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

CHAPTER XXII: THE DRUNKARD AND HIS SALVATION

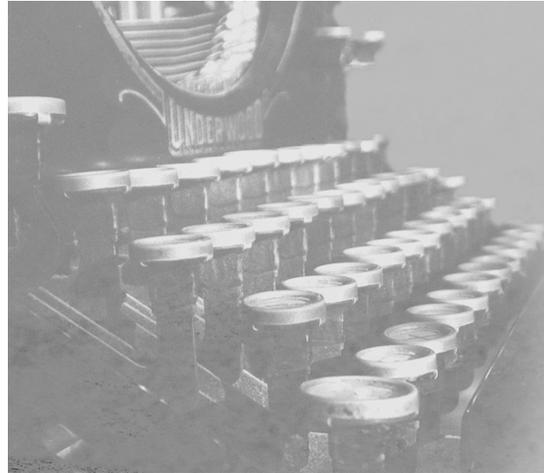
We have had our Local Officers' Meeting, but I can't say that it's been altogether satisfactory. There was plenty of us at it, so far as that goes, for nearly every Local in the Corps was there; but, somehow or other, there was a feeling about the meeting that I did not like a single bit.

Our Captain, he's "*a little gone*" on the public-house set, and that call of The General for the rescue of five thousand drunkards during the year has almost turned his head. So he had the subject up at the Local Officers' Meeting, and went into it in dead earnest; and when he had done, he said he would like to hear if we had any new plans to propose that would be likely to make it a success.

The speech was not, I must confess, received over grandly. The fact is, Publication-Sergeant Bookem had been talking against the scheme a little in the Corps, and there was a kind of a flat feeling about it. So when the Captain sat down, nobody was a bit taken back when they saw Bookem get on to his feet, and begin with his objections.

"Well, Captain," says he, "you're a proper friend of these poor wretches what you've been talking about. I admit that it would be a good thing if they could be helped; but then, you see, so far as our Corps is concerned, I think we've about as much to do as we can manage, and I fancy that you can lay the work on us a little too thick. 'It's the last feather that breaks the camel's back,' they say, and ain't there a lot of pretty heavy feathers on our backs already?"

"Isn't there this new move among the Juniors? and don't you want to double 'The War Cry' sales? which, as I'm Publication-Sergeant, I can see would be a good thing. And then, there's the one hundred thousand souls that The General is always a-writin' about. And then, isn't there the Self-Denial, which is just due? and, well – I don't know what there is not; and now on the top of it all we have to go and get five thousand drunkards saved I It may be all right; perhaps it is; but, to me, it does seem rather unreasonable, if not impossible.



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"Besides," he went on, "doesn't the Bible say, 'Charity begins at home'? And haven't we got a lot of unsaved people what's been coming to this blessed Hall of ours for years and years gone by, and yet ain't got saved yet? And isn't there a swarm of backsliders about, and doesn't the place want painting, and aren't there ever so many other things? Captain," says he, "you're a good man; but it seems to me that we've got as much to do at Darkington as we can manage at present."

Well, after this, the Captain he gets up, and he makes a red-hot answer, which I can't remember what it was. All I can think of what he did say – and he banged the table enough to smash it while he said it – was that if they would not help him to rescue the twenty poor wretches who had been put down as our share, he would go and do it himself; and then he pitched off, "We'll be heroes," which did not seem to fit in with things at all, and the meeting broke up.

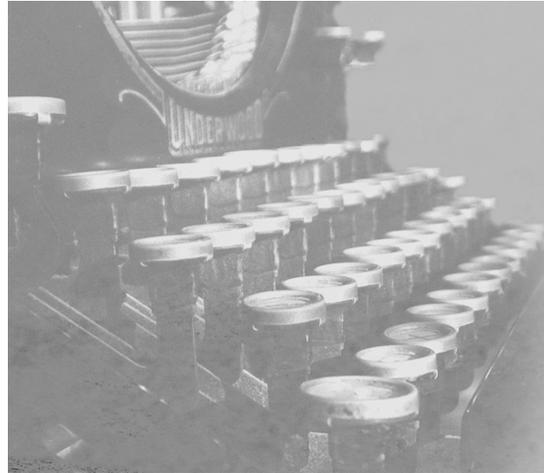
I got home that night a little sooner than usual, for I did not feel quite comfortable in my mind; and, as we sat over our bread and cheese, I could plainly see that Sarah was not right either. There was silence for a time, and then Sarah she broke out: –

"That was a fine speech your friend Bookem made tonight, wasn't it? And my husband, the Sergeant-Major, was a very brave man not to have a word to say on behalf of his Captain and the poor drunkards, wasn't he?"

