

William Booth

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



FROM PILGRIM FOOTPRINTS
by Dr. Ken Connolly

General William BOOTH

1829-1912



"The Poor Man's Friend"

1829 William Booth was born in Nottingham. His future wife Catherine was born this same year. His father was a speculative builder. William became apprenticed to a pawnbroker. He witnessed degradation and misery.

1844 At 15 he was converted, joined the Methodists, and started reaching out to the "ne'er-do-wells" from "The Bottoms," a cruel slum. "Willful Will" would bring his charges into the church and occupy the best seats, without encouragement.

1849 Unemployed, he went to London for work and settled at Walworth. East End slums were a sewer of humanity: 290 crammed into an acre with a gin shop at every fifth store. Gin was a penny a glass, and special steps allowed "tots" to

reach the bar. Five-year-olds lay blind drunk in the doorways. Young girls with dirty bare feet sold flowers. The place reeked of cattle hides, stagnant water, leaking gas and dung. Three hundred fifty sewers emptied their contents into two miles of river between Westminster and London Bridge. The black bank of sewage ran six feet deep and 100 feet into the main channel. Disease and death were familiar and cholera had struck three times since 1832.

1852 Booth met Catherine Mumford, daughter of a local coach builder and sometimes lay preacher, who encouraged him to go to school for theological training. The school was affiliated with the "New Connection," a breakaway from the Methodists. He was encouraged to preach and led about 1700 converts to Christ within a few months.

1855 He married Catherine Mumford.

1858 The Connection curtailed his travels and gave him a fixed position, ordaining him to the Christian ministry.

1861 Booth resigned his charge to become an itinerant evangelist. His heart was drawn to the unchurched masses in big cities. He frequently stumbled home haggard with fatigue, his clothes torn and his head swathed with bloody bandages, after being hit by objects thrown at him while he was preaching.

1865 In June he joined a meeting conducted by an East London mission group and preached outside The Blind Beggar Pub. He was then asked to lead these meetings.

On July 2 he preached in a tent located on a Quaker burial ground. Wooden benches seated 350 people and naphtha flares were used for lighting. After traveling the eight miles back to his home in Hammersmith that night, he announced: "I have found my destiny!"

In September, when the tent was destroyed, he rented a dancing academy for Sunday services. At 4:00 a.m., after the dancing was finished, they started their work, bringing in seats for 350 people. At service time they invaded the pubs and led people to worship, "marching" some seven or eight blocks. The public complained and the police forbade them to walk on the sidewalk, so they marched down the streets.

These efforts marked the beginning of the Christian Mission, the forerunner of the Salvation Army.



1866 A "Soup Kitchen" was opened.



The Pub where it all began.

1868 A monthly magazine, costing a penny, began circulation. It was known as *The East London Evangelist*. Eleven years later it became known as *The War Cry*.

1878 This was a decisive year! In May, William Booth's son Bramwell, along with George Hamilton, came to see William, who was recovering from the flu. He was in the midst of preparing a report for the 34-man committee who ran the organization. The report referred to the workers as a "Volunteer Army."

At this time, certain citizens had formed a part-time army known as "Volunteers." It was ridiculed by the press and Bramwell did not like the implication of being one of them. "Volunteer!" he cried. "I'm no volunteer. I'm a regular (full time) or nothing!" Whereupon William took his pen, struck through the word, "Volunteer," and wrote above it the word, "Salvation."

At the next general conference, called the War Congress, the 23-man committee was abolished, and Booth became "the General." (He complained that Moses never could have crossed the Red Sea if God had restricted him by having him work through a committee.) Booth then wrote the

eleven *Articles of Faith* which would become their compass.

Then Elijah Cadman complained, "If I am in an army, I want to wear a uniform!" That began a two-year study which resulted in the Salvation Army uniform, first worn in 1880.

1879 A specific effort began to reach other nations where "unfortunates" were overlooked. This brought the "Army" to Scotland. It was in this year that the *East London Evangelist* became *The War Cry*.

1880 Army members first began to wear uniforms and the Army reached to Ireland and the U.S.A. The first officers were sent at the request of followers of William Booth who had previously emigrated. At the same time, the future Major Fred Tucker read a *War Cry* magazine in India and travelled to London to investigate its claims.

