

FOOTE GEORGE WILLIAM

SALVATION SYRUP; OR,
LIGHT ON DARKEST
ENGLAND

George Foote

**Salvation Syrup; Or,
Light On Darkest England**

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G. W. Foote

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Twenty years ago the Hallelujah Band spread itself far and wide, but soon spent itself like a straw fire. Then arose the Salvation Army, doing the same kind of work, and indulging in the same vagaries. These were imitations of the antics of the cruder forms of Methodism. Even the all-night meetings of the Whitechapel Salvationists, ten years ago, were faint copies of earlier Methodist gatherings, especially of those in Cornwall, which were described by the Rev. Richard Polwhele.¹ “At St. Agnes,” said this writer, “the Society stays up the whole night, when girls of twelve and fourteen years of age ran about the streets, calling out that they are possessed.” At Probus “the preacher at a late hour of the night, after all but the higher classes left the room, would order the candles to be put out, and the saints fall down and kneel on their naked knees; when he would go round and thrust his hand under every knee to feel if it were bare.” The Salvationists never went so far as this. Freaks of such description are left, in this age, to the followers of King Solomon in the Brighton Glory Hole. But a friend of ours, who visited an all-night Salvation meeting at Whitechapel in 1882, told us that the light was very dim, the voices were low, cheeks came perilously close in prayer, and at one moment the proceedings threatened to develope into a thoroughgoing love-feast.

As far as a more cultivated age would allow, the Salvation Army advertised and recruited itself by the familiar practices of what Professor Huxley calls “corybantic Christianity.” During the last six or seven years it has grown more decorous, but prior to that time its vulgarity was excessive. Its songs, its rowdy meetings, its coarse, imbecile language, its ludicrous street processions, were enough to furnish a Swift with fresh material for his indictment of mankind. The names of its officers, as reported in its journal, were curiosities to the student of human aberration. There was the “Hallelujah Fishmonger,” the “Blood-washed Miner,” the “Devil Dodger,” the “Devil Walloper,” and “Gypsy Sal.” Many of the worshippers of success who are now flocking around General Booth as a new Savior of Society, would be astonished if they were to turn over the old pages of the *War Cry*.

No one can pretend that “General,” Booth is a man of spiritual genius. He is essentially a man of business. His faculty is for organisation, not for the promulgation of new ideas or the creation of new material. His eye for a good advertisement is unequalled. Barnum forgot Booth in calling himself the greatest showman on earth. As the present writer said in 1882, the head of the Salvation Army is “a dexterous manager; he knows how to work the oracle; he understands catering for the mob; in short he is a very clever showman, who deals in religion, just as other showmen deal in wild animals, giants, dwarfs, two-headed sheep, fat women, and Siamese twins.”

Everything in the Salvation Army is subordinated to “business.” At the head-quarters a minute register is kept of all the officers. Few of them are paid a regular salary. They are largely dependent on “results.” Whatever their faculty may be for “saving souls,” they must rake in enough shekels, or they are drafted from post to post, and finally discharged. On the same principle, Booth has married his family “well,” as the world calls it, and put them into all the higher posts.

By this means he secures a select circle of trusted subordinates, who convey his orders to the lower circles of the Army, and see to their execution. While this plan lasts there will be no dangerous mutiny; especially as, in addition, the whole of the Army’s property is held in the name of William

¹ Anecdotes of Methodism.

Booth. There is, in fact, a Booth dynasty; though it may be doubted if the dynasty will long outlast its founder. Certainly his death will cause changes, and his empire will probably split up like Alexander's.

Eight years ago the General's eldest son was married to a young lady of "great expectations," who joined the Booths against her father's wishes. With a keen eye for business, the General resolved to turn the marriage into a public show. Of course, the legal ceremony had to be performed elsewhere, but the Salvation performance came off at the Army's biggest meeting-place. The price of admission was a shilling a head, and £300 was taken at the doors. A collection was also made inside. During the speech of "Commissioner" Railton, an able man who has had an eccentric career, the crowd began to press towards the door. "Stop," cried Booth, "don't go yet, there's going to be a collection." But the audience melted faster than ever. Then the General jumped up, stopped Railton unceremoniously, and shouted, "Hold on! we'll make the collection now."

