or more correctly these accoutrements (worn over a boy’s ordinary clothes), consisted of a brown leather waist-belt with the B.B. crest embossed on the buckle, a white haversack slung over the right shoulder, and a small, round, dark-blue cap (such as was commonly worn by schoolboys), encircled by two narrow rings of white braid, and worn with a military tilt. The non-commissioned officers wore a chevron on the left sleeve; and a little later the sergeant’s prestige was enhanced by the substitution of a cap with a straight peak, and the addition of a cross-belt worn over the left shoulder.

This uniform was distinctive, yet simple and inexpensive (costing less than two shillings), and a line of boys thus attired presented a smart appearance.
There was at first no uniform for officers, who wore their ordinary attire. But bowler hats were obviously incongruous for men in command of boys in uniform, and a year or two later the present-day officer’s uniform was adopted. This consisted of a dark-blue civilian suit, a glengarry cap with badge, tan gloves, and a cane, an attire which, while remaining civilian, gave the requisite uniform effect on parade.

Meanwhile, on the 5th March, 1884, William Alexander Smith and Amelia Pearson Sutherland had been married in the home of the bride, 18 Ann Street, Hillhead. After a short honeymoon at Callander they made their home at No. 4 Ann Street, and, in the words of school chum, the Rev. James Ferguson, “In that home romantic love held sway from first to last.”

Mrs. Smith shared her husband’s love for boys and his enthusiasm for the Brigade, and entered into all details of his work with zest and understanding. No sooner were they home than she applied herself to the sewing of red rosettes for every boy, and stripes of yellow braid for the non-commissioned officers, to be worn at the first inspection, which took place within a few days of the return from the honeymoon.

On Saturday evenings At Homes¹ for the boys were held at No. 4 (and, later, at 12 Hillborough Terrace), every squad being invited in turn. These squad teas were given in the drawing-room, and the silver and best napery were brought out as for a dinner-party. The cakes, always made by the hostess, included a large one with the squad number embossed in cherries. After tea the boys were entertained, and encouraged to entertain themselves. There are Old Boys to-day who speak of the delights of these evenings “at the Captain’s,” and how they were looked forward to with eager anticipation, and looked back upon them as among the happiest days of their lives. They think of the lady with beautiful brown eyes who sang Spanish and Scottish songs to them in her fine contralto voice; how she showed interest in each boy individually and took pains to make him feel at home; and how, at the close of the evening, the N.C.O. in charge would express the thanks of the squad, and the Captain would reply. “The Squad Tea was a delightful feature of those early days,” said Canon Hill. “They were such happy evenings, and the bond they made was wonderful.”

¹ When, in 1905, Smith first looked through the house in Belmont Crescent, which became the home of his later years, his remark on entering the large drawing-room was: “Just the room for a Sergeants’ Social!”

These “at homes” were really an innovation in social work. “Slumming” enjoyed a certain vogue at this period, but that was quite another story. For a large proportion of those who visited mean streets and entered unclean dwellings for the first time, slumming provided a new excitement, and it gave a delicious, if transient, thrill to feel that they were engaged in good works and at the same time following the fashion – a novel combination. They visited the homes of the poor, but the idea of encouraging a return visit never entered their heads. The example then set by Mr. and Mrs. Smith has been followed by B.B. officers, and by men of
kindred organizations; and the association of the wives, mothers and sisters of officers with the
boys in their meals, recreations and entertainments, has had a wonderfully refining influence
upon scores of thousands of boys. Old boys of the Company tell how these visits to their
Captain’s home gave them a new outlook upon life, and how their own mothers commented
upon the improvement in their manners and in their attitude towards their home after they
had spent a few evenings at the Captain’s.

No boy, however uncouth, could fail to be touched by the beautiful home life of the Captain
and of his wife, by her lovely voice and very dainty ways, by his strength and gentleness, and
the atmosphere of love and complete trust. Mrs. Smith was absolutely unselfish, and she threw
herself heart and soul into her husband’s plans and hopes, and helped and encouraged him in
all difficulties and perplexities. It made her happy to welcome his boys to her home, to know
them intimately, to be interested in what interested them, and to gain their confidence and
friendship. The success of The Boys’ Brigade is largely due to her, and we still have a slight
memento of her practical help in details in the two rings of white braid on the B.B. cap, for it
was Mrs. Smith who decided that this addition was required. Smith fully realised the value of
her practical assistance, and he often said that the Brigade “owed everything” to his wife.

One of the boys of 1883 tells how the Captain taught them to doff their caps to women. The
practice was unknown to the boys, and at first it was considered a piece of effeminate affection
quite unworthy of manly lads, and altogether ridiculous. But the Captain was persistent, and
before long the habit was firmly established, and was considered good form.

Smith’s success as a pioneer was largely due to his instinctive grasp of the fact that boys are
keen to do the right thing, once they see it done by one whom they believe in. His boys soon
began to take their cue from him. They could not help noticing that though the Captain could
be as one of themselves in enjoying fun, yet he was always punctilious in all the little
observances of courtesy; and though it went against the grain at first they imitated him. The
officers made a practice of visiting homes of the boys and, by so doing, gained the confidence
of the parents and enlisted their interest in the Company, and, indeed, in the careers and
characters of their own sons.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIMENT SUCCEEDS

It was towards the close of 1884 that William Smith began to see that the vision of a great organisation for boys springing up from his grain of mustard seed was no empty dream. The vision was faint at first, and he was no dreamer, no builder of castles in the air, but an intensely practical man. His immediate duty was to lay the foundations securely rather than plan the upper stories, and he placed far greater stress on quality than on quantity. A good company always meant far more than a big one, and a score of efficient companies was infinitely better than a hundred “fairly efficient.” He believed in all-round efficiency in “taking up everything that should enter into healthy boy-life,” so long as “everything” could be done thoroughly, but his first test of a company was the place in which it put the Object of The Boys’ Brigade.

The second unit of the movement he had founded was started about twelve months after the first. Mr. J. B. Couper relates how it came about. “I was a young recruit in C Company, and as I had won the Recruit’s Prize for Shooting, I was invited to call at Mr. Smith’s office and choose a prize. When this had been done he began to talk to me on other topics, and asked which church I attended. I told him, and he asked if I took part in any church work. I replied that I helped with the Foundry Boys’ Mission in Anderston district. He then explained his experiment at North Woodside, and I was greatly taken with the idea.

“I talked it over with my elder brother, who was also a member of C Company, and we decided that t was well worth trying. But the minister and elder whom we approached were horrified. ‘Can’t you spend your time in teaching the boys something better than the art of war?’ was their attitude. However, we persevered and got others on our side, and before long succeeded in forming the second brigade. We had a trying time. Our boys were a rough lot, and at first were out for larks and nothing else. But we got W.A.S. to pay us a visit, and he made just the right appeal to the boys. After that the improvement was noticeable, and it was maintained.”

The third and fourth units were started shortly after the second. Colonel William Nicholl, who became captain of the 4th (and first secretary of the Glasgow Battalion, and later of the Liverpool Battalion) had told how his company came into being. “I did not know Smith personally, but he was a friend of one of my greatest friend, F. P. R. Ferguson, a fellow-teacher with me in Kelvinside Free Church Sunday School. When I heard of the Brigade formed at North Woodside I suggested that we ought to try something of the sort. So Ferguson introduced me to Smith, who invited us with others to his house. I soon felt that he was a congenial spirit, and a young man of great strength of character and strong personality. It was a meeting of enthusiasts, and much that was then considered by some of us as almost wild talk regard to expansion was indulged in, but all of it has more than come true.”

Another member of the 1st L.R.V., James C. Smith, was asked by an elder of his church to look into this new thing. He called on Smith, who “showed the most kindly interest and encouragement. As we shook hands on parting, he said: ‘Let the Brigade be your sweetheart, and you’ll find great pleasure in the courtship.’ This I found very true when we formed the 11th
Glasgow, and I never visited Smith without receiving new heart, fresh encouragement, and renew inspiration."

Men attracted to the Brigade tell with gratitude of Smith’s great gift of encouragement, and how he could persuade those who were disheartened to carry on, and those who feared that they were not strong enough to overcome some apparently insurmountable difficulty to realise that they could do so if they would make the effort wholeheartedly. No less successful was he with the different men who would plead that they were not “cut out for this” or that it was “not in their line.” They left with the feeling that they were peculiarly fitted for such tasks, and they carried them through, for this type of man often makes the best “sticker.”

Other comrades of those early days, speaking of his personal attractiveness, his good looks and erect figure (which he retained to the end) agree that his feature and penetrating eyes gave him a rather stern expression, which, however, did not indicate a stern nature. For boys took to him at once; and those who were in trouble, whether young or old, quickly found how gentle and sympathetic he could be. He was known to be generous, but the extent of his giving was not suspected even by his family until after his death. When appealing for funds for the Brigade he always took the line that if one has the money it is a privilege to give, and he applied this principle to himself very faithfully.

Boys and their parents went to him for guidance on all sorts of matters – as did many Brigade officers – and never found him too busy to listen and to give good counsel and practical help. It meant still longer hours of work for him, but he had a great capacity for work.

Though a very humble man, he had an air of natural dignity, and he was always remarkably neat and precise in person, attire, and manners. He had, too, an unusual aptitude for grasping essentials, and a most orderly mind – one could not imagine him in a “now, what shall I do next?” frame of mind. He was, moreover, a man with a keen appreciation of humour, and he loved to tell and hear a good story.

At the beginning of the year 1885 there were five companies, or “brigades,” in process of formation, and the Founder saw that the time had come to organise a national movement. He called a meeting of prospective officers at No. 2 Ann St., on the 26th January, and Messrs. J. R. Hill, J. B. Hill, J. S. Couper, J. B. Couper, F. P. R. Ferguson, E. W. Hamlen, and W. Nicholl accepted the invitation.

After the meeting had been opened with prayer, Smith gave a short sketch of the origin of the movement, its aims, and the methods used to inculcate habits that would form a sound foundation on which to build useful Christian lives.

“By associating Christianity,” he said, “with all that is most noble and manly in a boy’s sight, they would be going a long way to disabuse his mind of the far too prevalent idea that there is something essentially feminine about it, and that, while it is all right for girls, it is something alien to the nature of high-spirited boys. The result had more than justified anticipations. The boys had entered into it heartily, and this winter they were carrying on the work with great increased success. The idea had met with approval from gentlemen connected with other
Sunday Schools who had visited their company, and other companies were now being formed. It was for the purpose of organising the movement and putting it into proper shape that the meeting had been called.”

Mr. Hamlen then moved and Mr. Ferguson seconded “That this meeting constitute itself into the Council of The Boys’ Brigade, and proceed to draw up a Constitution.” After considerable discussion the following was adopted unanimously:

**CONSTITUTION**

1. This Organisation shall be called THE BOYS’ BRIGADE.
2. The object of the Brigade shall be the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among Boys, and the promotion of habits of Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness.
3. All Boys between the ages of 12 and 17 will be eligible for members of the Brigade, and in applying for their Membership Cards they shall fill up a form of application, agreeing to comply with the Rules of the Brigade, and expressing a desire to be true to Christ in their lives, and to help other Boys to be so.
4. The Brigade shall be composed of Companies which shall be designated by the town to which they belong, and numbered according to the date of their formation.
5. The Brigade shall be under the management of a Council composed of all the Officers, the Senior Officer of the Brigade to be Convenor. One-fourth of the Officers on the Roll shall form a quorum.
6. The Brigade shall be officered by Gentlemen whose appointment shall be approved by the Council in the proportion of One Officer to about twenty boys. Each Company shall be commanded by a Captain, whose Junior Officers shall be Lieutenants.
7. The Captain of each Company shall appoint Non-commissioned Officers by promotion from the ranks, in the proportion of One Sergeant, One Corporal, and One Lance-Corporal to about every twenty Boys.
8. Strict discipline shall be enforced, and all members must submit to the authority of the Officers and Non-commissioned Officers placed over them.
9. This Constitution shall not be altered except by a majority consisting of two-thirds of the number present at a duly called meeting of Council, and notice of any proposed alteration must be sent to each member of Council at least one week previously.

It was unanimously resolved to adopt the emblem and motto of the original company – an anchor with the words *Sure and Stedfast* – and also its text, *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*.

The following companies were then put on the strength of the Brigade: “The 1st Glasgow Company, connected with the North Woodside Mission, and the 2nd Glasgow Company, connected with Berkeley Street U.P. Church Mission (now Blythswood Church).
At the next meeting of the newly-formed Council, on the 30th March, 1885, five new companies were enrolled, the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Glasgow and the 1st Edinburgh. Among the new officers were men who became pillars of the B.B. – Nicholl and Ferguson, captain and lieutenant of the 4th, J. Carfrae Alston, captain, 5th, John Lammie, captain, and Alex. Orr, lieutenant of the 6th. Smith was delighted to enrol a company in Edinburgh and to welcome its captain, A. S. Paterson, to their deliberations. It meant that the Brigade was no longer a local movement.

At a Council meeting in September, Smith announced that inquiries had been received from more than twenty towns in England and Scotland. This led to a discussion on the best means of adapting the Constitution to the wider scope the movement was now assuming, and Smith, Alston, and Ferguson were appointed to re-draft it. Three weeks later this committee submitted the Constitution, which experience has proved to be so wise, so adequate, and so complete, that it remains to-day practically as adopted then.

What may be termed the First Annual Meeting of the Brigade Council was held on the 12th October, 1885, when Mr. Alston was elected President, Mr. Lammie, Treasurer, and Mr. Smith, Secretary.

It was typical of the man that he chose the humbler office which gave the most scope. He was one of those all too rare men whose innate sense of strength demands responsibility, who press forward to grasp eagerly at the chance of overcoming difficulties from which lesser men shrink. He never coveted the position that gave prominence in the eyes of men, but always that which brought most opportunity for useful work. He preferred to keep in the background and to direct unobtrusively from that position, ready to come to the front when a lead was needed.

