

CHALLENGING EVIL



Dispatches from
the frontlines of
Radical Justice

**with Chapter
Discussion Guides**

S. Carvosso Gauntlett

and

Cpt. Danielle Strickland

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DESTITUTION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

THE year 1890 was a momentous one in The Army's history. Having celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary, one imagines that Salvationists began to look back as well as forward. The Movement was acquiring perspective.

Then, in October, Mrs. Catherine Booth - after a long and very painful illness - was promoted to Glory. The end had been long expected, but it is difficult to realize what a loss her passing meant to The Salvation Army. All along she had been its 'battle-thinker,' the doughtiest fighter for its principles, its unsurpassed public speaker.

In October, 1890, immediately after the Army Mother's death,

appeared the Founder's most famous book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, which, as a B.B.C. broadcast declared a few years ago, did more than any other book had ever done to make people understand the condition of the poor in England.'

'Poor' seems hardly a drastic enough word. Vows of poverty have appealed to many idealists, especially in the Church of Christ. Francis of Assisi espoused himself to My Lady Poverty, and *Il Poverello* sounds quite romantic. But William Booth was concerned with what we should call *grinding* poverty-utter destitution, only too often linked with vice.

Probably no one was better equipped than he to launch on a half-indifferent world such a challenge as this book presented. All along, The Salvation Army had worked among the poorest, the most degraded. None knew more intimately the conditions in which hundreds of thousands of destitute folk existed than The Army's Officers and Soldiers. Many Salvationists, indeed, still belonged to the really poor.³

But William Booth had known what destitution meant long before he started his work at Whitechapel. In the Preface to *In Darkest England*, he says:

When but a mere child, the degradation and helpless misery of the poor stockingers of my native town, wandering gaunt and hunger-stricken through the streets ... , crowding the Union, or toiling like galley-slaves in relief works for a bare subsistence, kindled in my heart yearnings to help the poor ... which have had a powerful influence on my whole life.

William Booth knew poverty, too, in his own home; and both in Nottingham and in South London he worked in pawnshops - 'at a window, as it were,' to quote Professor Edvard Lehmann,

whence one sees human misery pass by and sees the seamy side of city life as perhaps nowhere else. There he kept daily account of the sighs and tears, the sorrow and despair of the poor ... who see no way out and seek oblivion and consolation in sin.

Now, at the age of sixty-one, this man had gained a wide experience of many types of poverty; through the Movement he had created and directed, he had long sought to ameliorate some of this vast distress.

³ General Bramwell Booth, in his *Echoes and Memories*, has a moving passage about an East End costermonger whose Sunday 'dinners' - a piece of fried bacon and some potatoes - he sometimes shared in his youth. Of one prominent East End worker it is recorded that she was obliged to starve sometimes for two or three days.

The Salvation Army was already at work in nearly a score of countries; it had a number of Rescue Homes, Slum Posts and Prison Gate Brigades, an Inebriates' Home, four Food Depots where cheap meals were served, five 'Shelters for the Destitute,' two Labour Bureaux and a 'Factory for the "out-of-work."'

The Army's battle with destitution, unemployment and other resultant evils began very early in its career, and it has never ceased. Here, however, we concentrate on the sensational challenge presented - five years after the 'Purity Agitation' - by this book: *In Darkest England and the Way Out*.⁴

The book was discussed, praised and criticized all over the land, and in other countries. A ferocious attack on it and on the scheme it outlined was made by the famous Professor T. H. Huxley. *The Times*, in a leading article, rather sneered at the would-be social reformer; and not a few eminent men raised doubts and objections.

On the other hand, Dr. F. W. Farrar, then Archdeacon of Westminster, preached a sermon on the book in Westminster Abbey, whole-heartedly supporting the Founder's plans, and sent a contribution to the fund to be raised. Bishops also approved of the scheme. Queen Victoria sent cordial wishes for 'success in the undertaking you have originated.'

Sir Henry Irving bought a copy on the day of publication, read it through that same night, then visited International Headquarters and donated a large sum to the scheme.

Support came also from Roman Catholics. Cardinal Manning, that great lover of the poor, in the course of a cordial letter to the Founder said:

I have already sufficient knowledge of its [the book's] contents to say at once how fully it commands my sympathy You have gone down into the depths. Every living soul costs the most precious blood, and we ought to save it, even the workless and the worst.

I hold that every man has a right to bread and to work.

To critics the Cardinal said:

If General Booth can gather under human influence and guidance those whom all other agencies for good have not yet reached, who shall forbid him?

⁴ The sales of this book, running to 125,000 words and priced - in 1890! - 3s. 6d., totalled a quarter of a million copies. The whole of the profits, £5,300, William Booth handed to the 'Darkest England' Fund.

