

General William Booth Enters into Heaven

To be sung to the tune of *The Blood of the Lamb* with indicated instrument]

I

[Bass drum beaten loudly.]

1. Booth led boldly with his big bass drum --
2. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
3. The Saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."
4. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
5. Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,
6. Lurching bravoos from the ditches dank,
7. Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale --
8. Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail: --
9. Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath,
10. Unwashed legions with the ways of Death --
11. (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

[Banjos.]

12. Every slum had sent its half-a-score
13. The round world over. (Booth had groaned for more.)
14. Every banner that the wide world flies
15. Bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes.
16. Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang,
17. Tranced, fanatical they shrieked and sang: --
18. "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"
19. Hallelujah! It was queer to see
20. Bull-necked convicts with that land make free.
21. Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare, blare
22. On, on upward thro' the golden air!
23. (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

II

[Bass drum slower and softer.]



24. Booth died blind and still by Faith he trod,
25. Eyes still dazzled by the ways of God.
26. Booth led boldly, and he looked the chief
27. Eagle countenance in sharp relief,
28. Beard a-flying, air of high command
29. Unabated in that holy land.

[Sweet flute music.]

30. Jesus came from out the court-house door,
31. Stretched his hands above the passing poor.
32. Booth saw not, but led his queer ones there
33. Round and round the mighty court-house square.
34. Then in an instant all that blear review
35. Marched on spotless, clad in raiment new.
36. The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled
37. And blind eyes opened on a new, sweet world.

[Bass drum louder.]

38. Drabs and vixens in a flash made whole!
39. Gone was the weasel-head, the snout, the jowl!
40. Sages and sibyls now, and athletes clean,
41. Rulers of empires, and of forests green!

[Grand chorus of all instruments. Tambourines to the foreground.]

42. The hosts were sandalled, and their wings were fire!
43. (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
44. But their noise played havoc with the angel-choir.
45. (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
46. O shout Salvation! It was good to see
47. Kings and Princes by the Lamb set free.
48. The banjos rattled and the tambourines
49. Jing-jing-jingled in the hands of Queens.

[Reverently sung, no instruments.]

50. And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer
51. He saw his Master thro' the flag-filled air.
52. Christ came gently with a robe and crown



53. For Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down.
54. He saw King Jesus. They were face to face,
55. And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place.
56. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Composition Date: 1913.

Background Note:

William Booth (1829-1912) founded the Salvation Army in London in 1865 to yoke Christians to social work. His missionary organization spread to the United States 15 years later. Lindsay writes about the making of this poem in *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1923): 21-22:

The poem called "General Booth Enters Heaven" was built in part upon certain adventures while singing these songs. When I was dead broke and begging in Atlanta, Georgia, and much confused as to my next move in this world, I slept for three nights in the Salvation Army quarters there. And when I passed through Newark, New Jersey, on another trip I slept in the Salvation Army quarters there. I could tell some fearful stories of similar experiences. I will say briefly, that I know the Salvation Army from the inside. Certainly, at that time, the Army was struggling with what General Booth called the submerged tenth of the population. And I was with the submerged.

In the spring of 1912 the news went around the world that the great founder of the Army had gone blind. Every Sunday newspaper had a full-page picture of the blind General. Later came the announcement of his death, with elaborate biographies. Later in these same newspapers, all over the world, came the story of his life as told by himself. So much has happened since, such rivers of blood have run under the bridges of the world, that this succession of newspaper features has been forgotten. Meanwhile the fanatical Salvation Army, that was like the Franciscans of the Strict Observance in the very earliest days of St. Francis, has emerged as a prosperous rival of the Y. M. C. A.

By General Booth's own story, quoted incessantly by the papers the year of his death, he went into the lowest depths of London, by malice aforethought and deliberate intention to rescue the most notoriously degraded, those given up by policeman, physician, preacher and charity worker. He reiterated in his autobiography that he wanted to find those so low there was none lower. He put them into uniform. He put them under military discipline. He put them in authority over one another. He chose their musical instruments, and their astonishing tunes. The world has forgotten what a scandal to respectable religion the resulting army was when it



began. It was like the day St. Francis handed all his clothes to the priest, or the day he cut off the hair of St. Clara. In my poem I merely turned into rhyme as well as I could, word for word, General Booth's own account of his life, and the telegraph dispatches of his death after going blind. I set it to the tune that is not a tune, but a speech, a refrain used more frequently in the meetings of the Army on any public square to this day. Yet I encounter a great number of people who are sure they have never heard of the General, the army or the tune, or who ask me if I wrote the poem to "make sport."