So it was he who prevailed upon Mr. Alston to accept the Presidency. It was now evident that the Brigade was going to be a big thing, and that this post would be a very honourable one. A lesser man would have accepted the headship as his right, but William Smith was remarkably free from pettiness and self-seeking. Carfrae Alston was an influential citizen, and a major in the 1st L.R.V., and his entry into the movement would do much to secure for its a great measure of public support.

Of all Smith’s claim to greatness – how he would have poked fun at anyone who should have made such claim on his behalf! – there was none so marked as his skill in selecting the right man for a job, in fitting the round pegs and the square pegs into the right holes. Though he was masterful, his lifelong friends agree that persuasiveness was his most pronounced characteristic. In asking a man to undertake some particular duty, he always gave him the impression that he was the one man in the world who could do it well. “He was a great encourager,” said one of those who helped him to share the destinies of the Brigade. “If any Officer brought out a new and workable idea, he promptly received a little chit of congratulation from W. A.”

“He had the biggest heart of any man I ever met,” agreed another. “In his busiest times he was never too busy to help young officers with encouragement and appreciation.”

The choice of Brigade President was a striking example of his judgement. For twenty-four years Carfrae Alston made an ideal President, loved and honoured by all officers. Alston’s wisdom
and tact, his charming courtesy to young and old, the interest he took in every detail and in every officer with whom he came into contact, did much to make the Brigade what it is to-day, and to create what is known as “the Brigade spirit.” With the sole exception of the Founder himself, there is none to whom The Boys’ Brigade owes more. Meanwhile the 1st Glasgow Company increased in strength and developed steadily. Before long the company programme included gymnastics, ambulance, swimming, club-room, cricket, and a summer camp, and a brass band superseded the flute band. Smith took great pains to train the boys to express themselves in writing, encouraging them to write essays on a variety of subjects. A feature of the Bible Class was the reading of essays on the subject of the lesson, a custom which is still kept up.

The first camp was held at Auchenlochan, Tighnabruaich, on the Kyles of Bute, from Friday morning, 16th July, 1886, until the following Friday.

This was a truly notable event, for it was the inauguration of what is now a general practice throughout the world. Camping for boys was then practically unknown. Dr. Grenfell, of Labrador, started a small camp for boys the same year, and one or two Manchester Lad’s Clubs had larger camps the following spring, but these had little effect in making the practice universal. From the 1st Glasgow’s camp in 1886 sprang scores of camps in the next few years; in ten years’ time there were hundreds of B.B. camps, and to-day summer camps are numbered by the thousand.

A leaflet was issued to each boy, setting forth the camp programme and assuring parents that “every precaution will be taken to ensure health and safety.” The routine was much the same as that of to-day, except that the early camps were not under canvas. Expeditions by water, evening fishing competitions between the camp squads (in boats), a regatta, and rambles over the hills were among the diversions. On the Sunday the boys attended three services in the neighbouring church, and this was not considered an overdose for Scottish boys of those hardy days, when the first meal was served two hours after the 6.30 a.m. Reveille, and tea (the last meal) at 6.30 p.m. In later years the afternoon service was cut out.

Two incidents of the first camp are mentioned by Old Boys. Hugh Baird tells how some boys “went off on their own,” and shirked the Sunday afternoon service. Tea was nearly over when they returned. The Captain motioned them away from the table and told them they could have no food before morning. Some chums surreptitiously flicked pieces of bread and butter across to them, but this was promptly stopped with a warning. One or two members of Baird’s squad manage to conceal some hard biscuits for their pals. But this did not escape the Captain’s eye, and he put the whole squad on fatigue duty next day. He insisted on discipline, and he got it, and the camp was therefore a very happy one.

Peter Steward recalls the excitement that prevailed when, on arrival in the hall at Auchenlochan, they were divided into camp squads. This led to some larking while the Captain was making entries in the roll-book. He looked up and said: “Stop that fooling, Steward.” Peter, who happened to be innocent of the offence this time, said, “It wasn’t me, sir.” And Smith at once accepted his word and begged his pardon. He was no believer in that misguided maxim:
“Never explain, never apologise.” An explanation at the right time makes all the difference between cheerful obedience and either sullen obedience or active opposition; and an apology – also at the right time and in the right manner – often wins a boy’s loyalty.

Camps were held in alternate years, and in Smith’s estimation there was no place to equal Tighnabruaich. He and his wife loved the water and the hills, and he taught the boys to share his delight in swimming, rowing and sailing.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE BRIGADE BECOMES A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

At the close of the first session there was one company; a year later there were seven. But the end of the third session (30th April, 1886) tells a very different tale. No less than forty-four companies are in active work, with 136 officers and 1,999 non-commissioned officers and boys. Note the meticulous accuracy of the honorary secretary! How tempting it must have been to write 2,000! This illustrates one of Smith’s characteristics that gave rise to some impatience on the part of officers as the Brigade grew. They usually pointed out that annual reports usually make the figure favourable as possible, and, where there is any doubt, give the society the benefit. By following the usual custom the B.B. would increase greatly its figures of membership, and so make a far better show for the public. But Smith consistently resisted the temptation to do this – probably never felt the temptation, could not have understood it. The statistical forms he sent did not ask for the number of boys who had joined, but only the number of those who had completed the session, and had been regular in attendance. And if a company neglected to send its returns in time that company did not exist so far as Brigade statistics were concerned. It would have been quite easy to have “estimated” the number, but Smith would have none of this, and the tradition has been maintained to this day.

Forty of the companies were Scottish – twenty-five in Glasgow, five in Edinburgh, three in Beith (Ayrshire), two each in Ayr and Kilmarnock, and one in Alexandria, Dundee, and Inverness; and four were English – in London, Manchester, Armitage Bridge, and Penzance. The three pioneer companies, the 1st London, 1st Manchester, and 1st Armitage Brigade, were enrolled on the same day, the 23rd November, 1885. So The Boys’ Brigade now stretched from the north of Scotland to Land’s End.

The press, religious and secular, had become aware of an experiment in dealing with boys which had the merit of novelty, at any rate. As a result of this awakening of public interest in England, Smith found it difficult to cope with his correspondence. There was no B.B. Manual, nor any printed matter to which he could refer inquirers, and his replies to the first sets of questions asked brought more and more requests for further information. He had neither typewriter nor copying-press, so he penned not only the letters, but also clear copies of everything he wrote. He must have kept at it regularly until the small hours of the morning.

The Rev. C. N. Keeling, Chaplain 1st Manchester (St. James’s, Collyhurst) wrote that “your ideas are just what we have been waiting for and praying for”; and his assistant-curate, the Rev. Wm. Holden, made two valuable suggestions, one of which was put into work straightway, and the other a few years later. The first was that testimonials to the value of the Brigade in the Sunday School should be obtained and published; the second, that a Brigade paper should be considered. Smith thanked him, and said:

“I believe with you that the Brigade has a great future before it and, with you, I sometimes see visions of an official organ in the not distant future.” A letter subsequently went out to
superintendents, and their glowing testimonies to the value of the B.B. in the Sunday School were published.

In this third session a Brigade Executive was appointed. There were eight members – the President, Secretary, and Treasurer, ex-officiis, and the Rev. W. Holden, captain 1st Manchester, J. A. S. Arthur, lieut. 1st London, W. Nicholl, captain 4th Glasgow, A. S. Paterson, captain, 1st Edinburgh, and A. Robertson, captain 3rd Edinburgh.

Some passages from the report presented at the Second Annual Meeting, in October, 1886, are still of interest:

Of the 136 officers on the roll, no fewer than 112 are serving, or have served, in Her Majesty’s Forces. The committee are much impressed with the value of the Bible Classes... and officers cannot be too earnestly reminded of the continual danger of losing sight of our watchword, the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys, and of allowing the movement to degenerate into mere instruction in drill.

While then committee would seek to speak very guardedly of the extent to which the Brigade is attaining its one chief Object, they have every reason to believe that it has been the means, in God's hands, of winning boys for Christ, and developing that manly, chivalrous type of Christianity which so appeals to all that is good and noble in a boy's nature.

Many valuable testimonies continue to be received, to the good effect of the Brigade training and discipline on the boys, and on the boys' departments of the Sunday Schools.

In other ways, too, the value of the work receives significant testimony, as, for instance, when one captain reports that within a very short time he received no less than eight requests from employers specially desiring to get Brigade boys to fill vacancies in their employment.

The Boys' Brigade Manual was first published this session. It was, of course, much smaller than the present manual, but was fundamentally the same. There have been developments, but in essentials – while many experiments have been tried – it has been found impossible to improve upon William Alexander Smith’s understanding of boy-nature. At an Annual Council discussion, forty years later, an English captain said: “When we started a few years ago I read the Manual carefully, and I saw one hundred ways of doing better than that. I’ve tried ninety-nine of ‘em, and had a rotten company. Two years ago I resolved to stick to the Manual, and now I’ve got a good company. That’s all I have to say.”

The First Annual Inspection of Glasgow Battalion took place in April, 1886. 684 officers and boys paraded under the command of Major Alston. The event aroused much interest in the city, and large crowds lined the streets in the city, and large crowds lined the streets and assembled on the parade ground. On the following Sunday morning nearly 700 boys turned out for the first Annual Church Parade of the Battalion.

During the following year the growth of the Brigade continued, reaching in 1887 a strength of 124 companies, 385 officers and 6116 boys. More than 2000 boys took part in the Church Parade and Annual Inspection of the Glasgow Battalion.

The Headquarters expenditure for the year was £59.11.4. £64.12.6 was received from company subscriptions, and £1.16.6 from donations. £1.16.6! Was there ever a movement of similar extent and importance run on such self-supporting and economical lines!
By 1887 The Boys’ Brigade had spread beyond this country. The formation of the 1st St. Louis Company, U.S.A., and the 1st Auckland Company, New Zealand, aroused interest and speculation.

At the Council Meeting that year the Brigade President made an important announcement. Early in the year, he said, it had become evident that such an increasing amount of work was devolving on the Brigade Secretary, that the serious question was arising whether he could continue to carry on his duty much longer in conjunction with proper attention to the claims of his business. It was suggested that if a fund could be raised to provide for a Secretary’s salary, and if Mr. Smith could be induced to relinquish his business and accept the post, there would at once be found a solution of the difficulty, and a most important advantage would be secured for the Brigade.

The President added that he was glad to announce that he had collected nearly the whole sum required to guarantee a suitable salary for four years, and the Council unanimously approved of the proposed arrangement.

Mr. Smith said that it was with a very deep feeling of responsibility that he ventured to accept the appointment. Although the work of the Brigade Secretary had come to be very heavy, it had been to him a labour of love, and had been made so by the uniform courtesy and kindness he had met with. Looking at this large gathering, it seemed very strange to him to think of the evening little more than four years ago, when three of them met together to formulate the idea of The Boys’ Brigade. One of these three was Mr. James R. Hill, who was present that night as captain of the newly-formed 1st Oxford Company. From the very beginning they had looked upon it as God’s work, had asked His blessing and guidance, and had continued to do so throughout; and it seemed to him very striking that, at this important point in the history of the Brigade, he should see, in his own and other companies, evidence of an earnest spirit of decision for Christ on the part of the boys such as he had never seen before. It seemed to say to him very clearly to “Go forward” in the work to which he could not help believing that God had called him.

No doubt there were some present at the meeting who, after raising their hands and voices enthusiastically at the meeting, went home to doubt whether they had done wisely, whether they had been quite fair to their leader and friend, in uprooting him from his business to transplant him into an insecure position. He was a married man, and The Boys’ Brigade was but an experiment. Their fears were soon cast aside, for it was proved beyond doubt, by the next annual meeting, that the appointment of a full-time secretary had not been made a day too soon, and that none other than the Founder himself could have taken charge with such conspicuous success.

It was a momentous decision for the boyhood of England. In the churches of Scotland the B.B. was firmly established by the end of the year 1887, but England was almost untouched. Smith’s decision to accept the call put it in his power to arouse the English churches to a realisation of the possibilities of neglected youth. From that decision, it may truly be said, sprang the Boy and Girl movements of the British Isles and of the world.
The decision was not made lightly. He was not the man to mistake for the call of God anything that might happen to attract him. He was no visionary, but an intensely practical man who could yet see visions. He weighed the matter thoroughly, consulted with his closest friends, and prayed earnestly for guidance. Some of the friends did not fail to point out that it was a rash step, and that he had a “plain duty” to wife and family.

But there was one who never faltered. Mrs. Smith had full confidence in her husband, was whole-hearted in her devotion to the movement he had founded, and gave him in fullest measure the assurance that she was with him heart and soul in putting God’s work before any thought of worldly prosperity. Should privation come, they would face it together. It was more to her that her husband should do the work for which he was peculiarly fitted than that she should live a life of comfort. She knew his boys – *their* boys! – of the Brigade with intimate personal knowledge, and had watched the growth of finer feelings and the development of Christian Manliness. She saw the vast potentialities of the Brigade, and ardently desired that this wonderful influence might spread throughout the length and breadth of the land; and so she gave him loving encouragement and unwavering support. A lesser woman might well have been afraid, and, without actively opposing, might still have turned the scale the other way; and The Boys’ Brigade might then have been a gallant failure.

Fortified by his wife’s courageous support, William Smith answered the call, gave up his business, and on the 1st January, 1888, became full-time Secretary of the Brigade, with an office at 68 Bath Street, Glasgow, as Brigade Headquarters.

As the fame of the movement, its remarkable influence over boys, and its good effect in the Sunday Schools, spread throughout the kingdom, there were many requests that the founder should “come over and help us,” by explaining its aims and methods. His attractive personality and marked sincerity inspired confidence in all who met and talked with him. He was not an orator, but he spoke very effectively in good, simple English. His addresses were never lengthy, never ornate, and he never wandered from the point. He rather disliked publicity, and certainly shunned the limelight, much preferring that some other speaker should tell the story of the Brigade while he sat in the background.

