

### **Bandmaster J.E. Smith, Southsea.**

The making of a Bandmaster.

No one would recognize the prosperous tradesman, member of the Board of Guardians, and, best of all bright Army Bandmaster of to-day in the drink-cursed, despairing seaman of some twenty years ago.

Yet the two men are identical, the great difference between their two stages of existence being that in one the power of Salvation is seen in all its ennobling force, while in the other the servant of Satan is the laughter of devils!

Bandmaster James Edward Smith, of Southsea, stands before all who care to behold him as a living trophy of the grace of God, and, as he himself as a living trophy of the grace of God, and, as he himself puts it, "never forgets the pit from whence he has been dug," or, to change the figure, "the bridge that carried him over the abyss."

Our comrade is remarkable in many ways.

He is a coal merchant in a large way of business, and has in his employment twenty men, of whom thirteen are Bandsmen.

They take their stand amongst the forty odd members of the Southsea Salvation Army Band, as follow: one solo cornet, one 1st cornet, two 2nd cornets, one 1st tenor, one 2nd tenor, one 1st baritone, one solo euphonium, two Eb basses, one bass drum, one side drum, and the Band Color-Sergeant.

Amid all his public and private business Smith finds time to discharge the pressing and important duties of Bandmaster, he has the confidence and love of the Bandsmen, and he is never so happy as when leading them on in a campaign crowned with souls for God.

A member of the Portsmouth Board of Guardians, elected without opposition, the Southsea Bandmaster is respected wherever he goes.

He puts God first in all he does, gives largely of time and money to The Army, and is only too delighted when he sees his house and grounds utilized in some wholesale fashion for the good of the poor and suffering.

Bandmaster Smith gives all the glory, and it is only right he should, but at the same time no one need be blind to the fact that when The Army found him in "the gutter of sin" they picked up "a diamond" which only wanted polishing in order to shine brightly in the Savior's service.

There are many such still awaiting the finding, and Bandmaster Smith remembers that fact every time he raises his "baton" to conduct the opening note of a soul-saving campaign.

In one way it is painful to turn back the pages of one's life, but his twenty years of stalwart Salvationism have made him willing that the story should be told in order that it may inspire some other "ship-wrecked" voyager over the ocean of life to stretch out his hands to the Christ who comes to him on the troubled waters.

At the age of sixteen, James Edward Smith was on the highroad to becoming a hopeless drunkard. Then he joined the Royal Navy, and soon became notorious for tipsy exploits.

It would serve no good purpose to relate them in detail, but we may briefly say that they brought the young seaman to a condition in which he began to loathe the chains that bound him to his foe!

Coming ashore, on leave, for the Christmas of 1886, he very readily promised his parents that he would stay at home and keep sober.

How his good resolutions vanished is perhaps best told in our comrade's own words.

He writes, "going out on the morning of the day before Christmas I called into a public-house at Portsea to see a friend, and thought I might safely have "one glass."

There I started drinking and gambling the whole of the day.

How it finished I do not know, but I woke up about six the next morning to find I had been lying on the taproom floor all night.

You may guess it was a sorry Christmas!"

The effects of this debauch, following on at least two years of "steady" drinking, were serious. The young seaman had to go into hospital, and there, in the agonies of sickness, he resolved to "drink no more."

He was discharged, invalided, a physical wreck through drink, although not much more than a boy in years.

As he went over the ship's side with his few belongings the doctor warned him in a kindly way that if he went on drinking nothing could save him from death!

Well aware of it, the drink-slave yielded to the first invitation to "a drink", and at the very same house where he had formerly prepared for a dismal Christmas, settled down to a week's carouse which left him penniless.

On a Sunday morning, sick of life under such conditions, he met The Army in the open-air at Southsea.

He followed to the Hall, and finally ventured out to the penitent-form to ask God to make a new creature of him in Christ Jesus.

Let our Bandmasters note what followed as narrated in our comrade's own words: "The Bandmaster of the small Band at once got hold of me and pressed me to become a Bandsman right straight away, which I believe meant my full salvation, as it got me right away from my old companions."

Twelve months later our comrade cheerfully went to prison for three days for "causing an obstruction", with his fellow Salvationists, in the street.

Our comrade, saved and happy, was prepared to dare and do all things for the God of his salvation.

For five years he held the appointment of Envoy, attached to the Southampton and Brighton Division, and during that time only spent about one Sunday a month at home.

Naturally, his wife hailed his appointment as Bandmaster, three and a half years ago, with delight, and she never grudges the time he gives to the Band.

With salvation also came a desire for better things generally.

Brother Smith gladly accepted the job of carting coal, but he soon got other men to cart coal for him.

To-day he is what he is by the grace of God, Army training, and his own perseverance. (The Bandsman and Songster, April 13, 1907)