

The
William Booth
Collection

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

CHAPTER XX: HOW THE GRUMBLETONS WERE SMASHED UP

Well, Captain Faithful is gone; and a real loss he is to us all, I can tell you. But we have had a lot of real good Officers at Darkington at different times, and at our little cottage we love them all. I fixes their photos up over the fireplace, and prays for them, and gets a letter from them every now and then, which is always welcome. And either Sarah or me, we writes to them, and cheers them up in their difficulties and troubles. Some who toiled hard for us are safe landed in Heaven, and one of my great joys, when I get Home, will be to see them again. Oh, my dear Lord!

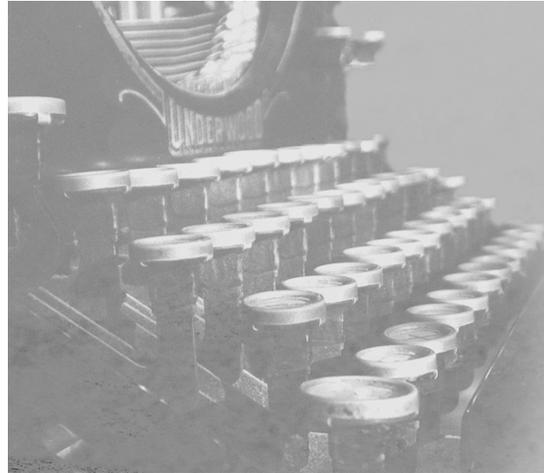
"What a meeting,
What a meeting that will be!"

Well, Captain Faithful did well for Darkington, and no mistake: Sarah says so, and she's a judge, if there is one in the town – bless her! He had his trials, and he did not get overmuch patting on the back, either – which none of us do. I'm sure I don't; but, then, I suppose it wouldn't be good for any of us to have the praises of men. Anyway, Captain Faithful did not.

"Sergeant-Major," he says to me, when the Soldiers, and the friends, and the roughs, and a lot of poor people were shouting, and blessing him, and singing:

"God be with you till we meet again;
Keep love's banner floating o'er you;
Smite death's threatening wave before you –
God be with you till we meet again!
Till we meet at Jesus' feet;
God be with you till we meet again –

"Sergeant-Major," he says, "' All's well that ends well.' This is a good finish. I am well paid for every struggle I've made, and every tear I've shed, and everything else I've done for Darkington. I'm the happiest man in the town!"



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I've had one or two letters from our old Captain, but I don't want to talk too much about Captain Faithful before I come to what I've got to say about Darkington, so I shall keep them for another day.

Well, we've got the new Captain, and I think we shall do better than ever. But, as our Sarah says, "The course of true love never did run smooth"; and we've been pretty close on to a big trouble at the start, I can tell you. And this is how it happened.

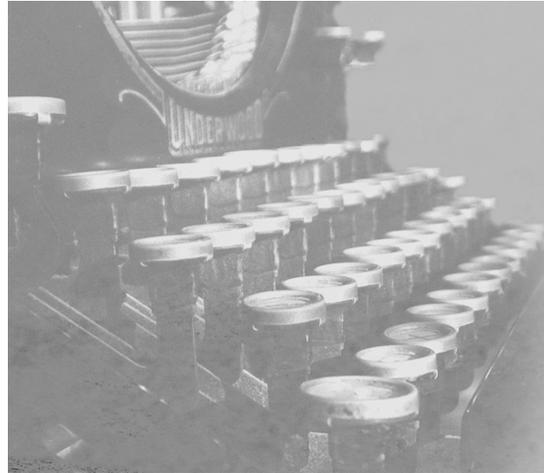
At the Welcome Meeting, Captain Seek-the-lost – for that is our new Captain's name, and a good name it is; almost as good a name as Captain Faithful was – God bless him! – well, Captain Seek-the-lost, as I was a-saying, was not in very good condition. He had a bad cold in his head, and his throat was wrong, and his voice was husky, and he didn't get on with his talking, and he tried at a solo, and that was a very poor do as well.