It the *Sunday School Chronicle* of the 11th May, 1888, there is a report of a speech he made at Sunday School Union Conference, presided over by Mr. Quintin Hogg, founder of the Polytechnic. After describing the beginning and growth of the Brigade, its object, aims and methods, Smith said:

> “Christ is the ideal Man; Christ was the ideal boy; and if men and boys are not won for Christ there is surely something wrong in the way in which we present Him to them. It may be we have gone too much on the lines of seeking to commend Christianity to them by showing the boy only the side of it that would commend it to the gentler nature of the girl. All a boy’s aspirations are towards manliness, however mistaken his ideas may be as to what true manliness means. Our boys are full of earnest desire to be brave, true men, and if we want to make them brace, true Christian men we must direct this desire into the right channel, and show them that in the service of Christ they will find the truest, bravest life that a man can live. We laid the foundation of the B.B. on this idea, and determined to win the boys for Christ by presenting to them a view of Christianity to which we know their natures will most readily respond. It also seemed to us that by associating Christianity with all that is most noble and manly in a boy’s eyes, we might do much to disabuse his mind of the idea that there is anything weak or effeminate about Christianity – an idea that is
far too widespread among boys. Our aim was to band the boys together and create an esprit de corps that would make them proud of their company, jealous of its honour, ashamed to do anything to disgrace it, and prepared to make any sacrifice rather than be dismissed from it. In the Brigade we try to realise not only that boys will be boys, but that boys ought to be boys, and it would be a thousand pities if they were anything else.

Through games, camps, club-rooms, ambulances, bands, and so on, we take the boy on every side of his nature, and surround him with a continual influence for good at that critical period of his life when his character is taking a mould that will affect his whole future. The Brigade gives the officer endless opportunities of coming into contact with his boys; and there is no better way of doing this than to ask them to spend an evening at his home – six or eight at a time – when the touch between the boys themselves gets very close, and they are drawn together as in no other way.

“The Brigade makes a point of acknowledging God in everything, of putting Christ at the head of everything, and tries to do it in such a way that a boy will feel that the religious element in the work is a pleasure and not a bore. It breaks down the notion in a boy’s mind that religion is a thing for Sunday and everything, and tries to do it in such a way that a boy will feel that the religious element in the work is a characteristic.

It was quickly evident that a large proportion of the representatives present were unable to appreciate the new point of view, and they vied with one another in depreciating “this fostering of the military spirit.” Whatever savoured of militarism was un-Christian, they said. “Teachers had enough to do without putting military ideas into their heads, and so on.”

George P. Reynolds, a Newport representative, who afterwards became a pillar of the B.B. in Monmouthshire and South Wales, made an attempt to bring the meeting to face the essential points of the address. A tree should be judged by its fruits. Everywhere the churches were losing thousands of boys for lack of something that the Brigade seemed able to supply. His speech received some support, and the Secretary of the Sunday School Union considered “that Mr. Smith had proved his case,” while Mr. Quintin Hogg, in summing up, said that far too much had been made of the military organisation side of the question. He supported the B.B. because it met a lad’s wants on all sides.

One of the S.S.U. representatives present was Dr. J. J. Ridge, who, as a direct outcome of the meeting, started in October, 1888, the 1st Enfield Company, which is still one of the best-known Companies in the Brigade to-day.

Opposition by many good people to the methods of the Brigade was rampant during the next few years. The Peace Society instituted a resolute campaign against the movement, which possibly helped to make it better known and more widely taken up. The members of the society were exhorted “in season and out of season to do their utmost, in the interests of righteousness and peace, to crush this young praying and fighting monster.” The Brigade was described as “the master-stroke of Mars... dragging true religion in to the gutter of corruption.”

Smith’s attitude towards these attacks was characteristic. He took them quietly, and never attempted to reply in kind. His case was good, and right-minded people rallied to the Brigade, including members of the Society who deplored such violence. Dr. Alex. Mackennal said at a public meeting that, though he had long been an advocate of the principles of the Peace Society, he believed strongly in the B.B. it did not tend to foster a military spirit but rather the spirit of
peaceableness and self-control, of fellowship and the love of Christ. It was a movement of the utmost value in advancing Christ Kingdom among boys.

The religious press generally expressed similar views, and the Christian Leader said, “From the very outset we have given warmest support to the Brigade.... It does not teach the art of war, nor does it encourage a spirit of enmity.... It meets as no other scheme has met more than one great want of our age. Our advice to the friends of peace is to throw their strength into his movement, so that by their presence and influence they may keep it from even the faintest approach to the fulfilment of their fears.”

The most notable event of Session 1887-88 was the parade of the Glasgow Battalion on the occasion of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales, on the 8th May, 1888, to open the International Exhibition. The Battalion was detailed to line the route in the exhibition grounds, and 78 companies paraded, with 3,649 officers and boys. A Battalion had now been formed in London, and on Whit-Monday was inspected at Hendon by General Sir Donald Stewart.

The annual report for this session showed a big increase in the number of Bible Classes, and in classes for First Aid and Ambulance. Nearly all the company band were flute bands; to-day a flute band is a rara avis in the B.B.

The Boys’ Brigade Gazette was first published in March, 1889, as a bi-monthly magazine for officers. Six copied were issued free to every company. It was first edited by Smith himself, and to this may be attributed its high tone. But one unfortunate consequence – from a biographer’s point of view – is that there is hardly anything in the paper about the Brigade Secretary’s doings. In reports of most important meetings of the early years, though W. A. Smith was the man whom the crowd had gathered together to see and hear, the reader hardly realises that he was present.

From its first issue the Gazette was a great success, and for forty-four years it has been recognised as the leading paper for workers among boys. It is noteworthy that the first two articles published deal with “The Company Bible Class,” and “A Visit to a Bible Class.” The Bible Class, as distinct from and additional to the Sunday School class, had not entered into the Founder’s original scheme. It had been introduced during the second session. Its values began to be seen, and gradually it took its place as the most valuable of the weekly meetings, the centre of a company’s work, from which radiate all the other activities.

In the second number of the Gazette we read that Mr. C. J. Guthrie (son of Thomas Guthrie of Ragged School fame) who, as Lord Guthrie, was later to succeed Major Alston as President of the Brigade, addressed the boys of the Edinburgh Battalion at a Church Parade in April, 1889, when no less than seven addresses by different speakers were given. They were all exceedingly good, but – seven! Not even the Scots boy would stand this nowadays.

The chief event this year was a crowded gathering in the Queen’s Room, Glasgow, on the 21st January, 1889 – the first great public meeting on behalf of The Boys’ Brigade. The Earl of Aberdeen presided and Professor Henry Drummond was among the speakers.
Drummond has been described as the Apostle of The Boys’ Brigade. The popular notion of a professor of Natural Science is a dry-as-dust personage, probably contemptuous of religion. But Drummond was a man of unusual charm in personal appearance, talk and manners, a lover of boys, and of saintly character. He was renowned both as a speaker and writer. His books and published addresses were read with eagerness by multitudes in all English-speaking countries. His influence, therefore, upon the growth of the B.B. was incalculable. Many who had been suspicious of this novel development in Sunday School and Church, or even hostile to it, were won over by the thought that there must be good in it, or Henry Drummond would not believe in it so enthusiastically. So they tried it, and themselves became enthusiastic.

Some passages from his speech may be given here, as they had great effect in bringing young men into the work:

THE BRIGADE AS A NEW FIELD FOR YOUNG MEN

“We have heard so much about the Boy to-night that perhaps we have forgotten that he ever becomes a young man. I honestly believe it would have been worth while founding The Boys’ Brigade if only for the sake of the officers.

“Sometimes the British Army is defended on the ground that it offers a useful outlet for the sons of our aristocracy; but I would defend The Boys’ Brigade because it opens a new door for that vaster aristocracy of young men of the more educated classes, who have hitherto swelled the ranks of the unemployed.... Whatever be the cause, many of these men are in revolt against the ordinary forms of Christian work. Some of these forms are too narrow for them; others are too artificial, others are unsuited to their qualifications, or uncongenial to their tastes. The young man is almost as new a discovery as the boy in religious work, and it is not to be wondered at if he s a little particular in choosing a suitable sphere. Young men are coy about Christian work; the least suspicion of unreality or sanctimoniousness frightens them off, and they feel a certain sense of inability – a sense of the greatness and sacredness of the work – which makes them shrink from touching it. But, be it right or wrong, be it modesty or mere fastidiousness, the fact remains that hitherto many men who cherished a real desire to help on the lives of others could find no congenial place in the current evangelism. No man had devised a practical scheme for linking those men heartily and sympathetically either with the Church’s activity or with other forms of Christian work; and this splendid enterprise has been initiated just in time to save hundreds of the best of them to their Church and country.

“What interests young men in the B.B. is the naturalness of the work. It is absolutely natural for a young man to be mixed up with boys. It is natural for him to take up their cause, to lay himself alongside their interests, to play the part of the older brother to them. He altogether understands them; he knows all their ways and dodges, and has been in all their scrapes. A mother does not really know a boy in the least. She has never been a boy. So the young man is in his place when he offers a kindly hand to these his younger brothers.

“Then there is the definiteness of the work. If you set a man down among 770,000 people in Glasgow, and tell him to try to do them good, the vagueness and vastness of the problem will paralyse his efforts. He will either do too little, or, aiming at too much, accomplish nothing. But give him ten boys and say, ’There is you life work – to guard and lead these boys.’ That compact piece of service is at least within his reach, and he will brace himself to attempt it....

“Not less inspiring than then definiteness of the work is the charm of its indefiniteness. No captain, when he begins, knows where it is going to lead him. If he is a true man it will take him to the boy’s father and his views, surroundings, and occupation. Through this he will become interested in social questions; for the first time he will touch them practically and feel their acuteness. He will perceive that religion must become a wider word than ever he supposed, and that the burning problems for his Christianity are those very social questions which his boys and their homes have raised for him. But this is only a part of the reflex action of the Brigade work upon the worker. The rich always owe more to the poor than the poor to
the rich, and the officer will owe to his boys the calling out of sympathies which he scarcely knew existed, the exercise of talents which were slowly wasting, and the development of his whole character towards a nobler and stronger manhood. The Boys’ Brigade will keep him young to the end of his life. That is a great thing. But, greater than all these, work of this practical and personal kind will transform the worker’s whole life into a mission.”
CHAPTER SIX

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Brigade was now receiving the backing of men prominent in the religious life of the country. In December, 1889, Brigade Council decided to have an Honorary President, and to ask the Earl of Aberdeen, who had taken keen interest in the movement, to fill the post. A little later the Archbishops of Canterbury and York became Vice-Patrons, and the list of Honorary Vice-Presidents included Lord Plunket, Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool, (both of whom were B.B. enthusiasts), many other dignitaries of the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches, Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, Lord Kinnaird, and Henry Drummond. These did not regard their appointments as purely honorary; they threw in the weight of their influence with good effect.

The Fifty Annual Meeting was held in Glasgow on the 26th December, 1889. That representatives should have attended from London, Liverpool, Sheffield, Cardiff, and Belfast on what is – outside Scotland – one of the most inconvenient days of the year was as stimulating and hopeful a sign as the Founder could have desired. His Brigade was now a British Institution, and the outlook was full of promise. It proved how fascinating the B.B. has become to those who had been lucky enough to discover it.

In his presidential address Major Alston paid tribute to the work of the Brigade Secretary, “whose special fitness becomes the more apparent as the labours of his office increase,” and Smith’s reception by his colleagues left no doubt as to the affection and admiration with which he was regarded.

The growing popularity of camping was mentioned in the report, with the comment that the boys were usually quartered in a building, though a few daring companies had gone under canvas. It was now being recognised that camp is the officer’s great opportunity. In no other way can a man get to know boys so intimately, or exert such influence over them. Though the number of bands had increased there were still but two bugle bands. These were probably the only boys’ bugle band in the kingdom; now they are numbered by thousands. We may read with wondering awe and admiration of seven sermons at one Church Parade, and reflect upon the fortitude of our forbears, but, after all, would that generation have endured so patiently the plague of bugling with which we are afflicted?

The Seventh Annual Meeting was held in London in October, 1891, this being the first time that Brigade Council had met in England, where the Brigade was now extending more rapidly than in Scotland. The strength in the United Kingdom was 418 companies, 1301 officers and 17,259 boys. Of the 89 new companies formed during the session only 22 were Scottish, 52 being English and 15 Irish; and no less than 47 of them belonged to the Episcopal Churches, and only twenty to the Free Churches. There were also companies in the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.
The first Annual Meeting to be held in Ireland was that of 1895, when the Archbishop of Dublin, Lord Plunket, entertained the gathering at Old Connaught House, Bray, and on the Sunday addressed a combined Bible Class of 400 officers and boys.

Among the subjects discussed at these meetings were some that are still among the topics of to-day, as: “The Bible Class.” “Camping,” and “What to do with time-expired Boys.” At all conferences of workers among boys these matters still come up. But the problems are very different now. The experimental stage has been passed; the virgin forest cleared, the swamps drained, the ground broken up and cultivated, by the pioneers of the first decade of The Boys’ Brigade, led by William Smith and his 1st Glasgow Company.

“What can we do for our Old Boys?” was discussed for the first time by Brigade Council at the London meeting. The question has probably been mooted at some B.B. conference every year since then. Consistently, from the very first, Smith maintained that no boy movement could deal with young men over eighteen years of age, that the B.B. was formed to deal with boys, and that its business was so to train the boy, so to form his character and direct his spiritual nature, that while still in the Brigade he would be, or would desire to become, a member of his church. He urged officers to work in fullest co-operation with their chaplains to link up the boy with the church, to pass him into whatever society for young people might be there, and to do all possible to find some sphere of service for him in Church or Sunday School.