I didn't say anything in reply, for, to tell the truth, I didn't know what to say. And then she asked me straight off: "Don't you think so, Sergeant-Major?"

"Well," says I, "come, Sarah, you must admit that there was something in what the Sergeant said. It's all very well to make speeches about saving the poor creatures; but you can have too much of a good thing, can't you? Besides, some of these 'drunks' that we are to go after are a real bad lot, aren't they? "

"Yes, they are a bad lot, Sergeant-Major; I admit they are," said she. "Don't I know it, Sergeant-Major, as was once a drunkard's wife, and who has the misfortune to have the same curse in my own family in other ways today? Wasn't there my brother Charlie – the kindest, lovingest, cleverest of all my brothers? Wasn't he my father's pride and



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my mother's joy; and didn't the drink get hold of him, and drag him down so often and so low that, in a fit of despair, he went and hanged himself?

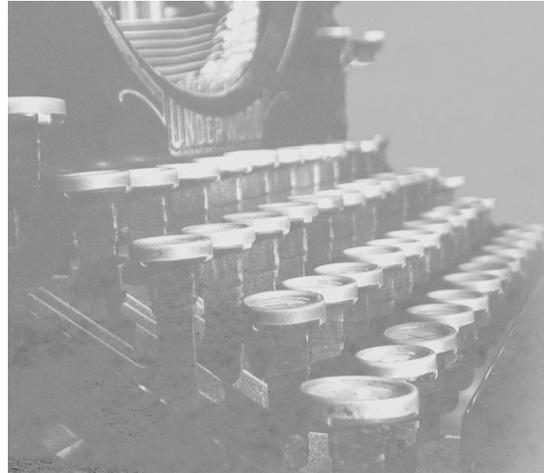
"And then, isn't there 'Uncle Ben,' as the children call him – your own brother, Sergeant-Major? What about him? But for the drink, would there be a better-hearted fellow walking about Darkington today? I don't believe there would!

"Where is he now, Sergeant-Major?" she went on. "Where is he now? I ask you. He's in a prison cell for doing what he never would have done but for the drink and the betting and the bad company it led him into. And isn't his poor little wife a-dying'? And aren't his children in rags and starvation? And aren't there hundreds more in this town today in the same case? It's the drink that's got them into this hell upon earth, I say – the hell what's in Darkington – and if you've forgotten what somebody did for you, and got tired of doing the same thing for somebody else, I'm going to help the Captain to fetch some of these poor wretches out of the devil's clutches, God helping me – which I believe He will!"

They are going at the Drunkards' Campaign at the Corps most furiously. But I must say that, notwithstanding all Sarah's arguments and the Captain's speechifications, I think there's quite enough made of it. And then I don't see exactly how there's going to be much gain come to the Corps over it – and that's my chief business, you see.

Here's Uncle Ben come out of prison, and though Sarah wept oceans of tears over him, and nursed his wife, and looked after his children while he was away, and got him a job in the garden of one of our masters when he came out, he's broke out afresh, and goes home drunk nearly every night of his life.

I wouldn't mind so much if he had any gratitude; but instead of being thankful, he's as surly as a hog, and refuses point-blank to come near the Hall, and swears and blasphemes shamefully if I talk to him about his wife or children, and specially if I say anything to him about his soul. Although he's my own brother – and it's hard to say it – I confess that I've given him up. I've got no hope left. I don't see what can be done for him, except the Government would shut him up in some island where he couldn't get the cursed drink – which it won't.



