

## **William Booth - a Short Bio**

William Booth was a passionate, fiery British preacher who had great compassion for all those he preached to. He is known for gathering together churches to care for the poor, as is well known today, and which I also deeply care about. But more than that, his major concern was always the eternal state of people. He preached a clear message of purity of heart and life, and clear word of holiness. That is what drew me to his person and his teaching. I was also drawn to the teachings on holiness by an American Salvation Army preacher named Samuel Logan Brengle. His books are also very worth reading. I was hungry for God, and these two men helped me greatly.

### **Birth and parentage**

William Booth was born in Nottingham in 1829 and had three sisters Ann, Emma and Mary and an elder brother, Henry, who died on his own second birthday. Writing about his father, William said: "My father was a Grab, a Get. He had been born into poverty. He determined to grow rich; and he did. He grew very rich, because he lived without God and simply worked for money; and when he lost it all, his heart broke with it, and he died miserably."

### **Pawnbrokers' apprenticeship and death of his father**

In 1842, when he was 13, his father sent him to work as an apprentice to Francis Eames in a pawnbroker's shop situated in the poorest part of Nottingham. He disliked his job, but it was through this work that his social conscience was stirred and he became aware of the plight of the poor.

In September that same year, his father Samuel became ill and died, though not before making a death-bed repentance. Shortly after, his mother had to leave the house in Sneinton for a small shop in one of the poor quarters of Nottingham where she earned a meagre income selling toys, needles, cotton and the like. William's heart was being stirred in these days.

### **Methodism and conversion**

Around this time William started attending Broad Street Wesley Chapel, a Methodist church, and in 1844 he had a conversion experience, noting that, "It was in the open street of Nottingham that this great change passed over me."

In 1846 he was impressed by the preaching of the Reverend James Caughey from America and David Greenbury from Scarborough. Encouraged by Greenbury, he joined a group of fellow believers who preached in the streets. He delivered his first sermon in Kid Street. Eventually Booth stopped working at the Pawnbrokers and was out of work for a year.

### **Marriage**

In 1849 William moved to London to find work, briefly returning to pawnbroking but also joining

a chapel in Clapham. Through this church he was introduced to his future wife, Catherine Mumford. After becoming an evangelist in the Methodist New Connection, they married on 16 July 1855, forming a formidable and complimentary lifelong partnership. Following a brief honeymoon, he was appointed to circuits in Halifax and Gateshead. But, finding this structure restrictive and feeling himself called to itinerant evangelism, he resigned in 1861.

### **The Christian Mission**

Four years later William and Catherine moved to London. It was here that William commenced his first open air evangelistic campaign in Whitechapel, preaching in a tent. This ministry led to the formation of The Christian Mission, with Booth as its leader. In 1878, The Christian Mission was renamed The Salvation Army. 'General Booth,' as he was now known, summed up the purpose of this group in the following way: "We are a salvation people - this is our specialty - getting saved and keeping saved, and then getting somebody else saved." But there was to be frequent opposition to the Army's methods and principles in its early years.

### **In Darkest England**

After suffering from cancer, Catherine Booth was 'promoted to Glory' on 4 October 1890, leaving a significant void in William's life. In the same month Booth published his major social manifesto, 'In Darkest England and the Way Out,' an excellent book I have read. He explored various far-reaching ideas, such as providing hostels, employment centers and helping young men learn agricultural trades before emigrating.

Thereafter Booth turned back to preaching and evangelism, with day-to-day administration of the Army passing to his oldest son, Bramwell. The years that followed were difficult ones for William. He had to deal with three of his children leaving The Salvation Army and one dying in a train crash.

### **Motor Tours**

In August, 1904, William Booth, always eager to make use of new technology, commenced his first motor tour, travelling from Land's End to Aberdeen. Six more motor tours followed. By this time in his life he had accomplished so much both in bringing men and women to Jesus, helping them to grow in godliness and holiness, and in helping so many of those who were so needy physically. He was honored by being given the Freedom of the Cities of London and Nottingham. Amongst many other honors, Booth was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from Oxford University.

### **The General lays down his sword**

Though his eyesight started failing at this stage in his life, it didn't prevent him from conducting campaigns, with his last trip abroad being to Norway in 1912. On 17 August, 1912, *The War Cry* reported that the General was "not so well." Three days later, on 20 August, following a terrific thunderstorm, "the old warrior finally laid down his sword."

In accordance with a widely felt desire, the body of the General lay pavilioned in state at The Congress Hall, Clapton, on the Friday, Saturday and Monday following his passing, when some 150,000 grief-stricken people passed the bier to gaze upon the ivory-like features of "the world's best-loved man." The Mayor of South Shields described him as "The Archbishop of the World."

About 35,000 people attended a public memorial service which included Queen Alexandra, Queen of the United Kingdom, who came incognito, and representatives of King George V and Queen Mary. The heart of London stood still for nearly four hours as the lengthy procession of some 7,000 Salvationists, including forty bands, wended its five-mile way through densely crowded streets from the Victoria Embankment, no fewer than 580 City and 2,370 Metropolitan police being on duty. Clearly he had been loved by many.

Bramwell Booth, one of William's sons, said: "The happiest man I ever knew was the General. He was a glad spirit. He rose up on the crest of the stormy billows, and praised God, and laughed at the Devil's rage, and went on with his work with joy."