

Surely not another book about William and Catherine Booth. Yes, and what a fascinating new approach! Punctuating the history of the Booths' experiences are the letters, the intimate and revealing letters, between them through which we see their devotion to each other. They give deep insights into their spiritual yearnings, their personal faith, and their views on Christian ministry and leadership. These letters shine with their incredible love for each other, and bear comparison with the famous correspondence between the poets, Robert and Elizabeth Browning.

This is a must read for anyone interested, not just in the character of the Booths, but in the foundation and formation of The Salvation Army.

General Eva Burrows (Retired)

General Burrows was the General – the leader of the international Salvation Army – from 1986 to 1993. She now lives in retirement in Australia.

A brilliant new take on the story of William and Catherine Booth in which their personalities, love for each other and achievements come alive in an unprecedented way. A gem of a book.

General John Larsson (Retired)

General Larsson was the General – the leader of the international Salvation Army – from 2002 to 2006.

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WILLIAM
and
CATHERINE



*The love story of the founders of
The Salvation Army, told through their letters*

Cathy Le Feuvre

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*For Dad and Mum, with enduring thanks
for their love, support,
and Christian example
of lives spent in the service
of Jesus Christ.*

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INTRODUCTION: A PICTURE OF THE PAST

There is a photograph of William Booth, the Founder and first General of The Salvation Army, which is quite familiar to members of The Salvation Army Church. The black and white image shows William as an old man. He still has a mop of thick white hair, although the hairline is receding to reveal a high brow. His matching long, thick, bushy white beard covers the front of his uniform “tunic”, on the front of which you can just about spy the Salvation Army crest. William is resting his right elbow on a table and his head is cradled in his right hand, so to look at his face properly you have to incline your head slightly to the left. He appears tired and his eyes under those thick white eyebrows have the look of someone staring into space.

I remember being intrigued by this as a child, and wondering about this old man who looked a bit grumpy and seemed so far from my own life and experience.

The photo was taken in 1907, when William was around seventy-eight years of age – fairly ancient for that time, when reaching the biblical promise of “three score years and ten” was quite a feat – and he still had five more years to live. Today, looking

at the picture, I realize that it indicates a man who is at the end, or nearing the end, of his great mission in life and if he was tired then he deserved to be. He had also already spent fifteen years without his beloved wife, Catherine, with whom he had created The Salvation Army and shared not just great spiritual ambition but also a great love. Catherine was only sixty-one when she died in 1890 so there are fewer pictures available of her, yet in the ones we have her personality also seems stuck in time, unsmiling and rather severe.

For most of the time they were together, from their first meeting in 1852 until Catherine's death in 1890, they wrote to each other, and it was through their letters that William and Catherine Booth came alive for me. As I listened to the few available recordings of William Booth, again made very late in his life, I picked up the traces of his Midlands accent. As I read some of the accounts and memories of those who actually met the Founders, the more real they became to me.

I realized they were inspired, fallible, quirky, loving, complicated: yet so much more. I realized, of course, that they were people of their time – Victorians, living through a period of great religious revival, phenomenal industrial change, and political and social upheaval, which particularly affected the urban poor. Attitudes to life, cultural morals, and family dynamics were vastly different from the twenty-first century, and personal matters were not easily shared. So it was refreshing to find that William and Catherine's correspondence gave me a glimpse not just into the spiritual lives of this couple who created a worldwide church and charity organization, but also of their day-to-day existence as middle-class Victorians and parents of a large family.

Poring over their letters in the British Library, where the family collection known as *The Booth Papers* includes letters

donated by their granddaughter Commissioner Catherine Bramwell Booth, I learned more about these rather distant historical characters. The papers, and other documents gleaned from various research works and sources, told me a good deal about the Booths, as did their handwriting. The letters are not just love letters, they also contain deeply spiritual matters, and, for some modern readers with notions of how “romantic love” works, this might appear peculiar. But the truth is that God came first for Catherine and William, even above the other partner.

There are more letters from the start of their relationship, before and during their engagement and in the early years of their marriage, when they struggled to find a spiritual home before The Salvation Army emerged. Obviously in later years they wrote to each other less, unless they were apart, so this narrative does detail more of their early days than of the later times, when to fill in the story I have supplemented their words to each other with notes they wrote to other family members and other materials found during my research.

