



The
William Booth
Collection

STEPHEN: THE STAFF-OFFICER MARTYR

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It will be just about fifty years ago next June since I was converted. I have seen some fighting for God and souls since that day, and oh, how my heart longs sometimes to give the benefit of these fifty years' experience to my comrades, without their having to spend the time and go through the trouble and sorrow to acquire it for themselves.

You are young; and there are within your reach vast possibilities. With a reasonable amount of application, industry, effort and self-denial there is no telling what you may yet do, without going out of your way, or putting forth very superhuman efforts. If you will exercise ordinary diligence in embracing the opportunities that surround you, I can foresee for each one of you a glorious future of progress and victory. I am always saying that I look upon everything that is Salvation Army - especially its Officers, not so much in the light of what they are, but of what they may be. I cannot see them as they are to-day. I am so much occupied in looking at what they may become tomorrow.

A COMMON DELUSION.

Now, there is a common delusion abroad with regard to the work and position of a Staff-officer, which I would particularly like to dispel, if that were possible. Here you are at the heart of this great organization, nay, you are in a sense yourselves its very heart; you are the mainspring, you set the pace, you lead the fashion, you are to an extent (that almost distresses me at times) the pattern of The Salvation Army all round the world. How important it is then that you should rightly appreciate that position, and duly estimate the responsibilities connected with it.

Now there is, I say, a common but fatal mistake made in regard to your position. It is supposed by many to be more difficult, if not altogether impossible for a Staff-officer to follow God as fully and to maintain the same spirituality, tenderness and inspiration which are necessary and possible for an officer in the Field. It is supposed that to sit in an office, write letters, deal with business, manage printing, trade and other details of our Headquarters' work are not compatible with a close walk with God.

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ANY WARRANT IN THE BIBLE?

Now, I can understand this temptation. It is one that has often come to my own heart, and I was really wondering to myself, in coming to this meeting, whether any Prophet or Apostle, or prominent servant of God, could be found who could answer for the Staff-Officer of today.

But before I came to that, I asked myself whether there is anything in the Old or New Testament which justified the existence of a Staff at all. It has seemed to me at times that it would simplify things if we had no Headquarters and no great Officers working there, no ponderous accounts to keep, no reports to issue, no records to preserve. So I set myself to enquire whether the Prophets or Apostles of old managed things in this fashion. Did they not go helter-skelter about their work without any particular plan? Were they not free from these burdens and bothers which weigh us down? Is not our Staff a human invention? and should we not do better if we were to dispose of it altogether?

But a little consideration was sufficient to convince me that in the Bible there is abundant evidence to favor the appointment of a Staff. Without going further back than the Pentecostal days, I find the Apostles organizing themselves into a Staff, and filling up the place vacated by one of the Head Commissioners whom the love of money had led astray, and almost immediately afterwards, like some of our Commissioners, I find them making over the more disagreeable duties associated with their position to a specially selected Staff of seven Officers, who were

APPOINTED TO SERVE TABLES.

Here, then, I have my Staff and my Staff-officer, and I decided to take hold of Stephen and bring him out tonight as a model Staff-officer, and one who exhibited in a remarkable manner what it is possible for a Staff-officer to be.

There is not very much recorded about Stephen, indeed his career was cut short in such a hurry that there was not time; but the little time he had was well employed, and enabled him to make an everlasting mark both upon this world and upon the next.



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Staff-Captain Marshall, in one of his songs, makes us pray,

“OH, MAKE MY LIFE ONE BLAZING FIRE!”

I think we can truly say that Stephen’s life, though brief, was one of “blazing fire,” and I think we can describe the more remarkable features in it by comparing it to a golden chain with seven links in it. Let us take them one after the other and look at them for a moment:

1. FULL OF FAITH.

We are told that he was “a man full of faith.” It does not say that he was full of ability, though doubtless he was not without it; nor are we told that he was full of intellect, though it is evident that he was not without capacity. Nor are we told that he was full of opinions; and most certainly he was not full of money: if he had any to start with he brought it to the Apostles and gave it to them for the starting of their Social Scheme. As a rule men who have money are not of much service to the world. It not only proves a delusion to them, but a misfortune to others. You have probably heard the story about Lord Eldon, who rose, if I mistake not, from the Pit’s mouth to the highest position on the Judicial Bench. On giving a curacy of about £300 to a young clergyman, he said, “Young man, if anyone had done this for me when I was your age, I should never have been Lord Eldon.” He meant to say, I suppose, that the possession of a settled income, however small, would have deprived him of the stimulus which poverty and hardship had supplied.