The Brigade has certainly done much on these lines. Many thousands of its boys are now actively engaged in church work as priests and ministers, missionaries overseas, Sunday School superintendents and teachers, secretaries of societies and guilds, and workers in various capacities.

Assuredly Smith did not neglect his own “boys” after they had passed out. He was “The Captain” to them for the rest of their lives, and the friend in whom they trusted. “He always kept in touch with us,” one of the oldest of them told me. “I was working in Aberdeen in 1914, and, a week or two before he died, I had a postcard from him about the Drill Competition saying: ‘You will be delighted to hear we are in the final. Am sure you will be there in spirit.’”

It is something said in criticism of B.B. methods that, granted that they are the best of all methods of dealing with boys in the mass, they do not encourage sufficiently the development of the individual. Of course, there are men who are able to control and teach a company or class, and effect a good influence upon character, by the example of uprightness and unselfishness, and yet are awkward and ill at ease with the individual. But the averagely capable B.B. man gets a very fair idea of the personality and temperament of each boy through seeing how he acts and reacts in the mass, takes note, and makes opportunity for closer study of the individual.

From the very start Smith felt that it was essential to know each boy – his home, his school or work, his likes and dislikes, hopes and fears. To feel this was to act upon it. Love of the boy was his stimulus, and he was the personal friend of every boy in his company. Ex-members still speak of the “fireside discussions” they used to have, when “the Captain” talked with the N.C.O.’s about the boys of their squads, and drew out their ideas as to the best way to appeal
to this or that lad and help keep him straight, or encourage him to try harder; and at other
times just one or two on some particular subjects, or with a group on boys problems in general.

“He had no patience,” said one of his lieutenants, “with the theory that boys are unregenerate
beings, and that to make them good we have to start from this rock-bottom level. He believed
that they are essentially good, and only require the inspiration of Christ the Hero to make them
heroic, too. His constant advice was ‘Trust the boys.’ Possibly his own exceptional purity of
outlook led him too far in this direction. I recall discussing with him the need for instruction on
Moral Hygiene. He agreed in principle, but took my breath away by naming sixteen as the age
for such teaching. He told me that it was his belief that one could so fill a boy’s mind with so
much that is healthy and good that there would be no time or rook for what was unworthy and
evil.

“I used to be amazed, too, at the faithfulness with which he interpreted the boy’s point of view.
In my first Bible Class address I used a slangy expression, in order to impress it on the boy’s
mind. Afterwards Sir William commented on it, and adjured me not to attempt to descend to
the boy’s level of thought and expression, as they did not really appreciate it. What they did
appreciate, he said, was a level of thought and expression just a little bit above them, and this I
found to be true.

“When a new officer joined the company, he was likely to be started at his first Officers’
Meeting by the captain’s remark, ‘Well, X —, there’s the syllabus of addresses for the session,
and as you are the junior you can have first choice of three subjects.’ There was no question as
to whether one was willing or not. My protest that I had never done such a thing in my life was
met with, ‘Well, you’ll never begin younger.’ He believed that a poor address from a sincere
man went further than any amount of eloquence. He had no use for exclusive specialists.

“His criticism was always kindly. He welcomed suggestions from even the youngest and most
inexperienced; and when his criticism was adverse he exposed the flaws gradually and logically.

“But what made most impression on my mind was his unerring judgement. He could put his
finger on the weak points of any scheme or argument with lighting swiftness. Many and many a
time I have been disappointed by the rejection of some pet suggestion. But when thinking it
over in the new light of his criticism I have been astonished that I, who had believed that I had
thrashed the matter out thoroughly, should have been so short-sighted.”

In spite of his very heavy Brigade duties, his many long journeys, with nights in the train, he was
attentive to every detail of company work. At one period Peter Steward acted as captain in
Smith’s absence. “When the Captain was away,” said Steward, “he never failed to write to me,
to send good wishes to myself and the other officers and to the boys.”

Another officer stated that the Captain never allowed anything to interfere with the fullest
preparation of his Bible Class lesson. He had everything thought out with most scrupulous care,
ever trusting to the “inspiration of the moment.”
Smith’s interest in the Volunteers had not slackened. In 1889 a Mounted Detachment was raised, mainly on his initiative, and he was given command. A member of the troop writes: “He was very keen on the work and very considerate to his men. He inspired confidence, and showed us an example we all wished to follow.” He commanded the Mounted Detachment for about six years, and became Major in 1895. But he was not commonly referred to by this rank in the Brigade, as “The Major” was the title affectionately bestowed upon Carfrae Alston.

During the early nineties the B.B. was rapidly winning its way. Everywhere its founder was greeted enthusiastically. “At the conference with our Dublin officers,” wrote William Connor of the 1st Dublin, “we asked him to speak first. But he said, ‘No, you tell me of your difficulties and successes.’ So, like the great modest man he was, never thrusting himself into the first place, he drew us out and, while he listened to our words, he read all our thoughts. His summing-up – whatever the subject – was always regarded as a clincher. He stated the case so fairly, and gave his reasons so simply, that our men said: ‘This man is a safe guide – follow him.’ And Dublin did follow him loyally; and whenever he came to us, Dublin boys would rise en masse and cheer until forced to stop.”

But probably no reception gave such satisfaction as that accorded him when he visited his native place in 1892, to inspect the newly-formed 1st Thurso and 1st Wick Companies. Another event about this time upon which he looked back with much pleasure was his meeting with Mr. Gladstone at the Earl of Aberdeen’s town house in Grosvenor Square.

The most important gathering of this period was the first public B.B. Meeting help in London, in May, 1892. Its success was beyond all expectations, and Exeter Hall was crammed to overflowing. The Earl of Aberdeen was in the chair, and speeches in commendation of the Brigade were made by Drummond and other Church leaders.

Smith had not intended to speak, but as there was a demand that he should, the Chairman called upon him, observing that, very characteristically, he had omitted any reference to himself in the programme.

Smith was received with a great demonstration of enthusiasm, and after complimenting the London Officers on the arrangements, he said:

“The phrase in our Constitution, ‘the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among boys,’ has been called the keynote of the Brigade. I do not know much about music, but I understand that the keynote is the note to which all other notes require in some degree to conform if anything approaching harmony is to be attained. If this be so, I think the definition is a peculiarly happy one. ‘The advancement of Christ’s Kingdom’ was the flag we raised at the very beginning. That flag has never been lowered, and to-day we lift it higher than ever we did before. We believe that the very existence of The Boys’ Brigade depends upon the maintenance of the high position that we took up at the start. It depends upon it for two reasons. First, because of its effect upon the boys, and, second, because of its effects upon the officers. As to its effects upon the boys: it leads us to surround them at all points with influences that make for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom, and for a higher and better life. We do not want, by making the boys religious, to spoil them as boys, but we want to break down once for all in the boy’s mind the notion – by no means confined to boys – that religion is a thing for Sunday and Sunday School, with no particular practical bearing on the rest of his life. We want to teach them that in every part of their lives, in drill and football, as well as in Sunday School and Bible Class, there must be this great underlying principle if they are to be of any real service in the world.
“As to its effect upon our officers, it is because underlying all this external aspect of the work – its drill, its music, its military accoutrements – which naturally presents itself most largely to the public eye, we have got the deeper personal influence which the officers continually exert upon the boys, that we believe that if it is to be the success we believe it is capable of being, we must keep this principle well to the fore-front. He is the true officer who loves his boys, who believes in his boys, and who is prepared to give up everything for the sake of his boys. If we can fill our ranks with officers like this, I am convinced that the boys will never fail us. If some companies have lapsed, as some are bound to do, we can truly say that it has never been the fault of the boys. It is not too much to say that if the boys are taken the right way you can do practically anything with them.”

Smith was never “eloquent,” yet his addresses made a deep impression on men. His transparent simplicity, good features, upstanding figure, and his bearing of quiet, unassuming dignity helped in this. He was never boisterously genial, or “hail-fellow,” but always one felt his friendliness and great gift of sympathy and understanding.

By the close of session 1893-94 there were at least three hundred companies in the United States and more than seventy in Canada. Henry Drummond had helped on the work in the United States, ¹ and the growth in Canada had been stimulated by the active interest of Lord Aberdeen, the Governor-General, who now urged Smith to visit the Dominion, assuring him of results that would make it well worthwhile. So in February, 1895, Brigade Executive set him free for this purpose.

Shortly before his departure he was the guest of the Glasgow officers, on whose behalf David Laidlaw, Smith’s successor as Battalion President, made the presentation of a silver card-case, inscribed, and containing a cheque for fifty guineas, as token of their indebtedness to the man, “who had guided and directed the Battalion in its early years, and who still, amid all the duties that pressed upon him as Brigade Secretary, was ever ready, by counsel or active help, to further its interests.”


“What! Are you quite sure you didn’t write it?”

“Quite sure.”

“That’s strange! You’re going to lecture to-night? What about?”

“Well – about Christianity.”

“Ah,” (whipping out his note-book). “What is your opinion of Christianity?”

Following his pleasant interlude, Smith wrote to inform his uncle Fraser of the approaching voyage, and to express his sense of gratitude and affection, and his wish that friendly relations might be resumed. Mr. Fraser gladly accepted the olive-branch, and gave his blessing and good wishes for the mission to Canada.
The Servia reached New York on the 19th February, and he was in Montreal next morning. He was warmly welcomed by their Excellencies and, after lunch, was driven in a sleigh through snow-covered streets to the drill-hall, where were gathered some of the most influential people of the Dominion, including many clergymen. The two Montreal Companies gave creditable displays, and the Governor-General spoke in high praise of the Brigade, and commended it strongly to the churches of Canada.

“At the close of this meeting,” Smith wrote to the Gazette,” a young fellow came up to me and proudly introduced himself as an Old Boy of the 15th Glasgow. I had many callers next day; and I have little doubt that the next few months will see the formation of new companies in this city.”

He left Montreal by the night train to Boston, where he was met by some of the leading American officers. The day being the birthday of Washington, it was a general holiday, and:

“At 10.30 a.m. I had the pleasure of standing for the first time before The Boys’ Brigade in the U.S.A. – 800 of as bright-looking boys as one could wish to see – and a very enthusiastic welcome they accorded to the representative of the British Boys’ Brigade.”

“While the American Brigade has gone in for a much more elaborate uniform than we believe to be either necessary or wise, and while I cannot but think – after making due allowance for the different conditions – that the movement there would gain in the long run by greater simplicity in uniform – especially in the case of officers – I am bound to admit that our brother-officers in the States are in no way behind their fellows in the old country in their appreciation of the high purpose for which the Brigade exists. Indeed, so far as I could judge, they are animated by an eagerness of spirit and a zeal to bring their boys into the Kingdom of Christ, which could scarcely be equalled by any of our Home Battalions.

“People talk about the Brigade creating a fighting spirit and a feeling of enmity between the nations. Why, there never was such an exhibition of mutual goodwill and genuine brotherhood as might have been seen that day in Boston. As those boys stood there, as proud of their Stars and Stripes as I of our Union Jack, we felt that The Boys’ Brigade represented a kingdom grander and wider than either the United States or the British Empire; and that, without losing any of the feeling of patriotism which has made both our countries what they are to-day, we could sink all national differences in the spirit of brotherhood born of such teaching as that of The Boys’ Brigade. And I was much struck by the fact that every reference I made to the friendly relationship between Great Britain and the United States was cheered to the echo.

“An old officer of the 49th Glasgow introduced himself to me at the close. He is now an officer here. Thus the B.B. spreads its influence through the world.”

He returned to Canada for a succession of visits. First St. John, New Brunswick, the birthplace of the Brigade in Canada. Here “I addressed a crowded meeting, and nothing could have been finer than the discipline and attention of the boys. The audience included the boys of the Rothesay Collegiate School, one of the leading schools of Canada, who had driven in sleighs a distance of nine miles.”

At Springhill: “I found the company being drilled by a fine old soldier of the 78th Highlanders, who nearly wrung my hand off when I told him the 78th was my grandfather’s regiment.”
Halifax was visited two days after the terrible fire that had devastated part of the city. There were two Halifax companies present, and two from Dartmouth across the water. At New Glasgow and St. John addresses welcome were read by sergeants, and the boys of the 1st St. John made the presentation of an ebony cane, with gold-plated handle and an inscription.

At Fredericton he attended the Company Bible Class, and in the evening went by sleigh to Marysville, and preached the B.B. to a crowded congregation.

On the 7th March he joined Lord and Lady Aberdeen in Toronto, and addressed a great public meeting in the Amphitheatre of the Normal School. The Governor-General was supported on the platform by the Bishop, the Lieutenant-Governor, the Minister of Education, senators, and prominent ministers and laymen. “On stepping forward to speak, I got a very enthusiastic reception, and I don’t hesitate to record this, because it always struck me as indicating the extent to which the B.B. has taken hold of the hearts of the people.”

The Bishop of Toronto spoke of his own varied experiences of boys, beginning in a London slum, and stated that there was no more rewarding work for a Christian than the B.B. The Minister of Education said that its drill and discipline were needed in educational work; and the Rev. Father O’Reilly testified to the excellence of Brigade methods as applied to the religious training of boys.

The strenuous propagandist managed to relax a little here. “I spent two or three days in Toronto in comparative quietness, with the exception of a few visits to Company meetings. I enjoyed the novel and exhilarating experience of ice-yachting on Lake Ontario, when we actually travelled over the ice at the rate of a mile a minute.”

Visit followed to Kingston and to Sarnia, where was “quite the most correct parade I had seen in Canada.”

London, Ontario, came next; then St. Thomas. “From St. Thomas I went on to Niagara Falls, where my host was a relative of my own, in the society of whose family I spent two very delightful days; and as it turned out that Mr. James Wilson, the Captain of the Niagara Falls Company, was the Commissioner of the Government Reservation, it goes without saying that we enjoyed very special privileges in viewing the wonders of the Falls. I may say at once that I would never attempt to describe the Falls of Niagara. It is simply indescribable.”

