

OUR SWEDISH OFFICERS

CAPTAIN S. VIBERG\*

According to what my parents said, I was born in a village in Southern Sweden April 28, 1865. When I was very young, I was a good boy, according to what my mother has said. But the years passed, and soon what I liked to do was wander around in the woods with other boys, and try to find bird-nests to plunder. I remember that one boy and I had a sort of contract with one another to share our loot, whether we were out together or not.

However, I soon outgrew plundering bird-nests, but the Devil had already looted my heart, and he knew how to lead me by the nose. Already, as a boy, I began to play cards and soon I was really a prisoner of that sin. Yes, I was an impassioned card-player up to the time of my Confirmation. God spoke powerfully to me during my Confirmation instruction. The minister who confirmed me seriously pointed out the way. I don't know if he, himself, took that road, but to my knowledge there was no one in that area who was a Child of God, and thus, no one to take me by the hand and lead me to Jesus. I tried as best I could to be a good youth. I succeeded for a while, but soon all my good intentions fell apart little by little, until I was tired of trying. Soon my home became too limited. Despite the fact that my parents needed me at home, and pleaded constantly with me to stay with them, I gave them no peace until I got their promise to allow me to find a position. I was able to obtain one near my home, and went there with several friends, and soon I was participating with them in all kinds of sin. The passion for playing cards gripped me harder than ever, and, as a result, I often neglected to eat or sleep.

The years passed and when I was twenty, I became employed in the town of Jönköping, which is also called "the city of religionists". It felt a little narrow for me in the beginning, since several of my companions were "pietists" and they immediately attacked me. I paid attention to them and observed them from morning 'til night, plus I noticed that many times their lives did not match their words, and then I thought they were all hypocrites, like so many others. I no longer listened to their admonishments, and told them often that they were no better than I was. Finally, they lost all hope in me as I went further and further down the road of sin.

After I had been in that town for two years, a certain type of people arrived, and they were going to hold meetings. They said they were "pietists", and as a result, I didn't pay any attention to them. But it just so happened that one of my comrades had been Saved a couple of days earlier in the Mission Hall, and he came to me and asked me nicely to go with him. I couldn't refuse, and in order not to distress him, I went with him to a meeting, held in a farmyard, which was completely filled with people. We pushed our way through and came into the yard. There we saw several men and women standing on a raised plank, which was supposed to represent a platform; the men were dressed in bright red shirts and the women wore hats which I had never seen the likes of before. These strange people were members of The Salvation Army. One man, Captain A., the rank he had then, went back and forth on the platform and spoke with great fervour and warmth about Jesus and His Power as a Saviour. After he finished, a rather corpulent man (at that time Staff-Officer M.) climbed up and began to prophesy that many of the young men and women, who were standing around him, would soon become Salvation Army soldiers. I smiled a bit at that and nudged my friend in the side while I whispered to him, "If that man never predicted incorrectly before, he certainly has done so now." The man saw that quite a few did the same thing as I, and therefore said right away, "Yes, just you, who are laughing, will be the first." In any case, I left the meeting with different thoughts about the "religionists" than the ones I had previously.

The following Sunday, when they held meetings in two chapels at the same time, I decided to go and listen to them, but I arrived just as they finished the hallelujah meeting. Their last meeting of the day was going to be held that evening in the Methodist Church. My friends wanted me to go out with them to have sinful fun, but I got away from

them in a clever way, because I had decided to go to the evening meeting. Not in order to be saved, no, that was as far from my thoughts as the East is from the West, but in order to see those strange people once more. I arrived in time to get a place in the gallery, almost in the middle over the altar-rail, before which were those who were going to lead the meeting. I don't remember very much about the first part of the meeting, because I was only looking at either the Salvationists or the huge crowd of people who were gathered there; but suddenly I was brought to my senses by some powerful words spoken by the previously-mentioned Captain A. The words were: "Is everyone here ready to meet Jesus if the trumpets sound, 'Time has ended'?" I felt, as never before, the need to be prepared, and I prayed, "Lord, wait a bit longer, until I am ready." The invitation was made, that everyone, who was not prepared, should come up and kneel at the altar-rail in order to pray to Jesus to make them ready. A powerful conflict took place within me. I wished I could have jumped right down from the gallery where I was sitting, so not as many could see me when I went up to the altar-rail, but that was an impossibility. I rose slowly from my place, determined to be saved then. Just as I came down from the gallery, the devil whispered in my ear, "You're not going to be able to go into the church now, you can see the people are coming out." But I prayed, "Lord, help me now", and then I elbowed my way to the altar-rail, which, in the meantime, had become completely lined with sinners. I sank to my knees and cried out to Jesus to lift the burden of sin, and Praise be the Name of the Lord, it didn't take long before I was free, yes, free as a bird on a branch!

It then took several months before the Salvation Army established a Corps in Jönköping, but during that time the Lord protected me, after which Staff Officer M's prophesy was fulfilled and I became one of the first soldiers there. I stayed there as a soldier for nine months, when the Lord called me to become a cadet. After trying to imitate Moses for a while, I obeyed God and on May 1, 1889, I arrived at the depot in Gävle as a cadet, and after three blessed and thoroughly happy months under the aforementioned Captain A., who I even refer to as my spiritual father (God Bless him!), off I went to the War College, and after an instructive month there, out in the field. ---During the years I was a Field Officer, there were both battles and victories, sunshine and darkness, but the thing that helped me the most during all of it, was my certainty that God had called me, and I have always said, "Lord, you are responsible for the consequences," and so it has proceeded as Paul says, "in triumph", every day. God has been very good to me. Many places have been very difficult in one way or another, but God has never let me go without, instead Kindness and Mercy have accompanied me.

Ever since I was saved, I have often sung, "Wherever, for Jesus", and when, for a little more than a year ago, orders came for me to go to America, I said, "Lord, if You can use me, then I am willing to go." During this year, I have learned more than ever before to place my trust in God, and will continue to trust Him in the future. I am weak, but God is strong, and He will manifest His strength in the weak, by letting the "wise" come to nought. I continue with "Our Father" and I know that He will be a Father to the fatherless. Hallelujah! My motto is: "For God and Souls."

S. Wiberg, Captain.



**\*This is the way the paper spelled his name.**