During the farcical marriage ceremony the General was duly facetious. His remarks tickled the ears of the groundlings. There was also the usual spice of blasphemy. Before Bramwell Booth marched on to the platform a board was held up bearing the inscription,

"Behold the bridegroom cometh."

Begging letters were sent out by Commissioner Railton, though cheques were to be "payable to William Booth, as usual." It was sought to raise a good sum, not for Bramwell personally, but to reduce the Army's debt of £11,000. The printed slips were headed,

"Wedding Presents to Mr. Bramwell Booth," who was stated to have worked so hard for the Army that his hair was grey at twenty-seven. But the piety was properly mixed with the business, and subscribers were told that their cash would not only gladden the hearts of the Booths, but "make the devil tremble," and "give earth and hell another shock."

This experiment was so successful that the General has repeated it on several occasions. But he carried indecency to the point of disgustfulness at the funeral of Mrs. Booth. The poor lady's corpse was dragged hither and thither by the inveterate old showman. It was brought up from Clacton-on-Sea and exhibited to the public at Clapton. Collection boxes were well in evidence, and although there was no charge to see the corpse, there were significant hints that a trifle was expected. Then the corpse was removed to Olympia, the scene of Barnum's triumphs. No effort was spared to secure a great success. Officers were ordered up from all parts of the kingdom. The rank and file of the Army were also invited, and tickets were available for any number of outsiders. With regard to the performance, we must remember that tastes differ. But one portion of it was calculated to shock every person with any delicacy of feeling. Booth and his kindred stood up to sing around the coffin the hymn they sang around Mrs. Booth's death-bed. The performers seemed to say, "Ladies and Gentlemen, you were not present when we sang your mother to glory, but just look and listen, and you will see how it was done."

For a third time the corpse was shifted to Queen Victoria-street. Unlimited advertising brought a tremendous crowd of sight-seers. Booth headed the procession, followed by the Booth dynasty, and all of them bowed and smiled to the cheering multitude.

Even in a funeral coach the Grand Old Showman had an eye to business.

Such being General Booth's attitude towards the public, what is his attitude towards the Salvation Army? Any one who reads his "Orders and Regulations" will see that he has his cattle well in hand, and not only can drive them where he pleases, but flick them smartly on any part with his long-reaching whip. He subjects them absolutely to his persona! despotism. Every part of his soldiers' lives is regulated. They must court and marry within the ranks. "Should a soldier," he says, "become engaged to an officer who afterwards gives up or forfeits his or her commission, the soldier would be justified in breaking off the engagement." The General wishes to *breed* Salvationists. He tells them what to eat and what to wear. He informs them that they are only passengers through this world. "Though still living in the world," he says, "the Salvationist is not of it, and he has, in this respect no more business with its politics – that is, the public management of affairs – than he has with its

pleasures.” When the General wants his soldiers to vote or act politically, he will issue a manifesto, and every one is then expected to “act in harmony with the rules and regulations laid down for him by his superior officers.” These superior officers, who take *their* orders from General Booth, must be perfectly obeyed, for “they have the Spirit of God, and will only command what is right.”

Now it is well to remember all this in discussing General Booth's new scheme of social salvation. He insists on retaining absolute command of all the funds, and on working the whole scheme through the Salvation Army. All who assist him, therefore, are helping to promote the development of a vast body of religious fanatics, under the despotic control of a single man, who will not scruple, when it serves his purpose to, use his voluntary slaves, for political as well as social objects. For General Booth has his own notions – crude as many of them are – and it is not in human nature to refrain from using power for the realisation of one's ideas. And Pope Booth is more absolute than Pope Pecci. The Vicar of Christ at Rome is unable to move without his Holy Council of Cardinals; but the Vicar of Christ in Queen Victoria-street, London, is the unchecked and irresponsible ruler of the whole Salvation Army.