One of the last meetings of the tour was that at Hamilton, where seven companies mustered, and every inch of standing-room was taken up.

In Ottawa he spent some time with Lord and Lady Aberdeen at Government House. After an inspection of the three Ottawa companies, on the 25th March, he attended a conference in Toronto of representative officers from all parts; and in the evening inspected the seven companies of the Battalion. Here he notes as another coincidence that Mr. T. W. Nisbet, the Brigade Secretary for Canada, turned out to be an old member of his own regiment; and while they were together in Toronto, “I received from my Commanding Officer a cablegram asking me to take command of the very company in which Mr. Nisbet had formerly served.”
At the close of the tour he wrote in the Gazette: “I am greatly impressed by the true B.B. spirit to be found everywhere among the officers. Wherever I have been I have found men who have thoroughly grasped the real meaning of The Boys’ Brigade, and are seeking with much earnestness of purpose and singleness of aim to lead their boys to the Saviour, whom they themselves love and serve.... The kindness shown to me has been beyond description.”

Referring to his stay at Government House, he wrote: “This gave me an opportunity of realising more fully than ever before the immense influence for good which can be exerted by those whom God as placed in a high station, if only they choose to consecrate their lives and opportunities to His service.”

He left New York on the 29th March, and, the Etruria breaking her own record, arrived in Liverpool early in the morning of the 7th April. Just after he got home the 1st Glasgow, returning from a Battalion parade, marched past the house, the band playing Home, Sweet Home. “Never have I felt so much the deep truth of the old song.”
CHAPTER SEVEN

HAPPINESS AND TRAGEDY

It is curious how little “personal” material has been available for a biography of the Founder of The Boys’ Brigade. He devoted himself so entirely to his life’s work that it is hardly possible to separate Man from the Movement. Few men could have had a larger number of true friends, but there is little variety in their reminiscences of him. He was always the same, always rang true, never showed one side to one man and a different side to another. He could be merry and youthful, and at the same time the experienced leader; he could enjoy the give-and-take of humorous verbal encounter, delighting to hear or tell a good story. But his attitude towards and his outlook upon life never varied, because he was as straight in mind and temper as in his erect figure, and all who knew him trusted him. In the words of one of his lieutenants: “Sir William’s life was not a series of interesting and exciting episodes, but rather the consistent, calm, strong incarnation of the spirit which promotes true Christian Manliness.”

His correspondence for thirty years must have been enormous. But his letters were strictly business letters, couched in most “correct” phraseology, however kindly and encouraging they might be. To his intimates he would often enclose with the formal letter a scrap of paper commenting racy upon what he had written officially. But these were not preserved. We regret now that we did not keep these brief notes. “They were very funny at times,” wrote one of his chief friends, “and very characteristic.”

His duties brought him into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and his natural dignity and innate courtesy put him quite at ease among men of any rank. He had a great respect for authority – considering the office rather than the individual who held it. To the holders of high office in the Church, under the Crown, or by civil election, he gave a touch of deference that served to enhance his own dignity. This deference he paid to the rural vicar or minster as to Bishop and Moderator, because they held God’s commission.

For fourteen years Smith and his wife realised to the full the blessing of a happy married life. Their two children, George Stanley, born in 1888, and Douglas Pearson, in 1891, soon began to take a very lively interest in the B.B. Company.

The family holiday was usually spent at Tighnabruaich in July, and during the camp week the boys of the company, who loved their Captain and his wife, made much of the two youngsters.

Rowing was the chief diversion of camp life. Every squad had its four-oared boat, and the captain’s love of discipline and organisation was shown in the system of bugle calls from his boat, in obedience to which other boats performed various evolutions and formations. He had discovered from the first what so many men in charge of camps have not yet discovered – that discipline and good organisation enable the leader to provide his boys with twice as many hours of interest and enjoyment as can be had in a slack and ill-disciplined camp.

In the early camps he was C.O., adjutant, quarter-master, and, with his wife’s aid, medical officer, too, until he had got men to take over the subordinate duties. He coached the boys in...
swimming and rowing, and to a lesser extent in cricket and football. At the close of the Annual Inspection of 1896 he took the company for a sail on the Clyde to visit the training-ship Empress in the Gareloch, and this visit established a connection that led to his appointment as a director of the training-ship.

His cherished desire to take his wife for a holiday in Spain was never realised, because his duties became more and more exacting with the success of the Brigade. So their holidays had to be spent nearer home, and Whiting Bay, Arran, was a favourite resort. It was then a primitive little place, with one shop and no pier. Occasionally they visited Caithness, staying with “Grandmamma Smith” at Sea View Place; and after her death in 1895 with his sister, Miss Kate Smith. In later years Smith often spent a short holiday in Caithness, ¹ where he kept up the friendships of boyhood days.

¹ He became President of the Glasgow Caithness Association, and at the first re-union at which he presided the Association piper played a March he had composed for the occasion, to which he had given the title, “Smith of Pennyland.” “Otherwise, the evening was a very happy one,” Smith informed his sons.

Sailing was his favourite recreation, and when his sons were old enough to be taught to help in the handling of a boat, a considerable portion of their holidays was passed in a small sailing-boat. In winter he got as much skating as possible, Lochburnie, on the outskirts of Glasgow, being a convenient place for this.

In the year 1898 he was called upon to face the great blow of his life. In the spring and summer of this year Mrs. Smith had been seriously ill and had endured great suffering with characteristic fortitude and patience. While Smith was at the Annual Meeting in Manchester in September, he was summoned home, and on the 10th October Amelia Pearson Smith was released from pain.

Their love had been a rare and beautiful thing, and the home as ideally happy one. Smith faced the blow as one whose faith in the goodness of God was perfect. “Religion was very real to him,” wrote one of his eldest friends. “I called on him – and I was the one who was upset. W. A. Was quite calm and collected, because he was sure of her happiness, and stedfast in his faith that they would be re-united.”

Mrs. Smith’s big share in establishing the Brigade has been recorded. “She was heart and soul with the B.B.,” said her sister, Julia Sutherland. “She knew the boys of the 1st Glasgow individually, treated them as her friends, helped them in many ways, but in no way more than by showing them unconsciously and example of the highest womanhood; and when her husband was called upon to risk all for the sake of the Brigade, she strengthened him to make the right decision. Though Willie was quick and decisive in everything, I never once knew him to be cross. He was invariably loving and tender with her, and never failed to joke when, through the carelessness or incapacity of a servant, or for any cause, things went wrong in the household. ‘Snapshot of the Brigade Secretary at home!’ he would remark gaily when, after a very tiring day, he had to set to help put matters right.

“For Mrs. Sutherland he ever showed the greatest respect and affection. Indeed, he was very good to all his relatives, and he assisted his brothers financially when he himself was a poor
man. However busy he might be, he would write long letters of gossip to distant relatives, and he never neglected to visit when the opportunity occurred.”

Kate Smith now came to live with her brother and take charge of the Bruce Street household. She was not a very wise or tactful woman, nor a good manager; and her regime was not an easy or comfortable one. By contrast with the happy, helpful and animated partnership of the past fourteen years it was the harder to bear cheerfully. But Smith was very patient and forbearing, and quick to recognise and appreciate the good intentions that so often failed to achieve their object.

His boys, now eleven and eight years of age, were a great comfort to him, and he was father and mother and elder brother to them. Never once was he known to lose his temper, yet he was in no sense an indulgent parent. He was interested in all their interests, which he guided as an older chum; and their holidays together, sailing, rowing, swimming and rambling, were times of sheer joy to him and to the boys.

Miss Julia Sutherland was a great comfort to him. He regarded her with deep affection and gratitude, and confided in her more than in any other person. “Aunt Julia” was loved and looked up to by the boys also, to whom she was a second mother.
CHAPTER EIGHT

EVENTS AND DEVELOPMETNS OF THE SECOND DECADE – 1895-1905

In session 1895-6 Brigade Executive decided that Smith must have an “Assistant-Secretary, resident in London,” and the Rev. A. L. Harding was appointed. Following this, the Executive was urged to establish at least a Branch H.Q. Office in London.

At the Annual Meeting of 1901, in Glasgow, Mr. Alston stated that the Brigade Secretary had long foreseen that the day would surely come when London would claim to have the H.Q. Office of The Boys’ Brigade. It went without saying, he added, that when one spoke of removing H.Q. it really meant removing Mr. Smith, and he asked the Council to endorse the Executive unanimous resolution to move Brigade Headquarters to London. Though the meeting was in Glasgow, English Officers predominated, and the Glasgow officers took little part in the discussion, as they felt that they were naturally biased. The opposition to the proposal to remove to London came mainly from Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North Midlands. After discussion, the proposal was defeated, much to the surprise – and gratification – of the Scotsmen.

None was more surprised by the Council’s decision than Smith himself. At camp that summer he had told the boys that this would probably be his last camp as their Captain; and they were nearly heartbroken. So, too, was he at the thought of the impending separation from the company he loved and was so proud of. But he never hesitated, nor sought in any way to influence the decision. If it was thought that in London he would be more useful, he was ready to make the sacrifice. It would not be the first nor the second he had made for the Brigade. He had been offered a very important post in Glasgow at a high salary – a post for which he was peculiarly fitted, and which would have appealed greatly to him but for the B.B. He declined even to consider it. The Brigade needed him more.

Three months later the matter of an office for companies in London and the Home Counties was again considered at a conference of London and District officers, and a scheme was submitted. Smith was invited to attend, and he commended the scheme as a thoroughly practical one. Offices were taken at 34 Paternoster Row, and Roger S. Peacock was appointed Secretary of the London Council.

The Brigade suffered a very heavy loss in March, 1897, by the death of Henry Drummond, its most able and influential protagonist. The thousands who flocked to hear him preach, and the hundreds of thousands who read his books, felt the magnetism of his buoyant nature and the glowing fervour of his religious faith. And this influence had an undoubtedly great effect upon both officers and boys of the Brigade, inspiring them to aim at the highest. His death was the loss of a great leader.

In the year 1898, the then Duke of York graciously consented to accept the position of Patron of the Boys’ Brigade; and in June, 1902, in connection with the Coronation of King Edward VII., His Royal Highness, as Prince of Wales, reviewed some 12,000 boys drawn from the B.B. and its
“offspring,” on the Horse Guards’ Parade. This was probably the greatest parade of disciplined boys that had ever been assembled.

The Prince, accompanied by Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, and other distinguished officers, rode round the ranks, and, on his return to the saluting base, the boys marched past. The Boys’ Brigade had the place of honour as senior Brigade, and the first Battalion was led by the 1st Glasgow Company. At the conclusion, Smith, Alston, and other leading office-bearers were presented to His Royal Highness, who expressed his pleasure with all he had seen, and his interest in the good work being done for the boyhood of the country. That interest had been maintained and to-day Him Majesty King George is still Patron of the Brigade.

The Prince of Wales (now our gracious Queen) drove to the review in an open carriage, accompanied by her three eldest children, the present Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and Prince Mary.

The London Annual Demonstration in May had been held first in Exeter Hall, and then in the larger Queen’s Hall. In May, 1901, the London men, with admirable courage, decided to take the Royal Albert Hall for the event. It was a big thing to face, but enterprise was justified by results.

Though Smith was always present at the London Displays, he could rarely be prevailed upon to make a speech. However, in 1899, Lord Aberdeen insisted, and the Founder was received with a mighty outburst of cheering. After congratulating the London Companies on their splendid turn-out, he went on to explain how the B.B. training appeals to boy nature and makes the best use of its characteristics.

“An observant student of boy nature,” he said, “has pointed out that about the age of twelve, boys develop a strong propensity to form themselves into groups or gangs, which exert a great influence over the boys composing them. Among the outstanding characteristics of this stage of boy life is an intense loyalty to his own gang, with a corresponding enmity towards all other gangs. For the sake of his gang a boy will do what he would never think of doing on his own account. He will steal when he has no desire for the article stolen; he will tell lies in order to shield his gang. Another characteristic is an intense admiration of physical strength, athletic prowess, and deeds of courage and daring. There is also developed a marked recognition of leadership and an unswerving loyalty to his leaders. The best fighter is chosen to lead the gang in their fights with other boys; the best football player is made captain of the football team; the boy who unites in himself most of the required qualities is the acknowledged head of the gang.

“Now, it is just this natural propensity which The Boys’ Brigade seizes hold of. It first turns it to good account, and then seeks to enlarge the scope of it. It does this by forming the boys into companies, under Christian men who sympathise with boy nature, and to whom the boys can look as their trusted leaders. In the company they are banded together by drill and discipline, which lays the best groundwork for a wholesome moral and religious training. In connection with the companies are formed football, cricket, swimming, and other sports dear to every healthy boy’s heart, while the Bible Class, in which the same esprit de corps is maintained, forms the copestone of the whole.

“Then the group of companies is formed into a Battalion, and the boy learns that as his company forms part of the Battalion, so the Battalion is part of the Brigade, and the Brigade itself is part of the great army which is fighting for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom in the world. Thus a boy is led to recognise that the love of God and the service of humanity in the spirit of Christ is the ultimate manifestation of that loyalty to his company with which he began.”

The heaviest loss the Brigade had yet suffered befell on the 7th May, 1904, when Thomas W. Cuthbertson died at the age of 35. He was Smith’s right-hand man – the young friend whom any
piece of work, however delicate or difficult, could be entrusted in the fullest confidence that it would be carried through with tact and thoroughness—a man of most happy and friendly temperament, endowed with many talents, including the great gift of humour to an outstanding degree. He was a member of Headquarters Committee (the inner “Cabinet”), Hon. Treasurer of the Brigade, and also editor of the Gazette, and it was as “Editor” that he was best known and loved. At the close of a day of field manoeuvres with his volunteer regiment his horse bolted as he was re-mounting for the march home; he was thrown, and died without regaining consciousness.

In September of the same year, while Brigade Council was meeting at Newport, and celebrating the Coming of Age of the Brigade, the Rev. J. R. Hill, who helped the Founder to start the pioneer Company, and was the first Lieutenant of the movement, died at his home in Dumfriesshire.

