

The Founder speaks of First Principles and Dangers

Fragmentary notes taken at a staff council that was held in January 1893

The Army history has been a series of changes and surprises. This is a sure sign of life. The egg becomes a caterpillar, the caterpillar a chrysalis, the chrysalis a butterfly, which produces in turn more eggs and caterpillars and chrysalises and butterflies. So we hail the new plans and prepare with heart and soul to give them a right royal reception. The following is a summary of the General's opening address at the last British Staff Council, which is likely to prove a turning point in the Army history.

The notes were roughly jotted down at the time and only give a bird's-eye view of what he said. The following were among his introductory remarks:

'Progress is tidal. There is a settling down tendency in human nature. If there is not a tide, we must make one.

'In the Church there is a flowing tide of worldliness. We must stem it. Our business is not to interest or to amuse the world, but to save it.

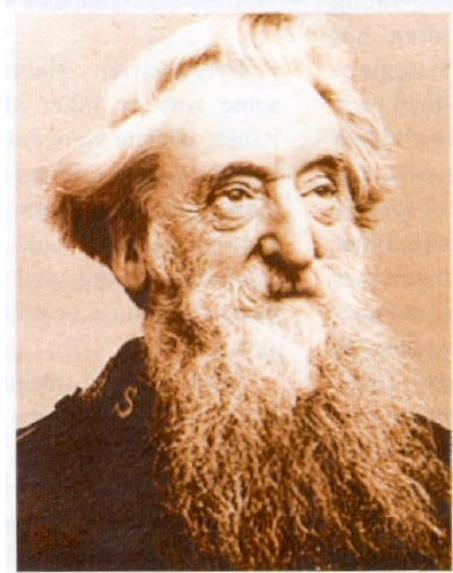
'There are other dangers of our own which must be looked into and remedied. By spreading out too rapidly, we have made some hard goes and have suffered losses. Again, we have weakened the Field to strengthen the Staff. There are many officers now on the Staff who should be in the Field.

'The foundation principles of the Army's teaching remain the same, and will do so to the end. They are in brief —

1. We can be forgiven.
2. We can be holy.
3. We must live to save others.

'These truths can only be worked out by means of —

1. Faith in God.
2. Hard work.
3. Sacrifice.
4. Discipline.



'The new plans I lay before you will not dispense with these essentials. There may be an easier way, but none better. These principles run through the Army like the veins through the body. If there be no other way, let us embrace this one, as I did myself when a boy 45 years ago.

'Rules and regulations are no use in themselves apart from the man. If we could keep you all like volcanoes in a perpetual state of eruption, we might dispense with them altogether. In Heaven I suppose there will be no commandments, either 10 or 12. There will be no need for them. But here they are necessary, not only for those who do wrong, but to prevent people from going wrong. They are like the lines upon which a train runs, like the water upon which a steamer floats. Think of trying to drag a steamer from Glasgow to London across the land! But put it on the water and it will come easily enough.

'I speak to you as your father, and want to warn you faithfully as to the dangers to which I see you to be exposed — the dangers which threaten to hinder the success and progress of our Army.

'1. The first great danger is Secularisation. We are in danger of becoming earth-worms, of being swallowed up in figures and business and returns. No hours with God, no flights of prayer, no going to Heaven over sinners saved.

'II. The second great danger is Stagnation. We are continually exposed to this danger of formality, and of sleeping with our eyes open.

'III. There is also the danger of Pride and Self-satisfaction. Few can stand promotion without being hurt by it, and losing the spirit of willingness to learn. A story is told of Lord Coleridge when a young man. The Master said to him, "Mr Coleridge, I have a high opinion of you, so has your tutor, so have we all; but none of us have so high an opinion of you as you have of yourself." I fear it might be said of some of us. It is a tendency against which we must guard ourselves.

'Dealing with root principles. I am going to deal with root principles. This has been largely the secret of my success in the past. I have laid them down and stuck to them. They are not many in number, and yet it is impossible to exaggerate their importance. There are only seven notes in music, and yet by a combination of them we are able to produce an infinite variety of exquisite harmonies.

'The time has surely come when I can speak to you with authority and expect you to follow me, even though you may not understand everything. I do not ask you to go against your reason, but I may ask you to go above and beyond it. My past history has proved to you that I am not a blind leader. I have led you to honour and success and to accomplish more than others. I do not say I have made no mistakes, but in looking back I am surprised to see how few they have been. I have not gone as fast as I ought to have, but I have gone faster than others, and a good deal faster than my friends have liked. I may possibly make mistakes in the future, but I think I have a right to demand your confidence by reminding you of the past.

'What is the use of a leader who does not go in advance of his people? It is nonsense to say we will not go beyond what we understand. You do not talk like that to your FO, nor the FO to his soldiers. You expect them to do as you tell them, because you are supposed to have superior intelligence and experience.

'Now I do want a continuation of your confidence, for I feel God has been wonderfully enlightening my intelligence of late.

'Have confidence in the future. You come here. I am your leader. I am not arbitrarily so. Neither am I a man of yesterday. Indeed I should be glad to slip out of the position. At times the burden of it seems heavier than I can bear. But I will stick to my post till God discharges me. I am perfectly sincere when I tell you that I never could understand what God saw in me to put me here. But when I see how He uses me, I encourage myself and think there must be something in me after all.

'There is not one of you in whose personal sorrows and struggles I do not feel an interest. I would like to go into them myself if I only had the time. I would like to go home to tea with each one of you, and help you mothers nurse the baby and share your troubles. I cannot bear to see you suffer, but I am unable to avoid it. I am determined to use you all to the utmost of God's work. I am going to get out of you all I can. A general is no good for his post who is not willing to see his soldiers suffer. And however good my plans may be, they will involve not less but more hard work, sacrifice, and discipline than in the past; but they will ensure, I believe, with your hearty cooperation, an abundant harvest of success.'

The above remarks occupied the first sitting of the Council. Needless to say that the stirring words of our beloved General moved us to tears, and to a fresh consecration of ourselves to God and the war.