



Bandmaster George Walker, Derby 2.

Led to the front.

A study of the life history of Bandmaster George Walker, of Derby 2, would convince any Salvationist of the fact that our comrade was, "through ways he knew not," led to the front of The Salvation Army's war, in a very special way by the Spirit of God.

The son of a musician, he was, on his tenth birthday, presented with a cornet, and such good use did he make of it, under his father's instruction, that at the end of the same year he was playing "the waits" with the Bilston Newton Catholic Band.

This Christmas exercise quickened his appreciation of music from various points of view, and left him richer in pocket and experience.

Migrating to Derby, he joined the Volunteer band as solo cornet player, but here an accident befell him.

The result was that for two years he was unable to play, but at the end of that period he emerged from misfortune as soprano in the same Band, of which he eventually became deputy-bandmaster.

Naturally, he took part in many public engagements, and became familiar with the platforms of concert halls and theatres, and it was during an engagement at the Derby Palace of Varieties that he was first made aware of the fact that The Salvation Army possessed good musical talent.

At the invitation of a friend he listened to the music of an Army Band, and appreciated what he heard.

His first real connection with The Army was of a purely musical character.

It came about in this way.

Some of the Bandsmen of Derby 2, who had a great respect for George Walker, and knew that he was "half-way" toward The Army way of thinking, by the fact of being a teetotaler, suggested to their comrades that they might get him to give them tuition (for in those days this was hard to obtain), such as that by which he had brought the Derby United Prize Band to a pitch of recognized excellence.

The idea found favor, and the musician took the first step, towards light and liberty, although at the time he made various stipulations, and was quite unaware of the immense change which was impending to his life.

Associated with Salvationists, he began to watch their lives, and compare them with his own. He saw they possessed something he had not, and in their company at an Alexandra Palace Demonstration he heard the then Captain Jack Stoker say certain Salvation truths, which caused him still deeper reflect on his position.

The work of grace deepened in his heart, and then, "by accident," if anything ever occurs "by accident," he came into such close touch with The Army that he realized his "call" to its ranks.

Our correspondent writes: "For some time previous to his conversion he had been teaching Burton Band, and the Bandmaster being minus a cornet player one Sunday, gave the teacher invitation to come and assist.

Out of curiosity, expecting to see something of a very funny nature, he responded to the further invitation to come to knee-drill.

Here the spirit of prayer impressed him.

He found he had come amongst people whom he had greatly misunderstood, and was also convinced that it was the purest form of the worship of God he had ever seen.

"At the night meeting he boldly stated he believed God had led him to The Army, and it was his desire to be a Salvationist."

The Bandsmen at Derby 2 were delighted, and as soon as possible offered their new "comrade in arms" the Bandmastership.

With full knowledge of all that it meant to him-self-sacrifice, financial loss, and the reproach of worldly friends, Brother Walker accepted.

For years, teaching music and instrumental engagements had been his means of livelihood.

At first he was not able to get work, but through the efforts of Commissioner Hay, then Captain of Derby 2, and others, a situation was found for him at the Midland Locomotive Works.

This he retained for seventeen years, with satisfaction to himself and his employers, while giving all the time he could to the Salvation War.

When made Bandmaster in 1889, it was Brother Walker's ambition to have a Band as large as one he had left, and he had the gratification of seeing that his labor was not in vain, for in less than three years the Band of Derby 2 had far exceeded his expectations.

Today, Bandmaster Walker is the same loyal Salvationist as when he gave up the world for God and The Army, and stands in the front rank of Army Bandmasters.

Few of them have such a record as his, forty-three years a musician, and an Army Bandmaster for nineteen, but he is of a very unassuming disposition, and "makes his boast" in the Lord who led him to where he stands today. (The Bandsman and Songster, May 25, 1907)