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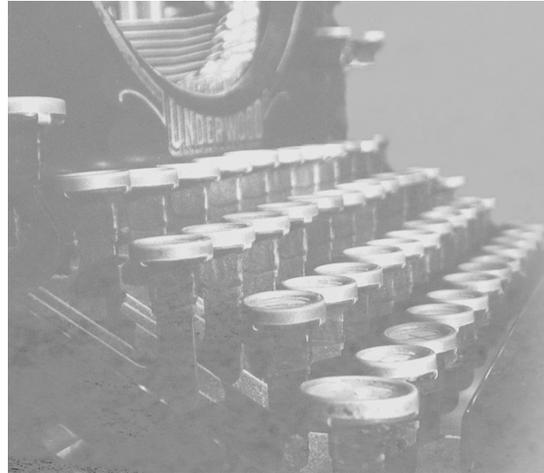
They're still raging after the drunkards at the Corps like mad people; and Will Boozham – I beg his pardon, he's Sergeant Boozham now – well, the Sergeant is the maddest of the lot. But they haven't got much to show for all their going on as yet. I don't believe they've got one of the twenty the Corps has to get as its share of the boom. But Boozham says to me the other night, when I asked him about it, "Sergeant-Major," says he, "have patience with us. The same God that saved you and me is going to do the work here." "All right, Sergeant," says I, "I'll wait, and we shall see."

A few nights after this talk, it appears that Boozham was out selling his "War Crys," when he came to "The Pig and Whistle," which is now kept by a brother of Publication-Sergeant Bookem, and that much to his annoyance. He thinks it's such a disgrace to the family to have a member of it doing such a disreputable business. Now, Will used to be a very good customer at this show; but since he got converted, and jacked up the drink, the landlord has never spoken to him once, and hates to see him near the place. I suppose that's his conscience that's working, or his mortification at having lost Boozham 's brass – I'm not sure which.

Well, on this particular night. Will went in with his bundle of "War Crys," and with a cheery word, began offering them to the first man he came across. On the other side of the room was Dick Swillem, who had been drinking half the day. You see the effects of the liquor is different with some people to what it is with others; some it makes real kind, and some it makes quite religious like, and some it makes downright mad people.

Dick is one of the last sort, and when he's got a quart or two of beer in him, he's ready to fight his own shadow. At such times he has a special spite against Salvationists in general, and he's bitterest of all against Boozham. You see, Will was one of his former mates, and he's been heard to say, when he wasn't responsible for his words, that he wouldn't be surprised if he was the death of him some day.

Well, as soon as Dick saw Boozham come into the bar with his "War Crys," as I've said, he rushed at him, seized him by the scruff of the neck, and proceeded to pour the beer out of his pewter down his back, while the very landlord lifted up his hands, and



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cried, "Shame!"

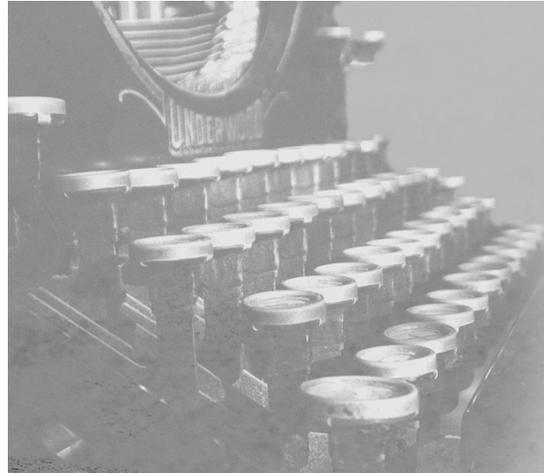
But there was somebody else there that night besides Swillem, and that was Uncle Ben. And Ben couldn't stand this, but made straight for Dick, and knocked him clean over, shouting as he did it, "I've got a brother in this 'blank' concern; and blow me, for his sake, I won't see the 'blank' fools treated after this fashion!"

As for Boozham, well, he fell on his knees right off, and began to pour out a hot prayer, while the publican looked on behind the counter, half petrified. It must have been a strange scene, as Boozham's just been a-telling it me after the meeting tonight. But I don't think anything particular will come of that. These drunks are such unaccountable people. You never know when you have them. However, the Captain and the Locals declare they shall get their twenty drunkards saved. I shall be glad to see them do it, and especially if Uncle Ben should be one of them.

It seems that the landlord of "The Pig and Whistle" was tremendously taken hold of by Boozham's prayer, and the martyr-like spirit that he displayed when Dick Swillem treated him so abominably. You see, he had known Boozham at a time when, with half such provocation as he had that night, he would have half killed Swillem; and now, instead of knocking him silly with the first blow, to see him simply get down on his knees, and begin to pray like a saint, was almost a miracle, and it had a mighty strange effect on him. He wanted no supper that night, I can tell you, but got off to bed as quickly as he could.

But the Spirit of God followed him to bed, and in his slumber he had a remarkable dream, which he told me afterwards. It was something like this.