When they pointed to defects here and there, he replied: ‘Then go and do it better!’

Many years afterward, Mr. Wilfred Meynell recalled that, shortly before Manning’s death, the Cardinal had asked him, Meynell, to take Herbert Vaughan - who became the next Archbishop of Westminster - to see some of The Army’s Shelters and Workshops. In a magazine Mr. Meynell then edited, *Merrie England*, he had the Founder’s book reviewed by one who signed himself ‘Francis Tancred’; that review is worth quoting:

Because I have knowledge, within certain narrow limits more intimate than most men’s, of this life which is not a life; to which food is as the fuel of hunger; sleep, our common sleep, costly and fallible as water in a wilderness; in which men rob, and women vend themselves; because I have such knowledge I have read with painful sympathy a book put forward by a singular personality.

I rise from the reading of it with a strong impression that here is a proposal which they who *will* not bless would do well to abstain from banning. Here is at last a man who has formulated a comprehensive scheme, and has dared to take upon himself its execution. Here was this vast putrescence at our very doors, and what scavengers of charity might endeavour its removal? Now comes by a man and offers to take on himself the responsibility of that removal. ‘In God’s name, give him the contract!’ one inclines to exclaim.

The reviewer then takes up Huxley’s comparison of the Salvationists with the Franciscans:

Whatever its qualifications, that joyous spirit which St. Francis so peculiarly fostered is claimed by General Booth as an integral and essential feature in his own followers. Street preaching received its first and special extension from the Franciscans.

Mr. Meynell had chosen this writer because he had’ lived in the streets, suffered hunger and cold and loneliness in the last extreme.’ William Booth was greatly impressed with the review and in his whimsical way declared: ‘Had I such a writer on my staff, I could convert England!’ No wonder! For’ Francis Tancred ‘ was none other than the poet Francis Thompson.

William Booth’s famous expression, ‘The Submerged Tenth,’ used in

In Darkest England, is based on the calculations of his namesake, Charles Booth, in *Life and Labour in the East of London*, which The Army’s Founder described as the only book he knew which enumerated the destitute. The paupers, the homeless, starving and very poor of East London alone totalled, at that time, 331,000! Basing his reckoning on these figures, William Booth declared that the population of ‘Darkest England’ was ‘three million men, women and children’ – doomed ‘to the service of the great twin devils: Destitution and Despair.’

The first part of the Founder’s challenging book, entitled, ‘The Darkness,’ briefly but vividly describes the condition of the homeless, the workless (both trade unionists and nonunionists), the vicious, the criminals and’ the children of the lost.’ Most telling are the numerous records of individuals in the various categories who have come under The Salvation Army’s care or notice.

William Booth adopts a remark of Thomas Carlyle’s that the four-footed worker has already got all that the two-handed one is clamouring for, that ‘there are not many horses in England which have not due food and lodging and go about sleek-coated, satisfied in heart’; and for all the unfortunates of whom he writes he claims’ *the standard of the London cab horse*,’ which has’ shelter for the night, food for its stomach, and work allotted to it by which it can earn its corn.’

The author assured his readers that there was nothing in his Scheme which would bring it into collision with any schools of thought in the great field of social economics - excepting anti-Christian economists....

I say nothing against any short cut to the Millennium that is compatible with the Ten Commandments (he declared). I intensely sympathize with the aspirations that lie behind all these socialist dreams. But whether it is Henry George’s Single Tax on Land Values,⁵ or Edward Bellamy’s Nationalism, or the more elaborate schemes of the Collectivists, my attitude toward them all is the same. What these good people want to do, I also want to do. But I am a practical man, dealing with the actualities of to-day...I am ready to sit at the feet of any who will show me any good...quite prepared to hail with open arms any Utopia that is offered me. But it must be within range of my fingertips...

After reviewing what was being done - very little indeed! - for the

⁵ Some years ago the Danish author of a little book entitled *William Booth-Henry George*, in which he argues that George’s Single Tax theory meets the Founder’s requirements, told me that Henry George several times discussed his plans with Catherine Booth. What she thought of them I do not know, though in *Popular Christianity* she refers to ‘land under our present iniquitous system’!

needy ones on whose behalf he pleads, William Booth set forth his Scheme in Part II of the book, entitled, 'Deliverance.' Among the 'Essentials to Success' he named first that every scheme put forward must *change the man* if his character and conduct have caused his failure. Earlier on in the book he had declared that in 'this frightful chaos of human misery' nothing could be done without God; but, with God we can do all things.'

The second condition was that the circumstances of a man must be changed whenever they were to blame for his state and lay beyond his control.

Viewing his Scheme as both a 'long term' and a 'short term' remedy, the Founder included among the essentials to success permanency, but also immediate practicability.