Then he said some things about sticking to the poor and the lost classes, which did not exactly please some of our croakers, for there is quite a little set of half-saved folks in our Corps who enjoy finding fault, especially with a new man or a new thing.

I think he thought we were a little too respectable. You see, while Captain Faithful was away, we painted the Hall up, and Sergeant Respectability got her hand on to the job, and made the place look rather gaudy. Then everybody had their Sunday best on; and, altogether, I've no doubt we looked rather spick-and-span.

So when the Captain plumped it out that he was going after the poor, and the drunkards, and all the rest of that sort, some of the set who reckon themselves superior to everybody else, thought he was making a kind of reflection, and that he didn't think as much of them as he ought. Mrs. Sergeant Grumbleton was specially displeased, and said right out, while he was speaking, that she was sure she should never like this Captain – he could neither talk, nor pray, nor sing, nor appreciate a good Corps when he got one.

Sarah was sitting close by, and heard this speech, and she quietly said to her: "Sergeant Grumbleton, 'never' is a very long time; perhaps you'll change your mind sooner than you think."



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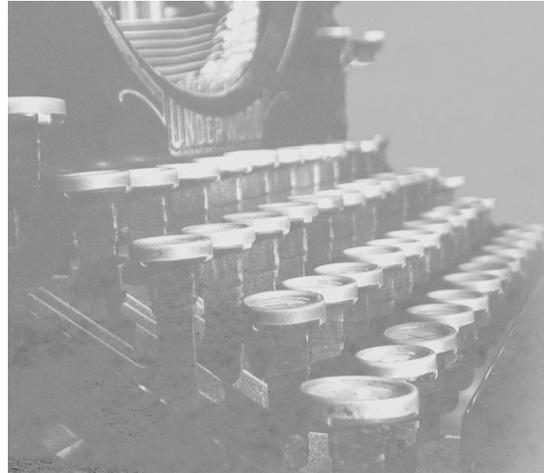
Now, I must confess that I was rather down myself, and I says to Sarah on the way home, "Sarah," says I, "I think things have been rather depressing tonight. I'm afraid our new Captain hasn't made a very good start. Oh, dear, we shall miss Captain Faithful!" And I was going on bemoaning the prospects in a general sort of way.

"Sergeant-Major," says Sarah, "you said, when the Captain was going away, that there was 'as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' You don't know what sort of a fish Darkington has caught this time. The poor fellow is sick. Give him a chance"

The new Captain's first Sunday has come and gone. In the morning, he told us he had been out and about among the pubs and the sinners till midnight the previous evening. His heart had been stirred, and he was determined to make a desperate effort to do something for them, especially for the backsliders. He implored us to try and bring some poor lost creature with us to the night's meeting. Says he: "I've heard The General say that he would like to have a meeting, with a board outside, iii big letters, saying: 'None but bad people admitted.' Now," he says, "couldn't each one of you bring some poor sinner with you to-night?"

Well, when the evening came, there was a big congregation, but they all seemed full of little more than curiosity. The Captain did his best, and, now his cold is better, his talk was not so bad. Still, the only result at the penitent-form was that wretched backslider, Sam Slip-down-easy, whom Sergeant Boozham had fetched right out of a public-house.

Now, the Captain was regular set up with this poor creature. If he had been the son of the manager of the Darkington and County Bank, Limited, he could not have made more fuss over him. But Mrs. Grumbleton, Mary Worldly-wise, Miss Highflyer, Harriett Top-knot, and their set, who were all fixed up in front – really, their behaviour was not very becoming. Indeed, Mrs. Grumbleton said quite loud, so as Sarah heard her, "Who next?" says she. "Why, that dirty fellow has been down at the mercy seat twenty times to my knowledge. It's all calculated to bring the penitent-form into discredit. I'm shocked! And, then, only see how the Captain's beside himself over such a sorry creature. I suppose it will all be in 'The War Cry' next week with a big heading – 'Captain Seek-the-lost at Darkington 1 – another victory.'"