He thought that while he was going about his daily business in the bar, serving his customers and the like, he heard the blast of a great trumpet. It frightened him terribly. It was a louder and more piercing sound than anything he ever heard in his life before, and, rushing out of his place and looking up, he saw the Saviour sitting on His Throne in the clouds above his head, and by His side was the great Archangel with his trumpet in his hand, calling the poor sinners to come to the mercy seat. All over the sky there were thousands and thousands of angels, while all around him on the



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earth were thousands and thousands of people all going up into the sky to seek salvation at the Saviour's feet. Oh, he said, he thought there was such a multitude as he had never seen in Darkington before!

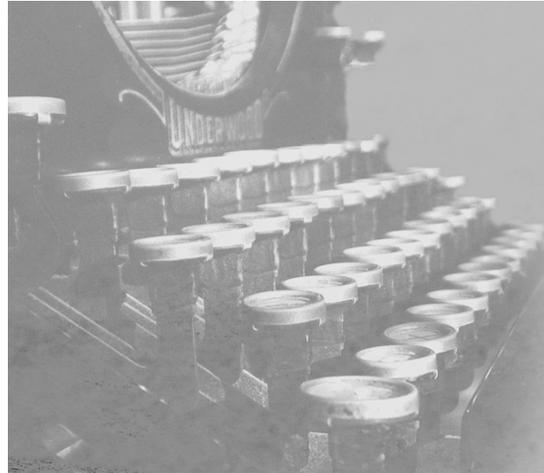
Crowds of old people were hobbling along, as fast as they could go; and hundreds of young people were rushing up, afraid of being too late. There were some rich people in the crowd, but they were mostly poor, and amongst them he thought he saw many of his own customers, some of whom were dreadful drunkards; and, what was most curious of all to him, he thought he saw some publicans weeping and wringing their hands, and wanting to be saved. And, as he wondered at the sight, he woke, and the dream was gone.

On the Sunday that followed this row at "The Pig and Whistle" and the publican's dream, we had a regular snowstorm in Darkington. I can remember it well, because it brought our congregations down at least one-half, and spoiled the collections terribly. However, it did not prevent something wonderful happening.

The landlord of "The Pig and Whistle" was not up and about very early that morning, and he had hardly finished his breakfast when singing was heard outside the house. The snow was falling fast, and a sharp wind was drifting it in clouds along the streets. But Boozham's Drunkards' Friend Brigade was at its post singing one of their favourite songs with all their might: –

"I've left the land of death and sin,
The road that many travel in;
And if you ask the reason why,
I'm going to seek a Home on high."

Now, this particular Brigade was made up of a lot of beauties, and no mistake, I can tell you. Most of them were well known to the landlord as he looked at them through the window. They were nearly all old toppers, and each had a history of recklessness, blasphemy, and shame behind him. The story of their wild days was written in blotches and scars on most of their faces. But every man of them that morning had the peace of God in their hearts, and the resolution of heroes flashing in their eyes, as they sang and prayed and testified, and invited all and sundry who would stand and



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listen to them in front of "The Pig and Whistle" in the driving snow, that morning.

"Buy me a 'Cry,'" the landlord shouted to the servant, as the song went over and over again. The servant bought him a paper, and as he unfolded it, and looked at the pictures, a pain struck him to the very heart, and he uttered a cry of amazement that quite startled the family, which was still sitting at the breakfast table. What was it? What's the matter now? It was the picture that had startled him. And what was that? Why, it was an exact reproduction of what the publican had seen in his dream the night before!

"Get me my hat and overcoat!"

"Where are you going," said his wife, "on a morning like this? "

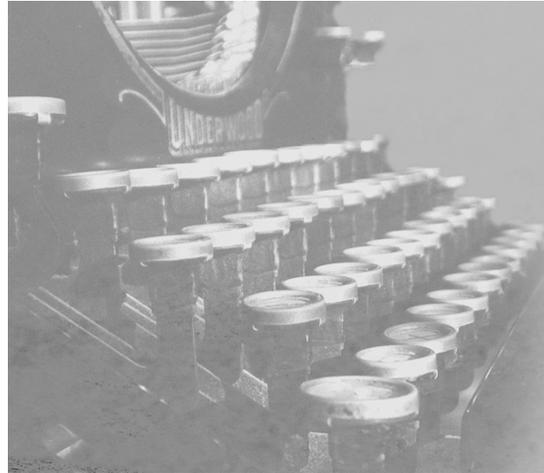
"I am going with the Salvationists!"