But if Stephen was not the possessor of these things, he had that which was of far more value and importance to him - he was a man of faith. At a time when nobody believed in the Saviour of mankind, Stephen believed. He was not troubled with doubts, as are many people. They think it is a mark of their superior intelligence to doubt; but Stephen was without doubts - there was no room for them - he was full of faith, and as a direct consequence, he was -

2. FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST.



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His faith linked him on to God, he gave himself up to God, he gave himself up to be ruled and controlled and possessed by the Divine Spirit. It is a great help to me when I think or talk about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, to remember that it simply signifies the coming nearer of God. To be baptized means simply to be immersed in God. We see only too often how people can be full of the world - full of its spirit - we all know what that means. We know how people can be possessed with the devil - we see it all around us in practice. Why do men commit such devilish things? why do they kill their wives, their children, and wind up by killing themselves? It is because they are full of the devil - he rules them. It seems to me that nothing must amuse the devil so much, if he can be amused, as to hear people talking about not being the slaves of religious notions, or of any notions about God, when all the time he sees and knows and feels that they are his own slaves. When Bramwell was a little boy he used to sit beside me sometimes when I was driving, and to amuse him I would give him the end of the reins to hold. He thought, in his childish simplicity, that he was driving, when it was I all the time. So, many people think they drive themselves. They have too independent spirits, they will tell you, to be driven, guided, and controlled by any other Being, when all the time it is the devil that is driving them, and we know where he is driving them to. Now, just in the same way as a man can be filled with evil and the devil he can be filled with God.

3. WONDERS AND MIRACLES.

The third link in this golden chain describes Stephen, full of faith and full of God, doing great wonders and miracles among the people. I should think the wonders and miracles were different from each other. Perhaps by the latter we are to understand that he healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, made the dumb to sing, and possibly even that he raised the dead. That was marvelous in the extreme, and I don't object to Staff-officers doing such things in our days.

But besides the miracles, Stephen did wonders - wonders with the books and with the money, wonders in raising funds, and wonders in making them go a long way, wonders at serving tables, and wonders in feeding and satisfying the widows; but, after all, I should judge that he did wonders in saving souls. How could it be otherwise, when he was full of faith and the Holy Ghost? We realize that this is the wonder of wonders. Doubtless it was this that aggravated the



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Priests and Pharisees to such an extent as to lead them to single him out for persecution, so that they hunted him to death. He was a mighty soul-winner.

Why should we not go in for the same? God is no respecter of persons. We are lost for the want of religious conceit. How willing we are to be ordinary, jog-trot-people - instruments without teeth. How few there are who will rise up and say that they will work wonders among the people! The curse of the Church is its willingness to be nothing, its lack of holy ambition. The curse of a crowd of Officers is their willingness to be nothing: they lack holy ambition. You know what I mean. There is a possibility of being at the same time great and little. John the Baptist is said to have been great in the sight of the Lord. I know some who are great in the sight of other men, and many who are great in their own eyes, so great that I wonder they don't come to grief with the sense of their own bigness and importance; but, oh! to be great in the sight of the Lord.

4. THE FACE OF AN ANGEL.

The next link in this chain was the transformation. We are told that his face shone like an angel's, and yet his circumstances were not very shining just then. They hated and slandered him. They were trying to catch him with his words, and seeking to condemn him to death. If there was anything other than the angelic in him, that was the time for it to have come out. But instead of this we read that his face shone like an angel's; therein he set a good example for Staff-officers.

I think we could do with a few more shining faces among our Staff. When the Commandant was a boy he was very delicate, and consequently a cause of great anxiety to his mother. Many a time I have seen him, when going into her presence, scrubbing his cheeks with his hands to bring a little color into them in order to prevent her anxious concern for him; but what little bit of color he was able to bring in soon went out, it did not last. And so it is with some of us. There are no people whose faces shine like a Salvationist's; but I am afraid they shine more on the platform than off. Cannot we have faces that will always shine? The other day the infidel Mayor of a town where I was holding meetings said to me, "There is one thing I cannot get over with your people, and that is their countenances." Why should he want to get over it? Why should



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he not rather try to get into it? We have no idea what an impression a shining face makes upon the ungodly.

I have just returned, as you know, from Scandinavia. One day the train stopped for twenty minutes at a Station, and though the thermometer was thirty-seven degrees below freezing-point at the time, I found some thirty happy Salvationists waiting to meet me. Some of them had tramped many miles over the snow in that bitter cold. Oh! how their faces shone. We were some three hundred miles north of Stockholm and yet there they were, loving God and living for souls. They listened to me with delight, catching at every point I made. As I went on talking to them I could not help thinking what a beautiful people we Salvationists are, and praising God for it all.

5. STEPHEN'S WISDOM.

He carried all before him with his words. No one could gainsay him, and because they could not answer him they slew him. And then comes the link of -

6. REVELATION.

He saw the heavens open and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Revelations are wonderful things, and they are terribly scarce, I fancy, in this age. Perhaps some of you say, "I never see any sights or hear any sounds that I dare call Divine or think come to me more than to others." Perhaps it is because you don't live in the spirit of Revelations. To be full of faith and immersed in the Holy Ghost must open a man's eyes, and a man's ears as well, to see and hear things that are outside the range of this poor doubting world.