The attainment of the Brigade’s Majority in 1904 was marked at the Annual Meeting by the gift to the Founder of a cheque and an inscribed inkstand. The presentation was made in the Park of Lord Llangattock by the Earl of Aberdeen.

“This incident,” said Smith, in acknowledging, “seems to me strikingly illustrative of the text, ‘Whosoever hath, to him shall be given,’ for I have received more credit that I deserve in forming the B.B. Many an officer has started and carried on his company with far greater sacrifice that myself. I can say this, that I know of nothing better than the B.B. for bringing out all that is best in men.”

In December a great gathering of ex-members of the Glasgow Battalion was held in St. Andrew’s Hall, and a gold watch, subscribed for in sixpences and threepences by those who had passed through the ranks, was presented to the Founder. It was some time before Smith could obtain a hearing when he had risen to reply. On his advancing to speak, the entire audience rose and met him with continuous cheering. It was only after these men who had become boys again had expended their energies in the song appropriate to the occasion that the Old Boys could be prevailed upon to resume their seats. This proof of affection touched Smith deeply.

“I am sure you will believe me,” he replied, “when I say that in all my life I never felt quite as I do at this moment. This most unexpected gift from the ex-members is one that would touch any man’s heart, and I thank you with all my heart for your kindness. It has been said that a prophet has no honour in his own country, and, without claiming to be anything in the nature of a prophet, or in the slightest degree worthy of the honour bestowed upon me to-night, you will understand when I say that what makes this gift most valuable is the fact that it has been given to me by my old comrades in my own adopted City of Glasgow. And even more than I do on personal grounds I value the gift because it speaks to me of the love and loyalty which all who have taken part in it feel towards the Old Brigade. I cannot help wondering why it is that the Old Boys of the Battalion should have shown me this great kindness. I am sure that the vast majority of those who are here to-night were never known to me personally, perhaps never heard my voice except when giving them an order on parade, and the tone of voice in which such orders are given is not altogether suggestive of those feelings of affection which are usually associated with presentations. When I know there are Boys sitting here (for I still call them Boys) who in past years have found their austere Captain cutting them out of a prize for a whole year because they happen to be one minute late at the Bible Class on a Sunday morning, I begin to wonder still more why they should ever have thought of giving me this beautiful gift....

“No one can look at this vast gathering without realising the immense possibilities for good that lie within the reach of the Old Boys of the Brigade and how much they have it in their power to help forward the work among the generation which has succeeded them. It is true that over a thousand of them are now serving in the Brigade as officers, and over 1500 as staff-sergeants. It is not open to all to do this, but there is not one man present here to-night who has not got it in his power to do something for the Brigade which has done so much for him. After all, the
Brigade must be judged by the lives and characters of you men who have passed through it, and there are a hundred ways in which you can stand by us and strengthen us, by carrying out in your lives the principles you have learned in the Brigade. We look to you to keep the old flag flying, to stand firm for everything that makes for the welfare of your fellow-men, the order and good government of you great City, and the cause of righteousness and truth throughout the world.”

Twelve months after the accident that cut short the life, so full of hope and promise, of his friend Cuthbertson, Smith met with a similar mishap, happily without very serious consequence. On the 17th May, 1895, he was on duty with the 1st L.R.V. As he was mounting his horse – which, not being an officer’s charger, was excited by the crowd and band – it reared and fell back on him, breaking three ribs. First aid was given on the field, and he was taken to the Western Infirmary. Before being moved he pencilled a note to his son, Stanley, to reassure him and to give instructions.

On leaving the infirmary he was the guest of H. Arnold Wilson and Mrs. Wilson, in their hospitable house in Milngavie; and here he received the care and comfort that he had not known for years. For a man accustomed to control and direct his own affairs – and those of others – who, since childhood, had never been ill or incapacitated, it was a novel experience to be treated as an invalid, to have his activities restrained and his doings ordered. But he found it by no means an unpleasant experience, and he enjoyed that period of convalescence. The Wilson children were great favourites of his, and he vowed that he had been unfitted for his ordinary routine by being so spoiled. Being in excellent physical condition, he made a good recovery, and was able to resume work in August.

Six months after the accident, being determined to rid himself of any lingering nervousness, he rode the same horse at the great Volunteer Review by King Edward VII. in Edinburgh.
CHAPTER NINE

THE OFFSPRING OF THE BOYS’ BRIGADE

The success of William Smith’s experiment had become so striking that other Youth Movements on similar lines began to spring up at home and abroad. These acknowledged gratefully that it was from him they had received the inspiration, and that their methods were based upon his.

The first of these was the Church Lads’ Brigade. In the year 1890 Mr. W. M. Gee, Secretary of the Junior Branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, was attracted by the methods and results of the B.B. He suggested to Smith that the Brigade should provide a separate section for its Church of England companies. As this was not considered either practicable or desirable by Smith and the Church of England members of Brigade Executive, Mr. Gee started a Brigade composed exclusively of Anglican companies.

To-day, when leaders of the Churches are striving earnestly for a better understanding, a fuller sympathy, and a closer co-operation, it is not easy to understand the reason for splitting, and thus weakening, the forces fighting for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among Boys, especially as The Boys’ Brigade has always made it very clear that the authorities of a church to which a company is attached have full control of the religious instruction, and also the power to decide whether the company shall join in any joint Church Parade or Service. But forty years ago there was sharp political antagonism between Church and Chapel, at times with some bitterness one both sides. Undoubtedly the appeal of one greatest, united movement would have helped to bring about that better understanding and fuller sympathy which is now so much desired. It has been said by leading men of all the Churches that The Boys’ Brigade has done much to promote Unity of Spirit; and form the point of view of what might have been done, the cleavage is to be regretted.

Existing Church companies and officers remained faithful to the B.B. The Archbishops and many Bishops are among its honorary office-bearers, and the Church of England influence is very strong to-day.

Quickly following this came the establishment of the London Diocesan Church Lads’ Brigade, the Catholic Boys’ Brigade, and the Jewish Lads’ Brigade; in 1899, the Boys’ Life Brigade; and in 1908, the Boy Scouts.

THE BOYS’ LIFE BRIGADE. In the later years of the last century the Rev. John Brown Paton, D.D., of Nottingham, gave much thought to the “Boy Problem,” especially as it concerned the Church and Sunday School, and his conclusions were much the same as those of William Smith some years earlier.
Dr. Paton had taken a deep interest in the first B.B. Company formed in Nottingham, and also in the Company connected with Rugby School. He found, however, that many churches had the impression that some of the methods of drill employed by The Boys’ Brigade might be misunderstood as tending towards militarism. Dr. Paton himself had no such apprehension. He had seen the results of B.B. training at close quarters, and was satisfied that not only was there no such tendency, but that the B.B. was doing a great work in promoting Christian Manliness. “I do not object to the military forms of The Boys’ Brigade,” he said, “but it is useless to ignore the fact that many people do.” For these people, he sought something that might be worked on lines similar in most respects to those of the B.B., and yet sufficiently different to allay such fears.

While he was still considering the matter a “Life Brigade” for Boys was started in 1897 in a Sunday School Union in 1899. He was a great power in that organisation, and used his influence to persuade them to adopt the idea. Dr. Paton then proceeded to found and organise The Boys’ Life Brigade, which soon became an effective National movement, of which he was the first President. Its avowed objects were,”... To lead our boys to the service of Christ; to train them for an active, disciplined and useful manhood; to promote habits of self-respect, obedience, courtesy and helpfulness to others, and all that makes for a manly Christian character.” These object were sought chiefly by means of drill, with instruction and exercises, in the saving of life from fire, from drowning and from accident.

The badge of the B.L.B. consisted of a crown (symbolising the Crown of Righteousness) and the Red Cross, with the motto, “To Save Life.” The accoutrements worn by the members consisted of a cap, belt and haversack, the two former bearing the badge of the Brigade.

Upon union in 1926 between The Boys’ Brigade and The Boys’ Life Brigade, the Anchor of the former was combined with the Cross of the latter to form the emblem for the united organisation.

THE BOY SCOUTS. The Boys’ Brigade had been in existence for about twenty-five years when the best known of all its progeny was born. Major-General Baden-Powell, a distinguished supporter of the Brigade, was interested in its methods; he has ideas also of his own. He has written of those days in a message of congratulation to the Brigade on its Jubilee.

It was my privilege to inspect The Boys’ Brigade at Glasgow on their twenty-first birthday, when the total strength of the Brigade was 54,000. On that occasion Sir William Smith suggested to me the idea of re-writing my little book for training soldiers for service called “Aids to Scouting,” so as to apply to boys training for good citizenship. So I wrote Scouting for Boys, intending it mainly for use in the Brigade. But so many boys outside any organisation took up the idea, that it became necessary to organise them as the Boy Scouts. Thus we in the Scout owe much to The Boys’ Brigade. Both movements work to the same end, if by slightly different roads, so there is every reason for them to work in closest harmony and mutual co-operation for the greater good of boyhood generally. The aim of
The Boys’ Brigade is to promote Christ’s Kingdom on earth; the thought of this cannot fail to inspire all its members to fresh effort.

It the Gazette of June, 1906, appeared an article on Scouting for Boys. Smith’s introductory note read:

General Baden-Powell has for many years taken a keen interest in all that concerns the welfare of boys, and it would be difficult to exaggerate the influence for good which he has exerted over the youth of our nation.

He has recently placed at our disposal the manuscript of a paper on Scouting for Boys which seems to have in it the possibility of so much helpful interest, that we are glad to publish the following extracts.... These are sufficient to show that this method of interesting and instructing Boys is open to endless development along the lines indicated.

The next year “B.P.” gave lectures on the subject in many towns, and had an experimental Boy Scout camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour. In 1908 Scouting for Boys was published, and the movement that has become world-wide was in being. The Girl Guides movement soon followed, and the influential support it received from the start enabled it to attain success so rapidly that it soon outgrew the older organisations for girls.

THE GIRLS’ GUILDRY, founded in 1900, was the pioneer movement of its kind for girls. It was organised by a B.B. officer, Dr. W. F. Somerville, of Glasgow, who received both encouragement and practical help from Smith.

“We have often been asked,” he wrote in the Gazette, “if it would not be a good thing to start a Girls’ Brigade on the lines of the Boys’ Brigade, to do for the girls what the B.B. does so well for boys. We have always replied that while there is abundant room for some such organisation it would be fatal to its success to attempt to run it too much on the lines of The Boys’ Brigade.” He commended the Guildry to all churches that had B.B. Companies.

THE GIRLS’ LIFE BRIGADE was formed by Dr. Paton in 1902 as a sister movement to the B.L.B. in the Sunday School Union, its aims and methods being similar. Like the Girls’ Guildry, it has been found very helpful in keeping girls attached to the Sunday School and church, but in contrast with that movement, it is strong in England, and not in Scotland.

The extension of The Boys’ Brigade to the British Dominions overseas and the United States has been mentioned. A Danish Boys’ Brigade, with the title, Frivilligt Drenge Forbund (Voluntary Boys’ Organisation) was started in 1902 by Mr. Holger Tornoe, who came into touch with the B.B. while on a visit to Glasgow, and was much impressed with what he saw there. With the idea of starting something on similar lines in Denmark, he called on Mr. Smith, and at the close of the interview he was convinced that it could be done.

Tornoe formed the first unit of the F.D.F. in Frederiksberg, a suburb of Copenhagen, and the movement soon spread to other cities. A national organisation was formed, on sound B.B. lines in essentials, but adapted to Danish conditions. The F.D.F. proved itself a healthy, truly religious movement, which lived up to its motto: “With God for Denmark’s Youth.” It was warmly welcomed and taken up by the National Church, and has become the most powerful organisation for boys in the country. It has always been bound to the B.B. by strong ties of brotherhood; its delegates sometimes attend the Brigade Annual Meetings, while parties of
officers and boys of the B.B. and F.D.F. exchange visits, take part in camps, and explore each other’s country, assured of a glad hospitality.

From its early days The Boys’ Brigade has interpreted in no narrow sense its Object, “The Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among Boys,” and companies have been formed at Mission Stations in Africa, India, and China. In the first volume of the Gazette the Founder wrote: “We can imagine nothing more in harmony with our Object, nothing more calculated to keep our work on sound Christian lines, than to awaken in our boys an intelligent interest in Foreign Missions.” Twenty years later, at a great meeting of the Church Missionary Society in the Agricultural Hall, Islington, Sir William received the first congratulations upon his knighthood. He had agreed to take the chair, and on that very morning the Birthday Honours were published. “Between five and six hundred B.B. officers and boys, plus several thousands of ordinary folk,” wrote the organiser of the meeting, “gave vent to their congratulations in three mighty cheers. It really was a wonder that the roof of the hall stood the strain. I have always looked back with much pleasure on my share in arranging what turned out to be the first opportunity to show public appreciation – though I am not at all sure that he was grateful at the moment.”

The Boys’ Brigade Missionary Auxiliaries owe their origin to three brothers, Drs. Herbert, Arthur, and Cecil Lankester, Captain and Lieutenants of the 13th London Company. In 1892 Arthur Lankester took charge of the C.M.S. Hospital in Amritsar, Punjab, and a year later two “B.B. Cots” were being wholly supported by B.B. boys. To-day the Boys’ Brigade Branch of the C.M.S. Medical Missions Auxiliary maintains more than fifty Cots in Asia and Africa. In addition, a “B.B. Hospital” has been built in Northern Nigeria, and is being entirely supported by the boys. Their annual contributions to the C.M.S. exceed £500.