"Going where?" said wife and children in the same breath.

"I am going to The Salvation Army Hall!" And away he went.

Now, as I have already said, that was Boozham's Brigade, and yet Boozham was not there. Where was he? Well, he, like the landlord of "The Pig and Whistle," had had a bad night.

Tossing to and fro on his bed, he could not help thinking about poor Dick Swillem, who had poured the beer down his back the night before, and spoiled his new tunic – for a time at least. You see, Will and Dick had played together as companions in the fields before they had drunk together as pals in the public's; and when he saw the plight to which Dick had brought himself, he could not help being sorry for him from the bottom of his heart. "What could he do for him?" was the question that kept coming up. He was determined to have another try to save his soul, and to make the trial that very morning, too. So he sent word to a Sergeant in his Brigade to do duty for him, saying he would meet them all at the Hall, and away he went to find Swillem.



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Dick was amazed beyond measure that Booz-ham should come after him, after what had happened. It knocked him clean over at a stroke, and he had nothing to say for himself. And there was nothing he could do, either, but surrender unconditionally, and that at once. So he went down on his knees, and asked God to have mercy on him, while Boozham prayed, and then went off with him like a lamb to the Hall.

Sarah's faith had never faltered since the Drunkards' Brigade commenced, she had set her heart on saving Uncle Ben, body and soul; and the more uproariously impudent and insulting he grew, the more patiently she plodded on.

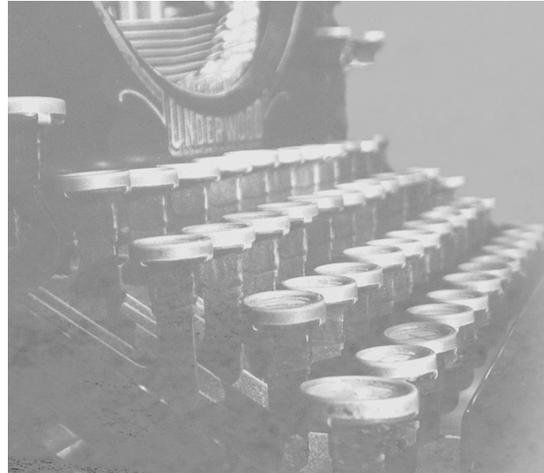
"You'll have to come. I shall never give you up till you are in the fountain," she would say to him; and he would reply with a curse. "Not for me, Sarah, never fear. I'll go to Hell before I join them fools; so shut up and leave me alone."

On this particular morning Sarah fought her way through the blinding snowstorm to the poor garret where Ben lived. A few days before, she had found one of Jack's old jackets, and mended it up, thinking it would do for Ben's eldest boy to go to the Juniors in. So on this morning she went to take the jacket to the boy, and the boy to the Hall.

To her utter astonishment, however, on her arrival, she found Ben in quite a softened mood. Indeed, he looked as if he had been crying – which he had. What could it mean?

It was soon evident that the Spirit of God had been at work with him, and on questioning him a little, he told her all about his fight on behalf of Boozham the night before at "The Pig and Whistle," and how his heart had been moved and broken by Boozham's prayer. He then confessed right off to the wicked, sinful life he had been living so long, allowed her to pray with him; and, most remarkable of all, kissed his sick wife, and went with Sarah to the Hall without any persuading.

That was the most wonderful Sunday morning meeting of its kind ever held in Darkington Hall, I can tell you. On the same bench sat Publication-Sergeant Bookem with his brother, the landlord of "The Pig and Whistle"; there was Boozham, with the



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companion of his boyhood, Dick Swillem; and there was Sarah, Uncle Ben, and your humble servant, the Sergeant-Major. But the shiniest face of all on that bench was my blessed Sarah!

We all went to the mercy seat together. I don't know who cried the most, but I do know that Publication-Sergeant Bookem got cured of his narrow selfishness, and that the Sergeant-Major got a fresh baptism of pity for the poor drunkards, to which class he once belonged; and that the landlord of "The Pig and Whistle" renounced the public-house business for ever; and that he and his two customers, Dick Swillem and Uncle Ben, got blessedly saved.

And as to Sarah, she is better, and more like her Lord and Master than ever in her compassion for poor sinners – whether they be drunkards or whatsoever else they may be.