

SERGEANT-MAJOR DO-YOUR-BEST
OF DARKINGTON NO.1

CHAPTER II: MEETINGS

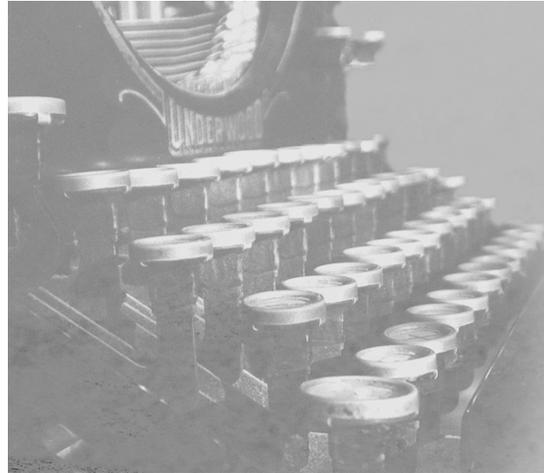
Another reason why I like our Captain is, because he makes good Meetings. We always have a good time when he's at the Hall. Is he always there? Why, no, I should think he isn't. Where is he? Well, he has got two Out-posts, which he works with all his might. Why, ours is as good as a Circle Corps, and some of our Soldiers don't altogether like it, because he often goes off, and leaves his Lieutenant and your humble servant to do our own concern as best we can; and some of them they say as how as if they pay the salary of a Captain, they ought to have all his services; which seems to me very selfish, and I don't like it. But, then, the Captain thinks the Outpost's all right, and that's enough for me.

But, I was saying, when you interrupted me that we always have good times when he's at the Hall. I don't know how it is, either, for he's not what you would call a great preacher. He can't keep at it a long time, and say lots of fine things you can't understand, and he never uses hard words that you don't know what they mean. He is nowhere in the running alongside of Captain Spin-it-out in these matters; but what he does say goes into your stomach, and fetches the water out of your eyes, and makes you feel ashamed of the bit of religion you've got, and resolve you'll get more before the day is out.

And then he can't come up to Captain Melodian at singing a solo, no how; but still, my word, he makes everybody else sing.

Why, there's my poor old mother – God bless her I she's been a dear old soul to me as was a deal of trouble to her before I was saved – Granny, the children call her, for she is getting on in years now, and it takes two sticks and a quarter of an hour to get her to the Hall; but the Captain makes mother sing, I can tell you! She has only got two teeth left in her head, and it's a cracking kind of sound that comes out of her mouth when she's done her best; but she enjoys it, and it does her good.

And, then, he can't come near to Captain Wrestler at long prayers; but I always pray when our Captain does, whether he's long or short; and, curious like, I always want to



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go on when he leaves off.

Then, he is not much to look at. He made me think of David and Goliath when I saw him the other day standing alongside of Major Pull-the-house-down, who was here booming the Grace-before-meat Boxes. But, then, the Major has got uncommonly stout lately. My! He is a weight. He broke our bit of a rail down a-leaning on it, and I was glad the old platform didn't go as well. Our Sarah says that she's sure he ought to have more exercise, or he'll have a happoplektic fit, or something of that kind, some day.

But, never mind, if our Captain is not much to look at, what there is of him is good stuff, and I always forget his looks when he once gets going.

No, he is not a great Bible man either, although he has got some pieces out of the old Book that he can put into you in such a way as makes your flesh creep, or softens you down till you cry like a child.

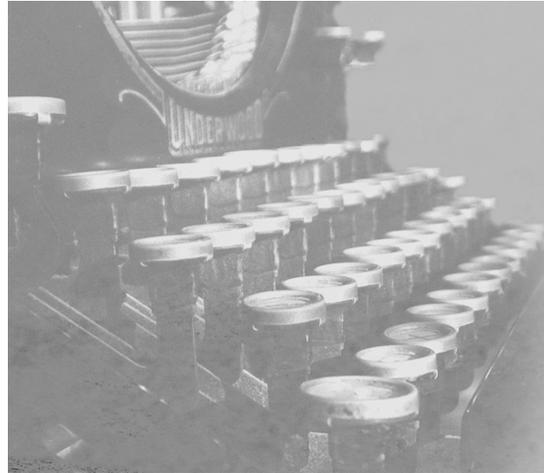
And, then, all that he does say, when he gets into the spirit, sounds like Bible to me.