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After the meeting, Sarah, she says to me: "Sergeant-Major, I'm going on first; I want to have a talk with Mrs. Grumbleton; she lives our way, you know."

"All right, Sarah," says I, "it'll suit me first-rate – I want a word with Will Boozham about Sam Slip-down-easy. I don't see why we shouldn't help him to stand up strong. But he won't, unless he gets a little assistance, until he's well on his feet. I won't be long behind you; thank God, the Captain's all right!"

Sarah followed Mrs. Grumbleton sharp; and she says to her: "Sergeant, I just want a little talk. Leave your husband, and walk with me." Then Sarah, she says: "Look here, Sergeant, I want to ask you a question."

"All right," says she, "go on."

"Well," says Sarah, "I want to know whether you've ever committed a sin since we got you into the Kingdom on what you thought was your dying bed? – that's what I want to ask you"

"Committed a sin?" says the Sergeant. "Of course I have." " Well, did you confess it to God, and ask His forgiveness?"

"Yes," says she.

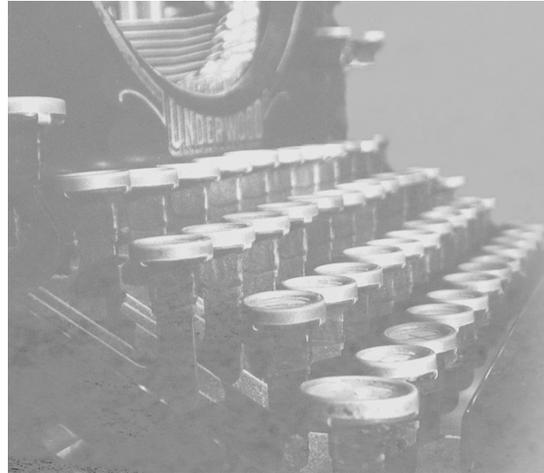
"Well," said Sarah, "have you committed another sin since then?"

"Sarah," says she, "what do you mean?"

"I just mean what I say," says Sarah. "Have you ever committed another sin since the first was forgiven?"

"Sarah," says she, "I am afraid I have committed hundreds."

"And have you confessed them to your Heavenly Father, and asked Him to forgive you?"



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"Sarah," says she, "I have. I hope I have."

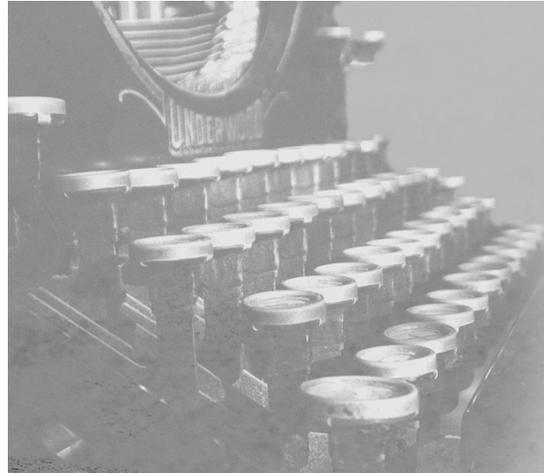
"Well," says Sarah, "now here you are, with all your knowledge, and a loving husband, and praying comrades, confessing to having sinned before God, and gone down before Him in private and sought His forgiveness hundreds of times, and nobody condemns you. But here is this poor Slip-down-easy, whose mother I knew, and remember holding him, a baby, in my own arms. He falls, and falls, and falls again, twenty times. But he comes out twenty times, and says: 'I've sinned publicly, and I confess publicly. All you Soldiers of Christ, pity and pray for me, and help me!' And, instead of remembering your own weakness and sins, and welcoming and praying for grace to keep the poor fellow faithful, you sit and sneer at him as he kneels at his Saviour's feet seeking His forgiveness!"

