



Bandmaster Thomas Cooper Dawkins.

His dollar cornet.

It was an utterly reckless speculation which determined the destiny of Thomas Cooper Dawkins, now Southampton's talented and popular Bandmaster.

He had attained the irresponsible age of eleven, and with the precociousness of a boy who had not yet reached the dignity of long trousers, he one day determined to have a flutter with his savings. So in an unguarded moment Tommy bought an instrumental tutor, with the remains of an instrument thrown in, for four shillings!

Many a marine store dealer has committed a similar indiscretion, at least in part, but the youthful Dawkins saved the situation by polishing up the old brass, for brass it proved to be after he had been rubbing and scraping for four hours more or less.

To the astonishment of his elders, the instrument when finally "discovered" was found to be an A1 cornet by Metzler.

Tommy's opinion of his judgment went up 100 per cent, and his new-born enthusiasm for music ditto.

But alas! "to what base uses," etc.

Young Dawkins and a companion began to practice assiduously with the object of "getting a job at a theatre!"

Happily for himself, and the Southampton Band, the lad's energies were before long directed into nobler channels by a godly father.

This worthy man was an Envoy, and every Sunday it was his delight to carry the message of Salvation to such Outposts of Salvation as West End, Fairrock, and Edge Inn.

His son often accompanied him on these expeditions, and was greatly influenced by the meetings his father conducted.

On one occasion he was so awakened to a sense of his need of a Savior that he longed to yield himself to God.

But, alas! as the Bandmaster says himself.

"I was only a boy. Nobody took any notice of me, although my desires were as real and my motives as pure as those of any grown-up person could have been."

At the age of sixteen he saw his companion give himself to God, and soon afterwards when the first batch of Cadets came to Southampton under Staff-Captain (now Lieut.-Colonel) Lucas, Tom Dawkins sought salvation.

As he could already play an instrument, he was at once made into a Bandsman.

In those days Army musicians wore what uniform they liked, and Dawkins adopted a sailor's cap with a red band round it.

The first distinctive uniform worn by Southampton Band as a whole were red blouses girt around the waist, such as the sister might now wear on washing days.

Then, though lax discipline, or some other cause, the Band split up.

One Sunday they marched out sixteen strong; a week later only five "stickers" faced the storm.

Dawkins was one of the five.

At that time several of the small Corps round Southampton required an instructor, and Dawkins was asked by his Officer to undertake this responsibility.

On his first visit to one of these Bands he found a splendid lot of men and a sorry collection of instruments.

"What can you do?" asked the instructor.

"Oh, we are dabsters at "We shall win," they replied cheerfully.

Closer inquiry revealed that half of these dear fellows, who looked so seriously at the music they had poised at the correct angle, could not read a note!

Some of them could not read plain English!

The instructor's perseverance and his genius for taking pains soon rectified these little shortcomings however.

Bandmaster Dawkins, who has occupied that responsible position in his native town for about thirteen years, has seen not a few changes during the nineteen years he has been a Salvationist.

Public ridicule and opposition have given place to respect and sympathy, while in nothing has there been more notable advances made than in the efficiency and equipment of the Band.

There are thirty players at Southampton, and their music is thoroughly up to date.

A String Band is the latest departure, and a very promising nucleus has already been formed.

The popular Bandmaster is a stickler for efficiency, and has great ambitions for his band, but no one can see him at work, or talk to him when off duty, without being impressed by his anxiety to put souls first in all he undertakes.

He speaks wistfully of some of the old tunes, which made the Bandsmen cry even as they played, but on the other hand he holds that our Bands were never more devoted than they are to-day.

Besides being a self-made musician, Bandmaster Dawkins has in business life attained, by integrity and diligence, a position of considerable responsibility, from as unpromising a start in life as ever working-lad had.

As foreman electrical engineer in the employ of the South Western Railway at Southampton he is widely known and respected. (The Bandsman and Songster, May 11, 1907)