More than half of this famous book is occupied with an outline of William Booth's proposals, which embraced what he called the City Colony, the Farm Colony and the Overseas Colony.

The former included the supplying of food to the hungry, shelter for the homeless (citing stories of a number of Converts already gained through The Army's Shelters), work and 'regimentation' for the unemployed and a 'Household Salvage Brigade.'

The word 'regimentation' may sound somewhat unpleasant; it referred to the establishment of a system by which the workless could be put in touch with opportunities of work. 'At present,' the author wrote, 'there is no labour exchange in existence in this country. The columns of the daily newspaper are the only substitute for this much-needed register.' To a later generation, alas! labour exchanges became

a sadly essential feature of life; yet what would have been their lot had no such exchanges existed? Apart from one or two small private registry bureaux which may have existed in the provinces, The Salvation Army led the way in the establishment of labour bureaux; in 1890 it had two, in 1899 twenty-two.⁶

Incidentally, in considering the destitution with which William Booth dealt, it must be remembered that before 1911 there was no Government unemployment insurance scheme in Britain!

Behind the City Colony, the Founder's Schemes envisaged the Farm Colony, where waste labour was to be employed on waste' land. This Colony was to be both a remedy in itself and a preparation for the third section of the Scheme-the Overseas Colony: not emigration, but the establishment in other lands of more or less self-contained and self-governed colonies. 'The Founder purposed securing for this purpose' a large tract of land' in South Africa,⁷ or Canada, Australia, or elsewhere....

Such a plan, he felt, would keep men and women on the land and avoid the danger of ordinary emigrants, who so often gravitated to the towns, competing with colonial workmen and lowering the wage levels.

'Universal Emigration' however, was also included in the Scheme. It may be said to have begun on a large scale in 1903, since when The Salvation Army has been responsible for settling more than 250,000 persons in overseas Dominions, with only about one per cent failures. The Founder insisted that this Overseas Migration and Settlement work must be advantageous to the country the migrant left; acceptable to the country receiving the migrant; beneficial to the migrant.

The Salvation Army has long been the largest voluntary migration

⁶ In *The Employment Exchange Service of Great Britain*, published in 1935, it was noted that in that year it was 'twenty-two years since the first (presumably Government) employment exchanges were established' -which carries us back only to 1913 !

⁷ Years later, when such a Colony in Rhodesia was under consideration, *The Mining World* wrote most delightfully:

'General Booth has his eyes on Rhodesia. It is perhaps out of place-and yet, why should it be?-to refer in a purely clp.ss paper such as this to the religious and social work of General Booth and the immense organizations he has been the means of creating. The commencement of The Salvation Army, as the General himself would admit, was on Mile End Waste. It was on waste ground, practically alone, that he began The Salvation Army, the name and work renowned through the earth.

'We have the conviction that since the days of Peter the Hermit there has not risen in the social and religious world a man greater than General Booth. We are not forgetting John Wesley, Whitfield, Luther or Father Mathew.

'We believe that fifty years hence, when the prejudice and passion his work has excited in our own times has died its natural death, General Booth will be ranked by the historian as the leading religious and social reformer of several centuries of the Christian era.

'The Rhodesian market became firmer at the very mention of his proposal to extend his work to that territory, showing the great power for good he wields over men and things.'

society. Of its various schemes-for women, single men, lads, children-there is not room to write here. Its remarkable success has been due largely to an 'unsurpassed world-wide organization,' and to the personal interest taken by Salvationists in each migrant until he or she reaches journey's end.

Nor can I do more than refer to the fact that the proposals of *In Darkest England and the Way Out* included a Slum Crusade, a Prison Gate Brigade, redemption of drunkards and of 'lost' women, inquiry after missing folk, Industrial Schools, Poor Man's Bank and Lawyer and many other interesting ventures. Many of these proposals were supported by actual stories illustrating The Army's success in the fields in question.

What has been the outcome of the challenge of the 'Darkest England' Scheme?

The past half-century has seen many and very revolutionary changes in Britain. After the first world war, unemployment increased to a figure which once would have been considered fantastic; but social legislation had been passed which greatly improved the condition of the unemployed, and utter destitution had become rarer.

Not all the proposals made by William Booth in *In Darkest England and the Way Out* have found practical realization.⁸

Some have been applied in a modified form. But many features of that Scheme, together with some not included in the original plan, are now part of The Army's widespread Social Work.

Numerous kinds of social endeavour are carried on to-day under The Army's Flag-from those enumerated above as being in operation half a century ago, to police court and probation work, Maternity Homes, Homes and Colonies for delinquent youth, Colonies for inebriates and (in the East) for beggars, Eventide Homes for the aged, Holiday Camps for children and for poor mothers, Leper Colonies, Hospitals, and much else.