But, anyhow, there is one thing he can do, if I am any judge – and I reckon I am, at least I ought to be, or I should not be fit to be Sergeant-Major of this Corps; and the Divisional Officer said, when he met our Soldiers three months ago, that I was one of the best Local Officers in the Division, which our Sarah will never forget, and is always calling to mind when anybody says anything that reflects on me. I don't think the dear little woman will forget that speech of the Divisional Officer's as long as she lives – God bless her! Well, what I was saying was, that our Captain can make a proper Salvation Army meeting.

What do I mean by a proper meeting?

Well, I reckon that a good meeting should cheer the Soldiers up – and some of my comrades have a great deal to put up with, I can tell you.

There's Harry Hardtimes, poor fellow, he is not very strong, and has the rheumatics,



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and can only do odd jobs now and then, and he has a sick wife and five youngsters. I expect the devil gets at him pretty strong now and then, and I like to see him forget his troubles and get real happy.

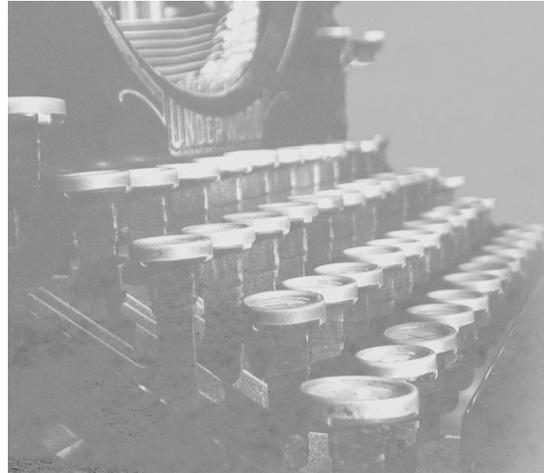
Then, there is Mary Holdfast, with her drunken husband, who, our Sarah says, knocks her about awfully in his mad fits. I feel sure she don't get enough to eat, and I made Sarah fetch her into dinner the other Sunday; and my! didn't she eat ravenous. And she can only get into the Hall now and then, because Jack is always so savage if he finds her away when he comes home. But I do like to see Mary singing with that beautiful look that comes on to her face, that she used to have afore she married that brute; but I must try and get at him somehow – I'll take our Captain round to see him. It always makes me feel good when I see her looking like that, because I think that she's thinking of the Better Land, where there'll be no pubs to make husbands worse than beasts, nor anything of that kind.

Then, there is Jim Wobbleton. He has lots of persecution, poor fellow, and not overmuch backbone to stand up against it. He has been in and out of the Corps I don't know how many times; and, in fact, he has never gone straight so long, and seemed so firm, as he has done since this Captain came on the scene; and I really believe that if our Captain could stop here forever that Jim would never backslide again. Well, I do like to see Jim looking bright and happy, and hear him roaring out:

"So we'll stand the storm, for it won't be very long,
And we'll anchor by and by."

And, then, although I'm Sergeant-Major of this Corps, and have a good life as always helps me along, and a situation at twenty-five shillings a week all the year round, only as when there is something happens such as a strike – which I'm sorry to say they're talking about now. But, if they pull it off, as two or three of them say they're going to, I've made up my mind to have a regular go at the people in every house of the town about their souls, and trust in God to find the family a bit of bread and butter till the thing is over.

I mentioned the scheme to Sarah last night after we got in bed, and she says to me:



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"Steve, you're a good man, and you've got more faith than I have, and the Divisional Officer says you're the best Sergeant-Major in the Division, but you haven't got the responsibility on you for feeding these children, as I have; but," says she, "the Captain says as how the Lord will provide, so we'll trust Him, and go to sleep."

Still, as I was saying, I have my trials, and I like to forget 'em all, and have my soul set on fire, and our Captain is just the man to make such a meeting as does that for you.

Then, there is another reason why I like our Captain; and that is because he gets souls saved. Now, I can't tell you how it is; perhaps it is because of the superior education I have had in The Army – for, you see, I couldn't read a letter in the Book when I was converted, and now I can read my Bible and the dear old "Cry" beautifully. Or, perhaps it is the feeling that came from the blessed Lord straight into my heart when I was converted. Or, perhaps, it may be with thinking so much about the dreadful Judgment Day that is coming on, and what will follow after; I can't tell what it is, but howsoever it may be, I do like to see people come to the penitent-form. I never reckon it a good meeting on a Sunday night if we haven't had somebody out – anyway, unless there has been a good fight made for it; and our Captain is the boy to do it.