



The
William Booth
Collection

CAPTAIN SOUNDINGBRASS

The Officer, February, 1893. Vol. 1.

I. *He was a very straightforward, honorable Officer.* I never remember him being charged with doing anything off the square. From the day he entered the Training Home, his truthfulness was never impeached. No one ever thought of him as tricky in his dealings, or as being guilty of dodging or misrepresentation in the accounts he gave of his work. No, he used to boast that his Christianity was founded on "doing right." His favorite texts and principal preachments and most frequent conversation ran on these lines.

There was no mistake about his example either in this direction, for he honestly strove to practice all he preached. He labored to let his light shine before his Lieutenant and his Corps and the people about him, and wherever he came short, or thought he did, in fulfilling the principles of inward and outward holiness as he understood them, he lashed himself without mercy and groaned in spirit until he felt he was forgiven.

As it may be expected, he preached and prayed and sung and talked righteousness to all about him. Some of his addresses were truly terrible. He was verily a second Moses, not only dealing in the Commandments, but freely consigning all to perdition here and hereafter who transgressed them. And yet, when he had done all, poor man, so far as the results of his labor went, he was only a Soundingbrass.

II. *He was an excellent talker.* Some said he was really eloquent, nay they dignified him by describing him as an orator. He certainly could pour forth flowery language and stirring appeals, and quote Scripture, and tell anecdotes, and make illustrations, and give arguments proving beyond question what everybody believed. In fact, he was quite a sermonizer. It is true that some ill-natured people said that some of his best speechifications were got from Talmage, or Beecher, or Parker, or some other celebrities of that description, but, none the less, they made a great sound and a considerable impression at the moment on those who heard them, and many of the Soldiers said he was the best preacher they ever had at their Corps. His fame in this respect spread abroad beyond the barracks, and some of the local preachers of the neighborhood used to come to hear him when they were off duty; and it is reported that a Minister on one occasion said it was a shame he should be a Salvation Army Officer; that if he were sent to college even now he would make quite a respectable Minister



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for a village congregation. And it is further reported that offers were made to him in this direction; but I don't know how far this is true, or whether there was anything in them beyond the talk of the moment. Still, he certainly made the people listen and admire, but, alas! they went away much as they came, for after all, he was nothing more than Soundingbrass.

III. *He was musical.* He played two or three instruments and was always at a great deal of trouble with the Bands. If I am not mistaken, he composed several tunes for the "Musical Salvationist." True they were sentimental things, that never brought the glory down, but he thought a great deal of them, and so did his friends, just because they were his composition. But that on which he prided himself the most, and in which his admirers boasted the loudest and longest, was his soloing abilities, for he could sing and no mistake. He had naturally a good voice, and he knew how to manage it. On the sly he had obtained a few instructions from a professional singer, and became quite scientific on two or three of his favorite tunes - not that this improved or made them any more effective in getting at the hearts of either saints or sinners. Just the contrary, I fancy. Still, they sounded fine and artistic, so he liked them.

Nevertheless, there were no two opinions about the Captain's abilities as a singer amongst the class of people who reckoned themselves judges of music. The organist of the Episcopal Church is reported to have said, after hearing him on one occasion, that his talent ought to be educated; and the leader of a Nonconformist choir in the neighborhood said he should like to have him as a member of his choir. That was no small thing to say, was it, seeing that this choir had quite recently obtained the second prize in a singing contest at a neighboring city? But I say again, there was no denying the fact that the Captain was a capital singer, and yet, properly weighed up as a Salvation Army Officer, and justly described, he could not be said to be anything more than Soundingbrass.

IV. *He was a hard worker.* I am sure that in this respect, of all the Captains that I have known, there have been few that have surpassed him Morning, noon and night he was at it. Week-days and Sundays. He knew no rest, wanted no rest. I have thought, sometimes, he hated the word "rest". He worked at his Forms and Correspondence and his Visitation. Of the latter he did I know not how many hours. Then there were his Open-air and Processions and Indoor-meetings and everything else that came within the circle of his duty. Moreover, he made



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everybody else work about him, for woe to the Lieutenant, or Sergeant, or Bandsman, or Soldiers that had anything to do with him that did not like work! He drove them to their duty like cattle. And yet, with all his doings and perspirations and risings up early and going to bed late - in short, in spite of his life of slavery - he was only as a good big sheet of Soundingbrass.

V. He was very zealous. His energy was tremendous. He was always ready for a new departure - he liked doing new things - he rushed here and there and everywhere. He shouted and stormed and stamped, and shook down platforms, loosened the rails, slapped the desk - when there was a desk to slap - clapped his hands, and made everybody else shout and clap and slap and sing choruses and fire volleys; and yet, when all was over and the results were counted, it was felt that the whole thing, the Captain into the bargain, was simply Soundingbrass and nothing more.

VI. In some respects he was a Salvationist, and a very pronounced one indeed. Everybody that knew him knew this. He made it known on the housetops. He was well versed in the Regulations, especially those with which he more particularly agreed, and woe to all who departed from them! He had only one law for the strong and the weak alike. He knew no pity or excuses for any who did not keep "the Commandments," especially those which he gloried in. Circumstances were never considered in his judgment. Still, he admired and believed in The Salvation Army, and stood to it in a most wonderful manner, and yet with it all he was only Soundingbrass.