The Army's multifarious *direct* social service would be a sufficiently remarkable result of the Founder's challenge; but in some ways even more notable has been the indirect outcome. Mrs. Roland Wilkins-

⁸ For one thing, the financial response to the Founder's appeal was inadequate. The initial £100,000 asked for was subscribed within a few months; but some years afterward Dean Farrar pointed out that, instead of an annual sum of £30,000, which William Booth had declared would be required, only an average of £4,000 was forthcoming!

better known in the earlier years of this century by her maiden name, L. Jebb, author of a book on English small-holdings-declared that The Army's Land Colony at Hadleigh, Essex, had definitely influenced the cultivation of the surrounding country, where it had been 'the pioneer of fruit-growing and market gardening.' In some parts of Essex, she said, horticulture had not been practised' until The Army had shown it to be possible. Now hundreds of acres are added every year and there has been an increased value of real estate.'

That relatively unimportant consequence is typical of many other advances The Army inspired. Lady Pethick-Lawrence, in her published reminiscences, says of the eightennineties: 'The rapid development of the social side of The Salvation Army was stirring up many of the churches and had inspired them to inaugurate social missions on entirely new lines.'

In a letter published some years ago in *The Spectator*, Commissioner David O. Lamb, writing on London's destitute during the fifty years in which the London County Council had then functioned-referred to the improved accommodation for homeless men, brought about by The Army's , continued co-operation with the authorities.'

Fifty years ago the common lodging-houses - doss-houses as many of them were called - were none too clean and were full to overflowing. A large number of the homeless were verminous, and The Army set up de-lousing fumigators at most of its Shelters. In this way we made a valuable contribution to the more hygienic condition of London to-day; but it was seven years after the launching of the 'Darkest England Scheme' before the necessary legislation was passed requiring Local Authorities to provide for the cleansing of verminous persons.

In the method of dealing with infectious diseases we sometimes found ourselves in conflict with the Health Authorities-but always with the most advanced scientists behind us! In an epidemic of smallpox it was the Salvation Army leaders who, acting primarily on humanitarian grounds, challenged the wisdom of the methods by which the London Health Authorities were dealing with the disease. Ultimately our views prevailed, and instead of clean lodging-houses being closed and the centres of infection multiplied by the scattering of the lodgers, the lodging-houses and shelters were kept open and the lodgers kept under sympathetic observation for a few days.

The provision by British authorities of meals for needy schoolchildren for a number of years past is largely the result of the famous 'Farthing

Breakfasts' at one time provided by The Army in many parts of the land.

One of the interesting proposals in *In Darkest England* concerned what the Founder called a 'Household Salvage Brigade.' This did not materialize quite in the form and to the extent suggested, but the principle of the utilization of waste products has been applied both in this and other lands. Some details of William Booth's original plan may yet be found practicable and needful; they certainly foreshadowed the salvage drives familiar in more than one country during World War II.

The proposal which has found most striking application was embodied in a passage urging that 'waste paper and rags, after being chemically treated and manipulated by machinery, should be re-issued to the world in the shape of paper.' The Founder's vision extended to the use of such paper for The Army's own needs - already then thirty tons a week - mainly for its periodicals.

Not only do Salvation Army Industrial Homes in many lands employ a number of men in sorting paper and so on, but The Army's pioneer efforts in this direction have been emulated by many firms working on a purely business basis, with no primary concern for the improvement of their workers' character. One authority has computed that in Britain alone this industry, together with the paper-mills and related undertakings, before 1939 employed about 250,000 persons.

This chapter may well include a reference to the great social and economic effect of The Army's general work, as apart from its specifically social challenge.

From the earliest days of the Movement, many wastrels, drunkards and other vicious characters have been converted in its Meetings. From being non-productive and a burden to the community, they have become steady wage-earners, contributing in rates and taxes to public funds. Not a few have rendered distinctive service to their town and nation. Their new mode of living has created an increased demand for food, furniture, etc. Quite a number have removed to better districts and often bought their own houses. Their children, and grand-children, have enjoyed an education and gained a social standing and economic efficiency very different from that which would have been their lot had

not their fathers, through contact with The Army, turned to God.

The number of such Converts must, in the course of years, have run into many thousands. Assume an average diversion of only ten shillings a week from drink, gambling and so on to more productive expenditure - well, you can do your own multiplication....!

When, in 1927, General Bramwell Booth unveiled the bust of his father on Mile End Waste, John Scurr - a Socialist and Roman Catholic - then M.P. for Whitechapel, in his speech gave considerable credit to The Army for the great improvements that had taken place in the social conditions of that part of London.

The young people here (he said) cannot have any idea of what Mile End was like sixty years ago. To-day it is a place of which we can be proud, and William Booth's sacrifice has been largely responsible for this.

What was said then of Whitechapel could be declared of many another place.