The Captain is going full steam ahead. We had a Saturday Night Mission to the drunks, and all sorts of lost creatures. Mrs. Grumbleton is thoroughly disgusted with it all, and has announced her intention to leave The Army and join the High Corner Church; but I don't think Jim, her husband, will go. Still, I'm not sure.

Mrs. Grumbleton has not gone. Things have changed altogether; and this is how it happened.

You see, Mrs. Grumbleton has a mother-in-law who has been a great hindrance to her. She won't be saved. Captain Faithful tried hard to win her. Oh, how he prayed for her, and talked to her, and I don't know what else, Sarah has done her best also, but the woman is so proud and haughty that she'll hardly stand a word from the likes of us poor people. In fact, all that's been done for her has been a dead failure; and she is, I am sorry to say, as proud and as full of Satan as ever.

Now, Mother Grumbleton has a difficulty. As Captain Faithful used to say: "Everybody who knows anything about salvation, and won't have it, has a difficulty." Well, Mother Grumbleton's difficulty is the bitter animosity she has in her soul to her son-in-law, Tom Break-your-heart. She hates him because she thinks he has broken the heart of her daughter with neglect, and brought her to the verge of the grave with ill-treatment.



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Oh, how she curses him in her secret soul! She counts him her daughter's murderer, and almost every day of her life declares that he ought to be hanged. The last time I talked to her about him, she said she'd like to tie the rope herself!

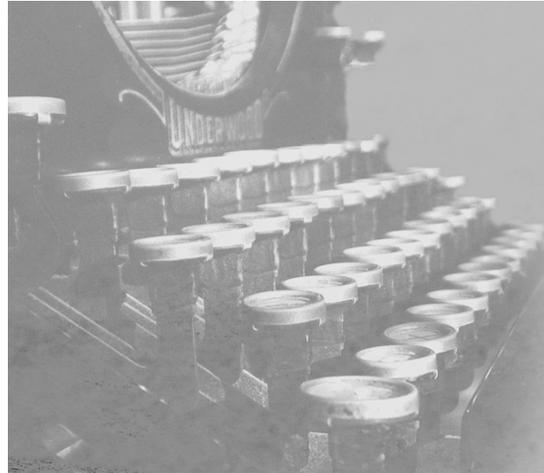
Well, Tom is a bad 'un, certainly. He is only a young chap, and so clever at his trade, and yet, through the drink, and gambling, and evil companions, and other bad things, he has lost situation after situation, sold up home after home, and, but for her mother and brother Jim, the poor thing would have had to die of actual starvation, or finish up in the workhouse.

Now, Break-your-heart is no backslider. No, not a bit of it! He has never been saved, for it seems as if neither God nor man could get near enough to him for that. He laughed Captain Faithful to scorn when he wanted to help him, and says right out, on every invitation, he would go to before he would enter a Salvation Hall. He's a wretched piece of business, I can tell you. I think even our Sarah has given him up. And that's a very bad sign!

Well, things went on after this fashion until, one day, the Captain announced that his topic for the next Sunday would be "The Unpardonable Sin," at the same time inviting all the sinners in the neighbourhood to come and find out whether they'd committed the sin or no.

On the Saturday, somewhere about midnight, our Penitent-Form Sergeant rescued Break-your-heart out of the hands of the police by promising to take care of him. He was senselessly drunk, and had been fighting, and would have been locked up right away, and very likely got a month on Monday. The Sergeant, however, dissuaded the fellow, whom Tom had half killed, from prosecuting him, and took Tom home, let Jim sleep on the couch in his parlour, and watched him all the next day like a cat does a mouse.

After so much kindness, Tom couldn't very well refuse to go with the Sergeant to the Hall at night. But although they got him inside, no power could get him further up the building than a corner near the door, offering the opportunity for escape, supposing the fit came over him.



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It was a remarkable meeting. The Captain was on his high horse. They had told him that Tom and other fellows of the same kidney were present, and after some testimonies, he went for them with all his might. His talk was a rough-and-ready affair, but it was hot and strong.