Now, it will be seen that my Captain was a wonderful man - a very remarkable man. Such a one as is not to be seen every day. Far from it. He belonged to a class, so far as the qualities I have described go, who are scattered all too thinly up and down the world. I never met him in Congresses, Councils, Demonstrations, Two Days, or in private, that I did not find something to admire in him, that I did not long after him, that I did not see what marvelous possibilities of blessing to men and glory to God there were in him. Perhaps he was not all that I have described, but a great deal of it, and yet, with it all, I was forced to the reluctant conclusion that he was little more than Soundingbrass.



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He was a machine. Complicated, capable. A wonderful machine, with revolving wheels, pistons, rods, cylinders, and I know not what. Wonderful in combination and in working, and in fizzing and whizzing and whirling and storming, and yet a machine and nothing more.

About him there was a want - a great want. Many felt it at the first sight of him, and knew what it was that was absent, while others felt there was something needed, not knowing what it was that was missing. Others, who were blind, did not perceive either -

THAT WANT WAS A TENDER "HEART."

He could do, as we have seen, almost anything but one thing. He could not, or he did not, or he would not, love. He was almost, or altogether, without that affection and compassion and charity which, with all his gifts and labors, left him nothing better than Soundingbrass.

He could scold his Soldiers, and show how they were to blame for all the poverty and difficulties of the Corps, the hardness of the sinners, and the damnation of souls, and for every trouble there was about them; but he could not love them.

He could sermonize, and make endless addresses, and shut out every other man and woman from having a chance to speak. He could point out the weaknesses and wickednesses and shortcomings of everybody round him. He could do almost everything with the troubles and sins and sorrows of the Army and the wide world

EXCEPT WEEP OVER THEM,

and as a result, little or nothing happened - that is to say, there was no genuine and permanent advance made in the Corps. On the contrary, the Soldiers languished and lost the Army spirit. The band wrangled. The members on the Roll went down, if not while he was there, directly after he left. There were no Candidates, or next to none. The finance was a burden, the "War Cry" sales were reduced. There was less uniform worn, less loyalty to the flag, less fighting in the streets, less bombarding of the drink-shops, and less of everything that went to make up a proper, dare devil, blood-and-fire Corps.



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But still, Captain Soundingbrass went on with his preaching of righteousness, and the outsiders went on cheating and lying and sinning. The holiness meetings became little more than a name, and the professors and possessors of clean hearts were fewer than ever.

But on the Captain went with his long-labored sermons, and, with the opportunity, the people lost all desire to talk themselves, some of them feeling that the barracks was a very poor limitation of an insignificant Methodist Chapel.

Still, the Captain went on with his music and song-singing, and the people got used to his bits of tunes and his worn-out songs, and took no notice of them. Still, the Captain went on scolding and lecturing and finding fault, and little or nothing occurred that advanced the Kingdom of God, blessed Jesus Christ, or helped the poor, sinning, suffering world around.

And yet, we cannot help thinking what a giant Captain Soundingbrass might have been. What a giant he ought to have been. What a giant, let us hope that he yet will be, for surely, surely we shall hear from him again? Perchance, in the marvelous outpourings of the Holy Ghost that are being realized in all directions, our friend will open his heart to receive that inspiration of the Almighty that will soften and melt and make his heart the dwelling-place of the sympathizing, compassionate Saviour.

Does anyone who reads this, charge me with exaggeration, and say that such remarkable gifts, combined with so little of the tender heart of Jesus Christ neither exist now, or ever have existed, in any single Officer? To the charge I at once plead guilty. I have exaggerated, I admit, and done so purposely. I have painted Captain Soundingbrass with a big brush in order to gain attention to a mighty evil sadly too prevalent among my precious Officers. I have pointed out a need which, if supplied, will make us, the Officers of The Salvation Army, the conquerors of the world, but which, if not supplied, will spread and leaven the whole lump, or a good portion of it, and leave us little more than a vast concentrated volume of Soundingbrass.



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But, even if there is no Officer who has so much that is good, beautiful, desirable, and at the same time so little love, so little tender affection, so little Christ-like, Christ-inspired charity along with it, are there not many, to say the least of it, who are an approach to it?

IS NOT THE FAMILY OF THE SOUNDINGBRASS A VERY LARGE ONE?

Has not the Captain of whom I have spoken many relations - brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces, in every country and every Division, belonging to both Staff and Field, who, while each very different from the other, possess a strong family likeness, and as the result, have ever a measure of the family failure?

In closing this, I cannot but pray with all my heart, "Oh, God, make my Officers honest with themselves; make them to examine and see whether there is not about them, born in them, or which they have fallen into, some of this coldness and hardness and lovelessness which makes their performances and working and dealings and talkings more or less Soundingbrass!"

Perhaps I shall hear something that will be interesting from or about the Captain of whom I have been writing, before the next number of "The Officer" appears, and if it be anything interesting, I will certainly pass the news on to my comrades. Till then, farewell!