There are also Boys’ Brigade Branches of the London, the Methodist, and the Baptist Missionary Societies, and the Lovedale and Kikuyu Missions of the Church of Scotland. Many companies also contribute to their “Own Missionaries,” or to assist B.B. companies in non-Christian lands; or, through Church and Sunday School, to the S.P.G. and other missions at home and overseas; and a goodly number of B.B. officers and old boys have gone forth into the Mission Field. (Since the above was written a B.B. Branch of the S.P.G. has been formed.)
CHAPTER TEN

SEMI-JUBILEE AND KNIGHTHOOD

By July, 1905, Lieut.-Colonel W. A. Smith (now Second-in-command of the 1st Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers, which he had joined as a private in 1874), had recovered sufficiently from the injuries caused in May by his riding accident to be able to take part in the camp at Tighnabruaich, where ninety officers and boys of the 1st Glasgow were under canvas. His officers saw to it that he did not play quite so vigorous a part as usual in the camp routine, or in the bathing, boating, fishing and hill-climbing that filled the week with interest and happiness. It was nineteen years since in this place he had initiated camping for boys, and in this summer of 1905 more than 12,000 B.B. boys were enjoying this ideal form of holiday.

On the 10th April, 1906, William Alexander Smith and Hannah Ranken Campbell were married in the Stevenson Memorial Church. The second Mrs. Smith (whose father was a cousin of the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman) was actively associated with the church, and was a teacher in the Sunday School in which The Boys’ Brigade had its origin. None of the numerous wedding gifts gave greater pleasure than those from the Company and from the Woodside Branch of the Y.M.C.A., which was largely composed of Old Boys of the 1st.

Members and friends of both families – between which there was a friendship of long standing – regarded the marriage as a very happy event, and Smith’s two sons welcomed their stepmother with warm affection.

The honeymoon was spent in the Lake District, and then the happy family life that had been broken off eight years before was resumed in the new home at 13 Belmont Crescent. The summer holiday at Glengariff and Killarney was a fortnight of unalloyed happiness for all four. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were present at the chief outdoor and indoor events of the following session – the Review of the Glasgow Battalion (by Field Marshal Sir George White) on the 28th April, 1907, and the Albert Hall Demonstration in London (Major-General Baden-Powell presiding) on the 2nd May.

Two days later they sailed from Liverpool in response to the invitation of General H. P. Bope, Commander-in-Chief of the United Boys’ Brigades of America. They visited B.B. displays, inspections, and public meetings in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington and many other centres, and had most gratifying receptions in every town. In Baltimore two of the officers were Old Boys of the 1st Glasgow, who greeted their captain with obvious pride; and in Pittsburgh two others came forward at the close of a meeting – “two whom I am glad to say I recognised both at first sight.” In Washington Mr. Bryce, the British Ambassador, secured an introduction to President Roosevelt, who “gave us a characteristically hearty reception, and spoke most enthusiastically of the admirable work the Brigade is doing for the boys of America.”

While very favourably impressed by the earnestness and keenness, and intensely grateful for the honours paid to him, he pointed out in the Gazette differences between their methods and ours, and doubted if some of these would make for permanent success.

William A Smith of The Boys’ Brigade by FP Gibbon
“If I venture now to make a few criticisms, it will be understood that these are offered from no want of appreciation of the officers and boys of America, but are rather an indication of the high opinion I have formed of their earnestness and capacity, and of my conviction that they will welcome any suggestions which may help them more fully to attain the purpose they have in view.

“I was struck with the tremendous variations in the matter of age. In some companies mere children of nine years were to be found, while I found so-called “boys” in the ranks of such mature age as to be able to refer to their wives. The minimum age should be placed at such a figure that the boys will feel it is a privilege to join, a privilege for which they have to wait... and I do not believe you can do much good to a young man if you continue to deal with him by methods that are applicable to boys. If you are to retain your grip of the boys, you must pass them out before they want to go.

“I am convinced that there is room for more simplicity and uniformity in both uniforms and decorations. Many ministers spoke to me of the great cost of running a Company.... I believe, therefore, that the B.B. would be much more readily taken up by the churches if it could be run on cheaper lines.... It was not unusual to see in one Regiment three or four distinct types of uniform. One obvious objection to this is that it opens the door to an unwholesome rivalry between Companies as to who shall have the finest uniform, and so introduces a spirit contrary to the best interests of the movement.

“With regards to officers’ uniforms, the same need for simplicity seems to exist. I think the line might profitably be drawn at the wearing of swords.... As to medals and decorations, I saw in some cases such a lavish display of these as must certainly have deprived them of all value in the eyes of the boys. The aim should be to make the boys feel that these are really worth striving for, and obviously their appreciation of them will be in direct proportion to the difficulty of winning them.

“I am convinced, too, that the Brigade in America would gain in public estimation if more discrimination were shown in the matter of adopting high military titles. I do believe there would be a very real gain in being able to feel that no man would have any inducement to become an officer for the sake of a fine uniform or a high-sounding title, or from any other motive than a love of boys and the desire to spread Christ’s Kingdom among them....

“But I am convinced that the spirit which animates the movement is the right one, and that the true purpose of the Brigade is being kept steadfastly in view.”

“In conclusion, I would express my deep indebtedness to General Bope for the generosity which made this visit possible, and for the kindness from all my brother officers which made it such a pleasure from beginning to end.”

Returning home at the end of June, Mr. and Mrs. Smith went to Tighnabruaich, where the 1st Glasgow camp was help as usual. Her health had not been satisfactory for some months past, and after camp they were looking forward to a restful holiday, when, in the early morning of the 29th July, she was suddenly taken ill, and died a few hours later. Though Smith had been worried about his wife’s health there had been no warning of the danger of a sudden collapse, and the tragic blow was wholly unexpected.

He took this second wrecking of happy wedded life with characteristic strength and steadfastness. He just went on with his work, guiding, encouraging, and inspiring young men to give the best that was in them, and only his sons and his very closest friends knew what it cost him to do this during that Brigade Session of 1907-08.

During that Session preparations were made to celebrate in fitting style the Semi-Jubilee of the founding of the 1st Glasgow Company. At the Company’s 25th Annual Inspection there were on parade 107 officers and boys, and great enthusiasm was aroused by the parade of 160 Old Boys, led by their own band, as they marched round the hall to the strains of The Boys of the Old...
Brigade. Colonel H. A. Ker, the original Inspecting Officer, was present, and was introduced to six of the Old Boys who had been in the ranks at the first Inspection twenty-four years ago.

It was fitting that the Annual Meeting of 1908, should be held in the city of the Brigade’s birth, and the arrangements made by the Glasgow Battalion were worthy of the occasion – though the weather was Glasgow’s worst, which is bad indeed. Officers came from all parts of the British Isles and there were delegates from Denmark and Cape Town, and representatives of the C.L.B., the Catholic Boys’ Brigade, and the Jewish Lads’ Brigade.

On Friday evening, 4th September, the Council were the guest of the Lord Provost (Sir William Bilsland, Bart.) and City Corporation, when a presentation was made to the Founder on behalf of the citizens of Glasgow and other friends of the Brigade. This took the form of a cheque for 1000 guineas, with “the wishes of the subscribers for his future happiness, and in recognition of his great work in the founding and subsequent guidance of the Brigade for twenty-five years.” “We admire you,” said the Lord Provost, “as the hero of The Boys’ Brigade, and join with the late Professor Drummond in regarding you as an inventor – of a sure system for forming the wild, intractable boy into the best specimen of boy-life.... The amount subscribed is £1,337 in sums ranging from half-a-crown to £50, and part of it will be expended in a portrait with a replica for the City Art Gallery.”

The portrait was painted by Alexander Roche, who was unable, owing to illness, to do the replica, and a second portrait was therefore painted by Fiddes Watt for the City. In accepting the gift on behalf of the Corporation, after it had been unveiled by the Lord Provost, the Senior Magistrate said that “there is no person whose portrait more deserves to adorn Glasgow’s wall of fame.”

The chief event of the Semi-Jubilee celebrations in Glasgow was the great Review in Queen’s Park by H.R.H. Prince Arthur of Connaught. In deplorable weather, the parade was a brilliant success. 10,528 officers and boys were formed up in fifteen battalions – probably the biggest organised turn-out of boys that had ever been seen. Smith was in command, and his eldest son, Stanley, as a Lieutenant in the 1st Glasgow, carried the Battalion Colour. The parade included some 4000 visiting boys from all parts of the Kingdom, and these were hospitably entertained by the Glasgow Battalion.

On Sunday morning officers attended a special service in the Cathedral, and in the afternoon a Church Parade was held in St. Andrew’s Hall, the preacher being the Ven. Archdeacon Sinclair, of London. In the evening Lord Guthrie presided over a Devotional Meeting and conference, at which the address was given by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who represented the Church Lads’ Brigade. After this, Mr. Holfer Tornoe spoke of the wonderful hold taken by the Brigade (the F.D.F.) in Denmark, where every town of any standing now had its Company or Battalion, and the strength was 5000. On behalf of the boys of Denmark he then made a presentation to the man whom they, too, regarded as their Founder.

The Rev. W. Mason reported on the Brigade in South Africa; Mr. Algernon Lesser spoke for the Jewish Lads’ Brigade; and Colonel Everard A. Ford for the London Diocesan C.L.B.; and Mr. H. B.
Bradish, Representative of the Catholic Boys’ Brigade, who had been unavoidably detained, wrote as follows:

“... During the many years I have worked among boys I have never come across any infallible system whereby to hold them absolutely, and safeguard them from all the evils that beset their terribly exposed youth; but the nearest to infallibility of all the systems, and far, far away beyond all the rest in value, and above all in results, is that of The Boys’ Brigade, to whose happy conception I owe most of my glowing moments in recent years, because of the harvest of good, straight, honourable men it has reaped.”

For all but a few of the Visiting Officers this memorable week-end closed with the excursion through the Kyles of Bute, and past the now historic camping-ground of the 1st Glasgow, to Arran, where the garden-party given by the Marquis and Marchioness of Graham at Brodick Castle was much appreciated, in spite of the weather.

The many events had been splendidly organised. The President (J. L. Ferguson), the Hon. Secretary (Andrew McClure) and officers of the Glasgow Battalion had indeed risen to a great occasion.

Notable as had been the great meetings and parades of the preceding days, the Social Gathering of some thousands of Old Boys on the Monday evening was the most striking tribute to the lasting influence of William Smith’s inspired experiment, and demonstration of the love in which he was held. The great St. Andrew’s Hall was filled with young and middle-aged men who had been boys in the Brigade, and who looked back upon those days with grateful affection. Not theories, not hopes or expectations, but results were there to crown the work of five-and-twenty years.

The Lord Provost spoke of the memorable week-end, of which this gathering formed the closing scene. The Earl of Aberdeen, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, said that this was a family party, not a public meeting; and on behalf of past and present members he presented to the Founder of the Brigade, “who is the man of this evening, the man of this week, as he has been for twenty-five years the man of the Brigade,” with a casket containing a cheque for four hundred guineas, and also an illuminated address and a life-size portrait of himself.

As Smith rose the vast audience rose, too, and deafening cheers resounded on every side. Much moved by the enthusiasm, yet preserving his habitual calm, Smith returned thanks in clear, straightforward sentences. It was characteristic of him at once to turn attention from himself and to bring in others to share the triumph. He called upon the Rev. J. B. Hill to stand up and receive an ovation; then upon seven of the original members of the year 1883, the cheer being renewed as each of these was named by his old Captain; and he referred in appreciative terms to the Rev. Dr. Reith, who had been the Company Chaplain from the beginning. His short speech closed with the words: “Every one of you ex-members has it in his power to do a great deal to extend the work; and surely there is no one present who can fail to be inspired in his life and conduct by the responsibility of having been a member of The Boys’ Brigade.”

In these various ways the members of Smith’s own Company, the ex-members of the pioneer Battalion, the Officers of the Brigade, the organisations that had sprung from The Boys’ Brigade,
and the city in which the movement had been founded combined to do honour and pay homage to “the Man who had discovered the British Boy.”

His Majesty King Edward VII. put the final touch to the celebrations at the close of the session by the bestowal of a Knighthood upon the Founder, to the great joy of many thousands of officers and boys.

Smith took it with innate modesty and calm. In his “Headquarters Notes” in the Gazette he never even referred to the honour. He treated it – and wished others to do the same – as a Royal recognition of the value to the nation of the work being done by Officers of the Brigade, of whom he happened to be the senior. But his brother-officers would not have this at all. He was the man who had made the B.B. – not merely the originator who had given birth to an idea, but the man who for twenty-five years had been the trusted leader and guide; the man who combined high ideals with sound workable ideas; the master whose clear sight had persuaded Brigade Council and Battalion Councils to turn from meretricious stunts and seductive schemes that might attract popular applause at the risk of lowering the standard of quality. “We place Sir William Smith,” wrote the spokesman of the Brigade, “in the very foremost rank of the King’s subjects who have merited honour by devoting their talent and their energies to the furtherance of the highest interests of the race.”

Smith was in camp at Tighnabruaich from the 16th to 24th July, 1909. As they disembarked, the senior lieutenant fell in the company while the Captain supervised the landing of the stores. An elderly gentleman, who had been waiting the arrival of the boat, at once went up to Stewart, shook his hand warmly, and congratulated him on the honour conferred upon him by His Majesty. Smith looked on with relish.

On the evening of the 21st he left camp for Buckingham Palace, and returned as Sir William on the morning of the 23rd, having been absent for one day and two nights.

To the boys and old boys of the company, to their parents and the people of North Woodside, he remained “The Captain,” not “Sir William”; and for long years after his death “The Captain” always meant the old Captain, his successor in command of the company being referred to as “Mr. Stanley.”

More than a thousand letters of thanks for congratulations were signed by his own hand, and it was noticeable afterwards that his signature was never quite the same as it had been.