But I don't suppose this was Stephen's only Revelation. They were probably common to him. However, he had this one, he had it and just at the moment when he needed it most. It came to him in the thick of the fight, with the blackness of darkness all around him, and the scoffing, mocking, blaspheming magistrates clamoring for his blood in front of him. And what a wonderful vision it was for him to see the face of the crowned and glorified Jesus! Dying was easy after that.



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Then comes the seventh link -

7. IN THE TRIUMPHANT DEATH.

We are apt to think that it was a pity that he should pass off the scene so early, so young, so good, so wise, so courageous, so divine. Why did God let him die? We know not the reason. Doubtless the reasons were there. To being with, there was Paul standing by watching that shining face and beholding the marvelous words with which he closed his career: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." If the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, if men are convinced more by what we do than by what we say, who can gauge the results of Stephen's martyrdom?

STEPHEN'S FAITH

But I come back to my starting point, the first link in this wonderful chain - Stephen's faith. What nonsense it is for the devil to seek to make us believe that the fullness of faith and of the Holy Ghost are not as necessary to Staff-officers as it is to those engaged in the Field warfare!

Go back to the Old Testament, take only one instance; namely, the building of the Ark. What time, what labor, what planning and arranging it must have required - first, to build it; then to provision it, and finally to get the animals in all their kinds into their various places and properly fixed up when they were there.

How was it all done? By the Holy Ghost; and why should not we fall back upon the same great power for wisdom and comfort and strength for our multifarious duties? There is wisdom, just the wisdom that is needed by architects, cashiers, accountants and builders and trading people and printers and secretaries of every class and grade - nothing is too hard or too intricate for that Divine Director. He can go before us, and with us, and follow after us, and will give us victory. Oh! blessed Spirit, You are the need and the success of the Staff-officer.

Now, my comrades, with the fullness of faith in this Mighty Spirit you will be able to stand alone. One of the great strengths of The Salvation Army is in danger of becoming a weakness. We are



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united, linked together; we hold one another up, and consequently lean on each other in days of darkness and storm. Now, there is a danger of this very facility for resting in each other's confidence and co-operation becoming a weakness, and leading us away from the ability to stand for Christ and truth and the Army, even if we have to stand alone.

Now, my brother, my sister, take hold of God, and take your full share of responsibility for the Kingdom on your own shoulders, and stand up for it if you stand alone, and God will make a Stephen of you.

But you say, "I am so unworthy." That was what my dear old mother used to be ever saying when I urged her to take her place among the redeemed of the Lord, claiming the forgiveness of sins and title clear for heaven. She felt so unworthy, and I used to answer her, "Yes, mother, it is quite true that you are unworthy - very unworthy, but 'the Bleeding Lamb, He was found worthy.'"

Unbelief of the most diabolical character often clothes itself in the garb of humility. It says, "Don't suppose I am going to live and succeed where others have failed." Oh, I charge you to measure yourselves, not by one another, nor by the achievements of others, but by the promises of God, the merits of the Atoning Blood, and the power of the Holy Ghost.

Look at those Apostles - those cowardly Staff-officers who ran away and forsook their Master in His direst hour of need. But see the same men when they had received the Holy Ghost in all His fullness! See how they rushed at death, and how they afterwards created a people after their own kind, who feared nothing and nobody! See how they had to be held back, so eager were they to seal their testimony with their blood! Now for it here. Let each one of us stand up in our own individuality, as though there were no one else but ourselves to fight for Jehovah.

Never mind your feelings; they are often purely animal, and have nothing to do with your standing before God. It is not always those who feel the most who are the highest and noblest and best among His followers. Never mind if your heart is as hard as a stone, hold on and say "God lives, and because He lives I shall live also."



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If I were asked to put into a few words the one thing that distinguishes The Salvation Army from the doubting, shivering, hesitating crowd among us, I should say it was Faith in the Bleeding Lamb; and when you get hold of people whom you are satisfied believe in Christ the Sacrifice and a Holy Life, take them to your heart, you will be safe in doing so. To the world there is nothing more contemptible; to heaven there is nothing more glorious; to us there is nothing more mighty, than the Bleeding Lamb. The Father was unable to express His love to man by a more perfect method than by giving His Son - His own Son, to be the Saviour of mankind.

The world is ashamed of the Bleeding Lamb; you and I are going to be simple, humble, bold, laborious believers in Jesus Christ, and He will be the medium through Whom we shall receive the "rivers of water" which shall flow out through us upon this poor, sinful, wilderness world.