General Booth's success as an organiser is great, though he has had a comparatively easy task in organising *sheep*. Now, however, he proposes to deal with the *goats*. Some of his scanty leisure has been devoted to studying the social question, and as the interest in the Army's old methods is obviously declining, he proposes to raise a million of money, and reform that part of the population which John Bright called “the residuum.” In other words, the wily old General has launched a new boom.

Plaudits are heard on nearly every side. The religious bodies give him the homage of fear. They shout approval because they dare not show hostility. Next come the mob of cheap philanthropists. This consists of rich ladies and gentleman, who feel twinges of remorse at living sumptuously while others are starving, and who are ready to pay conscience-money to any social charlatan. When they have written out a cheque they feel relieved. “On with the dance, let joy be unconfined.” But it is not thus that the spectre of poverty and misery will be laid.

Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as by want of heart.

If the so-called lower classes are to be elevated, the so-called upper classes will find they will have to do some *thinking*. Social knots cannot be cut, they must be untied. The Sphinx says you must *read* her riddle. All the money-bags in the world will never smooth her terrible brow.

General Booth's scheme of social salvation is before the world in the form of a book. Let us examine the prophecy of this would-be Moses of the serfs of poverty and degradation.

An ordinary author would sign himself “William Booth,” but this one is “General” even on a title-page. In *Darkest England* is an obvious plagiarism on Stanley, and *The Way Out* is suggested by his long travel through the awful Central African forest.

In the preface General Booth acknowledges the “valuable literary help” of a “friend of the poor, who, though not in any way connected with the Salvation Army, has the deepest sympathy with its aims, and is to a large extent in harmony with its principles.” The friend is Mr. Stead. This gentleman has “written up” the scheme in the manner of “the born journalist,” that is, in the fashion of the *Modern Babylon* and the adventures of Eliza Armstrong. He contributes the descriptions, the gush, the hysterics, the sentences crowded with adjectives and adverbs. Sometimes he writes a whole chapter, unless our literary scent misleads us; sometimes he interpolates the General, and sometimes the General interpolates Stead. One result of this twofold authorship is that the book is twice as big as it should be; another result is that it often contradicts itself. For instance, the General states in the preface that he has known “thousands, nay, I can say tens of thousands,” who have proved the value of *spiritual* means of reformation, having “with little or no temporal assistance, come out of the darkest depths of destitution, vice, and crime, to be happy and honest citizens and true sons and servants of God.” Elsewhere (p. 243) he speaks of them as “multitudes.” Yet in the very next paragraph of the

preface Mr. Stead (if we mistake not) breaks in with the assertion that “the rescued are appallingly few,” a mere “ghastly minority.”

This little contradiction may throw light on the rumor that Booth has been urged into this scheme of temporal salvation. Once upon a time he was down on “Commissioner” Smith, whose tendencies in this direction were obtrusive; and how long is it since he wrote in the new Rules and Regulations, that the members of the Salvation Army had nothing to do with the world, its politics, its business, or its pleasures? The hand is the hand of Booth, but the voice seems the voice of Stead.

Here is another contradiction, and this time a vital one. The General curls his upper lip (p. 18) at those “anti-Christian economists who hold that it is an offence against the doctrine of the survival of the fittest to try to save the weakest from going to the wall, and who believe that when once a man is down the supreme duty of a self-regarding Society is to jump upon him.” Without dwelling on the fact that this is a shocking and perfectly gratuitous libel, probably meant to pander to Christian prejudices, we content ourselves with drawing attention to a contradictory declaration (p. 44) that “In the struggle for life the weakest will go to the wall, and there are so many weak. The fittest, in tooth and claw, will survive. All that we can do is to soften the lot of the unfit and make their suffering less horrible than it is at present. No amount of assistance will give a jellyfish a backbone. No outside propping will make some men stand erect.” Thus the General, or Mr. Stead, joins hands with the “anti-Christian economists” in the doctrine that it is useless to try to save the weakest from going to the wall. Of course he does not endorse the policy of jumping on them, but that policy is merely a production of his own pious imagination.

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