He was the most punctilious of correspondents. Most of us who imagine we are overworked in a good cause are apt to assume that people will understand and make allowance. Sir William never excused himself. He knew what pleasure and encouragement the expression of a leader’s appreciation can give. A typical instance is told by an officer upon whom devolved unexpectedly all the work and worry in connection with an Annual Meeting. The Battalion secretary had been called abroad, and, though T —— was far from well, the responsibility was forced upon him. Smith, aware of the circumstances, arrived the evening before the meetings opened, and discussed everything with him until the small hours. The effect of his encouragement and example was that “when I left him I was fully resolved to forget everything but the meetings for
their very opportunity. A battalion. „We owe a debt of gratitude to your wife for so ungrudgingly sparing you for all these duties, which must have meant no small sacrifice for your wife and daughter. Will you thank them both for me?”

Smith appreciated fully the great part played in the B.B., and the sacrifices made by mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. He remembered how his own wife had given so freely to the cause, and he recognised the Brigade’s enormous debt to the women who deny themselves social pleasures, and spend lonely evenings, that their men-folk may be unhampered in their interesting duties, and who – in the background – do invaluable service for company and battalion. And he was not unmindful of the risk that young men may neglect their wider duties through being too absorbed in this fascinating form of social service. So he never let pass an opportunity to express his gratitude and show that he understood, and many an officer was very proud of the letter his wife received from the Chief.

Unfortunately only a very few of these letters are now available for quotation:

**August, 1910. (To friends who had conspired to lure him into a partial holiday by lending him their house in the country, within easy reach of Glasgow).**

> “Dear Mrs. Wilson, - This is Sunday evening, and I can’t get over the _funniness_ of being here, in full possession of Underfell, and not one of you about the place! And to think that we are to have a full fortnight of it. I can’t tell you what a treat it is.... We had a simply ripping afternoon at Lanark (an exhibition of flying). At one time there were seven in the air at once, and Radley broke the world’s speed record.”

> “We were well represented in the family pew this afternoon, and there was one awfully funny thing. Mr. Y. Spoke of the wonderful _heirship_ that God had conferred upon us. He said it was not for the individual, but for the _race_ that this _heirship_ was given. Of course the boys saw it at once, and I was in terror that it would get so funny that they would explode, for the more he went on about this wonderful _heirship_, the more appropriate everything seemed to Lanark yesterday....”

> “Poor old Jack has been wondering very much what has happened, and seems to be listening always for the children’s voices. But we are going to be friends....”

**December, 1912. (To the same).**

> “I feel I must take this chance of congratulating you on the success on Friday evening. It was most charming from beginning to end, and I never was at a dance where all seemed more thoroughly to enjoy it.... And now I am going to make a request, and that is to ask for one of the photos of the family group that I saw at Julia Sutherland’s to-day. I think it is a lovely picture, and I do hope I may get one.”

> “P.S. My love to M. for that last dance.”

The photograph was sent at once, and his letter of thanks ends with a subtle compliment to his hostess – “Some who have seen this family group said they never knew before that poor H. A. was a widower!”

_A Christmas letter to a little girl in Aberdeen, who sent an annual Christmas gift of her own making:_

William A Smith of The Boys’ Brigade by FP Gibbon
My dear Meta, - It was awfully kind of you to remember my weakness for your toffee, and Stanley and Douglas join me in warmest thanks. It is just the sort you can’t stop eating once you begin. I simply can’t resist it, so you must tell your father that if he hears of the Brigade Secretary being seriously ill, he will know the reason....

February, 1914. (To the fiancée of a B.B. Officer).

I have just had the pleasure of congratulating my good friend J. K. on the good news.... Although I am quite sure, from all I have heard of you, that I have good reason to congratulate him, I feel that it is much more easy, knowing him as I do, to congratulate you.

You have won the heart of one of the truest and kindest men I know, and I am very sure you will both be very happy.... Many and many a man is now a better and braver man because of J. K.... and he will be a still greater blessing when linked with one who will share his desire to serve God and be a blessing to his fellow-men.

At the wedding that followed, Smith poured confetti over the best man, with the remark: “It’s the only chance we shall ever get; I’ve lost all hope of ever seeing J. D. in the rôle of principal at one of these affairs.”
CHAPTER ELEVEN

DEATH OF THE FOUNDER

Soldier of God, farewell. Thy death doth cloud
Each sky where’er our flag blends with the blue
Above, aye, and where alien banners proud
Flutter aloft – in other lands they knew
Thy worth. To thee what honour can we pay
Upon whose vision burst the blaze of noon
Betokened by that feeble streak of day
Which saw thy small advance guard march, so soon
To be a host? – Afresh to consecrate
Our lives in service to the Church and State.

*Armstrong Barry.*

Early in 1914 the Executive appointed Sir William’s elder son to be Assistant Brigade Secretary. Stanley Smith had been born and bred in the B.B. atmosphere. On reaching the age of nineteen he was gazetted Lieutenant of the 1st Glasgow, and during his father’s frequent absences he had been given a large share of the Company responsibility. He had also had experience on Battalion Committees, and had taken an active part in the work of other institutions. In 1910 he became an Officer in his father’s old Territorial Regiment, and he had had a good business training in a large shipping office.

The appointment was heartily approved; and there were some who thought that greater pressure should have been brought to bear years ago to persuade Sir William to accept such help. For many years leisure hours had been unknown to him. Night after night, nearly all the year round, he would sit up until a very late hour writing letters and arranging his work for the next day, for correspondence was never allowed to fall into arrears. When away from home he would work in his bedroom long after his host had retired, and the week-ends at home were given up to the boys of his own company. It was bitterly regretted a few months later that the appointment of an Assistant had not been forced upon him long before. But until it was too late no one had fully realised how hard the strain had been.

On the 7th May, 1914, Sir William Smith attended the Albert Hall Demonstration, and was apparently in his usual good health, though one or two intimate friends thought he looked rather tired – which was unusual. Next morning he took part in committee meetings at the London Office, and, after lunch, in the full Executive meeting, at which his son was present for the first time. Soon after Lord Guthrie, Brigade President, had opened the meeting, I noticed – with some amazement, for he was so very sure in every word and action – that twice within a few minutes when leaning forward to dip his pen in the inkstand, Sir William bungled the first two attempts. Almost immediately after the second occasion he collapsed in his chair, and was unconscious. His old friend, Dr. Albert Morison, was instantly beside him, and in a very short time he was taken to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, close at hand. All possible was done, but he never recovered consciousness, and early in the morning of the 10th May the Founder of The Boys’ Brigade passed away, the cause of his death being cerebral haemorrhage. Both sons were by his bedside when he died.
Sir William was only in his sixtieth year, and there was no doubt that overwork was the cause of death. Hard though it always had been to convince him that he ought to consider himself while he saw a duty to be performed, we ought to have insisted at a much earlier date that he must be relieved of some part of the too heavy burden that he bore until he dropped.

The news came as a stupefying shock to thousands of men of all ranks, classes, ages and denominations throughout the British Isles and across the seas. Slowly they realised that they had lost and honoured leader and a dearly loved friend.

The mortal remains of him who had taught the nation to place a proper value upon its boyhood were taken from London on the night of Friday, 15th May, for interment in Glasgow on the following day. A memorial Service was held in St. Paul’s Cathedral prior to departure. On the morning of his stroke, Sir William had snatched a few minutes’ respite from a busy day to enter the Cathedral. He marked on its solemn beauty, and recalled the B.B. Services of former years. It was fitting that the memory of a truly national hero should be honoured in the National Cathedral, and it is doubtful if St. Paul’s has ever witnessed a more moving and impressive service than when crowded to its furthermost recesses by some 4000 boys, who were there to pay a last tribute to the Chief whom they revered.

The King had sent a warm tribute and a message of condolence to the Brigade, and many friends and B.B. Officers from all parts of the Kingdom attended the Service. After the Service the great congregation dispersed, but there still remained to be performed a duty which will be a sacred memory to those who took part in it. A small party proceeded to the little Chapel at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, where lay the body of the beloved leader, the coffin guarded by four sergeants, the covering flag half hidden beneath a mass of flowers. Prayer was offered, and then reverently eight Staff-Sergeants bore forth their burden. On their side walked the pall-bearers – Lord Guthrie, Brigade President, and seven leading Officers, followed by Stanley and Douglas Smith. Outside, in the darkness of the courtyard, waited the Guard of Honour, standing like statues – the boys of the 62nd London and the 3rd Enfield, the two Companies which a few days before had competed for the Daily Telegraph Shield with an added zest because they knew that the eyes of their leader were upon them.

Silently the cortege formed up, and passed through the Gothic arch that seemed appropriate to the impressiveness of the occasion. At the Slow March, the procession passed to Euston, where the West London Battalion provided a Guard of Honour. At midnight the train steamed out of the station, and in the small hours of the morning, as it passed through Rugby, the stillness of the night was broken by the haunting notes of the Last Post, sounded by a detachment of the 2nd Rugby, who had waited through the night to pay homage to the Chief.

The City of Glasgow was in mourning on Saturday, 16th May, and everywhere the flags were at half-mast. The College and Kelvingrove United Free Church, in which Sir William was an elder, could hold but a small number of the mourners. The front seats were given to members of the Company, and the rest of the church was filled by leading citizens of Glasgow and representatives of Battalions and Companies from England, Scotland and Ireland, and of the other movements for boys, which owed their inception to our Founder’s inspiration. The
service was conducted by the Rev. Dr. Reith, who had been Chaplain of the 1st Glasgow Company from its earliest days.

Companies composed of Sergeants and Staff-Sergeants preceded the Founder’s own Company in the funeral procession. The long route was lined by 7000 Officers and Boys of the Glasgow Battalion, with members of the Church Lads’ Brigade, Jewish Lads’ Brigade, Boys’ Life Brigade, the Boy Scouts, and boys from the Industrial Training Ship, Empress. It was a fitting avenue through which passed the man who had raised the status of boyhood, and each boy gave a last salute to his Hero.

After the committal service the boys of the 1st Glasgow filed reverently past, and every boy dropped a white flower into the open grave of him who had been not only his Captain but the true friend of boys throughout the world.
EPILOGUE

The story of a great life is ended. Few lives so potent in achievement and far-reaching in influence can have offered scantier material to a biographer.

Those who knew William Smith recall – across the years and across the valley of the shadow of the Great War – a strong and attractive personality, a leader who seemed indispensable. And they are surprised that his life should be lacking in varied, picturesque and dramatic episode.

But so it is. He found one job. It led him through a strait gate, along what may often have seemed to him a narrow way. “His cherished desire to take his wife for a holiday in Spain was never realised.” But he opened the doors to the vision of the Kingdom of God for a million boys.

“When anyone asked me,” said Lord Guthrie at the Memorial Service in Glasgow, “how he could get an idea, accurate and expeditious, of what The Boys’ Brigade stood for, I used to say: ‘Read our Motto and then go and take a good look at Sir William Smith.’ You can get that impression about him if you look at his photograph. There he stands, as we can scarce yet realise that we shall never see him again – virile, alert, masterful, yet so genial, so considerate, so tactful, so unaffected, so modest.”

His life, deliberately restricted and concentrated, ended as it seemed too soon. But the Brigade marched on.

To-day the harvest of his toil is greater than even he foresaw. The testimony to his wisdom stands in the growth and development of the Brigade. The war imposed upon it a testing strain. Its members responded to the call for service and sacrifice to the fullest extent, and the losses were grievous. Many promising young men who would have become leaders laid down their lives. The Brigade fell off in numbers; but at the end officers and old boys came back to help those who had carried on, or to re-start the old company which they loved now with a grateful understanding of all it had meant to them.

It was natural that after the common experience of suffering and realisation of essentials, the Old Brigade and the Boys’ Life Brigade should draw together. The story of their uniting has been told already. With it came an accession of strength.

And then the triumph of the Jubilee. Early in that year the Prince of Wales broadcast a characteristic appeal to the people for a spirit of service in difficult days. He said:

“You all know of The Boys’ Brigade. I was very interested to meet, on Wednesday, members of the original Company, founded fifty years ago by Sir William Smith.

“When he realised the needs of the boys around him, he set to and tackled the job himself. He did not wait for a scheme, nor did he appeal for a lot of money, but, because he had energy and imagination, other men and boys were soon infected by his spirit.”

“1933 is the Jubilee Year of The Boys’ Brigade, and over a million boys have been enrolled as members since its foundation. This is an inspiring illustration of what may grow out of a small individual service, and it should encourage us to make fresh ventures.”
As we close this story of the Founder’s life the events of the Fiftieth Birthday of The Boys’ Brigade are fresh in the memory. The generous acknowledgment by the other youth movements of their debt to one man; ineffaceable pictures of Royal Reviews on a vast scale; of Thanksgiving and re-dedication, in Cathedral, Church, and Chapel. And, everywhere, the Boy – the Boy to whom William Smith gave himself – eternally young, irresponsible as ever, inconsequent and merry, with infinite capacity for good and for evil.

We end the tale with words, written it that same year by the Rev. George F. Macleod, which surely would have been echoed by Sir William Smith.

“... If we must choose one word to comprehend that note of The Boys’ Brigade, the word is Discipline. It is a word that is in fashion and out of fashion with the regularity of a weather-gauge. Just before the War its currency fell on evil days... to be re-minted hurriedly to meet a national emergency. After the war how loud were the assertions that we must coin new principles, that everything was fallacious save “freedom.” The only movement, it was said, that would ever hold boys again must be free and easy. But in fair weather and in storm The Boys’ Brigade retained its constant note.

“How, now? It is surely a kindly stroke of providence that has wed this Jubilee to the moment when discipline is again in her ascendancy. Turn to any phase of life to‐day, and discipline is preached with the fervour of a discovery. The President of the Board of Education would appear to make it the burden of his every plea; rationalisation holds the business world in its vice; and in half the countries of the earth dictatorship is rule or half‐expressed desire.... And with so much counterfeit about, is it not a matter for great thanksgiving that our eyes are turned to the Movement that knows the secret of true minting?

“For its secret is very simple. Never once for fifty years has it forgotten that discipline is really discipleship; that our only dictator is one whose boyhood was in Nazareth. Truly, if we will let it, the movement meets the hour.”