The line he took was something like this: that lying and drunkenness, swearing and cheating, and all uncleanness were wrong. That breaking the hearts of your loved ones, and cursing your own soul, and murdering the souls of those under your influence, was awfully wrong. That rejecting mercy and trampling on the blood of Jesus Christ was terribly, Oh, so terribly wrong! Indeed, that all sin was bad and black and devilish – as bad, and as black, and as devilish as sin could be.

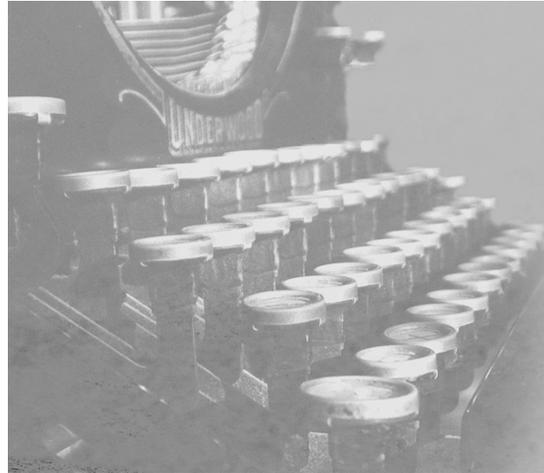
And then he went on with tremendous earnestness to say that refusing forgiveness for all that had gone before, for the last time, was the most serious offence of all, because it must be the unforgivable sin. And as none of them could tell whether the offer of mercy he was making them there and then was not the last they would ever have, they might, if they refused it that night, commit the unpardonable sin.

Then came the invitation to those who would seize the chance God once more gave them; and first one, and then another, volunteered for the mercy seat, and things soon became very lively.

Mother Grumbleton sat alongside her daughter-in-law on the front seat. The old lady's face was a picture. It revealed the strife that was going on in her heart between pride and conviction.

"What will she do?" more than one of us asked as we watched the outward signs of the inward struggle. She's a woman with a will. I reckon Sarah has a will; but, lor' bless you, Mother Grumbleton would have done for a judge.

But we were not kept long in suspense as to which way the victory would go, for up she jumped and fell at the mercy-seat with a piercing cry heard all through the building.



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And then, while the whole meeting was powerfully moved, there could be seen walking up the aisle the wreck of what, not so long ago, had been a noble-looking man, meanly-dressed, with a face bleared and scarred with drink and passion and fighting, and all the rest of the ill-treatment the drunkard's poor body usually meets with. Ashamed, and yet determined, Tom had left the corner seat where, hidden from view, he had slunk down, and, followed by the Sergeant – who had hardly ever had his eyes off him since he picked him up the night before – slowly crawled up through the crowd, and, in ignorance of everything else but the haunting memory of his wretched life, he fell down by the side of Mrs. Grumbleton, senior, his bitter mother-in-law.

Neither of them knew who it was that was seeking mercy by their side. Both entered into the liberty of God's children almost at the same moment, and rose rejoicing to their feet. Then, opening their eyes, they looked at each other in amazement for a second or two; and then Mother Grumbleton recognised the son-in-law she had wished was hung that very morning, and Tom recognised the mother-in-law whom he had cursed a thousand times because she hated him; and then they fell into each other's arms, and wept together, while the whole audience wept in sympathy. The quarrel of Mother Grumbleton and Tom Break-your-heart was ended, not only with each other, but with their Maker.

Mrs. Grumbleton, the daughter-in-law, sat looking on at the scene. She could contain herself no longer. Her difficulties about lowering the dignity of the mercy seat, and ever so many other feelings fled away. With a broken heart she fell at the same penitent-form, and asked God to forgive her backslidings, and take away her conceitedly faultfinding spirit; but she found no peace till she had sent for the Captain and received his forgiveness. There was much joy that night among the angels of God over the repentance of these Darkington sinners.