1881 Again, requests of emigrants brought the Army to Australia, and Kate, Booth's oldest daughter, began mission work in France. She showed all the courage of her father. Booth also began a refuge for reformed streetwalkers in London. By 1884, over 800 girls had passed through it.

1882 This was the year that Major Fred Tucker brought the Army to India. The major was told by the general, "Get into their skins, Tucker." Booth informed his recruits: "Remember that you are likely to be absolutely alone. In the villages you must expect to have no furniture at all. You will have to learn to cook as the Indians do and wash your clothes at the stream with them. You must leave behind you forever all your English ideas and habits."

Opposition came, not from the Indians, but from the British Governor of Bombay. The issue was "living as the Indians do." After five months of bitter hostility, the India Office in London demanded a cessation of persecution of the Salvationists.

It was also in this year that the Army went to Canada.

Mob violence began against the Army. Ruffians showered marchers with tar and burning sulphur. In Whitechapel, girls were roped together and pelted with live coals. In Hucknall, a cadet was unconscious for three days after a savage beating. In Plymouth, 40 men humiliated James Dowdle by emptying chamber pots full of urine on him. In spite of this hostility, the Army became bolder and eventually public opinion forced the police to provide protection.



Mr. and Mrs. Booth in their youth.



International Headquarters.



A memorial to the General and his wife in London.

1883 Mission work now reached New Zealand.

1884 By this time, the Army was composed of 900 corps, over 260 of them abroad. Of the 500 overseas officers, only 90 of them came from Britain.

The form of opposition now changed; the Army was accused of violating local bylaws. They were taken before magistrates on charges of obstructing traffic and disturbing the peace. Over 600 of them were placed in prison.

In spite of opposition, the Army's success was phenomenal. A survey done in London by the Church of England demonstrated that on a weekday evening 17,000 people were in attendance at Army meetings, but only 11,000 at the Church of England. The Archbishop of York therefore attempted to merge the Army with the Church of England. Booth adamantly refused.

1885 17-year-old Annie Swan begged to see the General for help. At the age of 13 she had answered an ad for domestic service, only to find brothel imprisonment, rape, and submission through pressure. Investigation of the eight-million-pounds-a-year traffic in prostitutes revealed 80,000 prostitutes, nearly 27,000 having been trapped before they were 16 years of age. After six weeks of investigation, William Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* agreed to print the awful facts. The first copy appeared on the 6th of July. Before the third article was published, Stead almost backed down when hired thugs caused a riot with bricks and bats. With Booth's encouragement, however, Stead continued.

A bill had just been introduced in the House of Lords to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16. Booth travelled non-stop for 17 days and gathered 393,000 signatures on a petition – enough to cover two and a half miles if unrolled on a scroll. Under pressure, Parliament voted to raise the age of consent and allowed the police to enter any brothels sus-

pected of violations. Within five years Booth had 13 homes housing over 300 girls in the British Isles alone, and another 17 homes abroad.

1887 Traveling home late one winter evening, Booth saw the appalling sight of homeless men wrapped in newspapers and lying in niches on the London Bridge. The next morning he commanded his boy to rent a warehouse and heat it for them. A "cab-horse charter" gave the right of food and shelter to London's horses – but Booth discovered that Britain had over three million people living without even so much as horses' rights.

1888 Catherine, the General's wife, became ill with cancer. An operation proved that the disease could not be halted. In a solemn moment, she placed her wedding ring on his finger and said, "By this token we were united for all time, and by it now we are united for eternity."

Eva Booth found a man sick in Marylebone, with a crust of bread in the cupboard, but unable to reach it. Soon after, a Cheap Food Depot was opened on West Indian Dock Road. Meat pudding and potatoes cost 3d, a baked jam roll was ½d, and a bed for the night was 4d. For the destitutes who needed cash, Booth opened a labor bureau (seven years before the government opened its first labor exchange) and in the first seven years of its operation Booth found jobs for 69,000 people.

1890 Catherine died in the General's arms. All members of the Salvation Army wore white armbands, believing that she had been "promoted to glory."

In the same month, Booth published his *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. (Stanley, who had discovered David Livingstone, had just written a bestseller, *In Darkest Africa*. Booth's book was an attempt to apply the Christian ethic to the industrial civilization. Ten thousand officers, working