This book is my attempt to bring William and Catherine Booth to life for a new generation – and my hope is that readers will begin, as I did, to see them as young, vibrant Christians making their way in a challenging world, struggling to find a spiritual home and raising a family. To add some context, I provide a little background to the times in which they were writing and the realities through which they were living. I am indebted to authors past and present who have already written extensively about the Booths and I commend to you many of their excellent works if you wish to read more about the life and times of William and Catherine. I am particularly thankful to David Malcolm Bennett, whose transcripts of the Letters of

William and Catherine Booth, meticulously researched over many years, were the first inspiration for this book. I also thank the Booth family and The Salvation Army for use of the material and photographs, and the British Library, where many of William and Catherine's original letters are held in trust.

If this book does nothing else, I hope it will encourage readers to be inspired to look at, again or for the first time, the ongoing work of The Salvation Army across the world. As the Christian movement which is the heart and brain child of a mid-Victorian, middle-class couple approaches its 150th anniversary in 2015, it is still vital and vibrant and at work and witness in more than 120 countries around the world. Every week millions of people across the world attend its churches to learn about the love of God, and through its caring mission it reaches out to many millions more people in need – homeless people, families, people with addictions and in debt, prisoners, victims of human trafficking, and people who just need a little extra support to help them on their way.

It all started with a lad from Nottingham who didn't want to be part of the "commonalty" and the quiet but single-minded Derbyshire-born girl with whom he fell in love in 1852, more than half a century before he became that old man with his head in his hand, staring at a camera.

CHAPTER



The young man picked up his quill pen and smoothed the nib between his thumb and index finger, stretched across the desk to dip it into the inkpot, took a moment to collect his thoughts, and stared intently at the clean crisp sheet of writing paper in front of him. Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes for a second or two as if to pray, and then began to write, at first as neatly as he was able but then, within seconds, growing more animated, his cheeks beginning to burn. Stopping briefly, he ran his fingers through his thick unruly mop of hair, drawing it away from his forehead. William was a man in love. As he wrote, the image of the object of his affection came clearly to mind. Her pale face framed with brown curls, her quiet smile and her lively, sparkling eyes shining with a sharp intelligence. It was but a few weeks since they had met, yet already Catherine's personality and beauty were imprinted on William's heart. When he thought about her, his heart pounded, his mouth grew a little dry, and his hand shook ever so slightly as he wrote.

"I honour you, I worship, I adore, I have loved you... but I forbear: I would not write about myself. I want you to be happy and in the future to... but again I am rambling onto forbidden ground. ... I will work harder, study more closely... and seek to gain equilibrium for my spirits and employment for my thoughts. Fear not for me. If

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I love you at all, if you wish to know how much I love, measure it by my calmness and my willingness in any way to do as you wish. I will. If you wish to see me, name the time and then nothing positively presenting, I will come, though it be every night or only every year...”

Like every young man who finds himself suddenly, desperately and deeply in love, William Booth was overwhelmed by his feelings, and, most importantly for him, his Catherine – Miss Mumford of nearby Russell Street – appeared to feel the same.

It had been but a few weeks since they had met, yet already they were speaking about long-term commitment and marriage. Several letters had passed between them, in which they were able to pour out their new feelings of love in a way they were unable to do when they actually met, since that was often in the company of others. But it was clear to them both that this was not just a passing fancy or an infatuation; it was much more than a developing friendship or mutual admiration, and it surpassed a growing love affair.

In 1852 love was usually less than “romantic”, with couples at all levels of society often finding themselves together for practical, family, and economic reasons. But, although many marriages were largely “of convenience”, that did not mean that “love” was entirely excluded. As arranged by their families just a few years earlier, the young Queen Victoria had married her cousin Albert in 1840, but theirs had also turned out to be a true love match.

Catherine Mumford had first caught sight of William Booth from a distance when he stood to preach at the church she attended, Binfield House Methodist Chapel in Clapham, South London.

Was she immediately struck by the sight of the young man standing more than six feet tall in the pulpit? Did she find him imposing and attractive with his dark hair and the short

trimmed beard that framed his chin? Or was it the power of his voice, his energetic preaching style, his intensity of spirit, and his religious zeal that made the greatest impact as he urged people not just to live a Christian life but to give their lives to Christ and to strive for a holy life? Whatever the case, she was sufficiently impressed by the young visiting preacher to express her admiration to a church friend, a prosperous Walworth bootmaker and businessman, Mr Edward Harris Rabbits, who was also William's sponsor and supporter.

Within a fortnight Mr Rabbits, an unlikely matchmaker, had arranged afternoon tea at his house and Catherine, her mother, Sarah, and William were among the invitees.

This first personal contact may have confirmed Catherine's opinion. William was sincere, deeply religious, and driven by the same ambition – to see the world and individual people transformed by Christian faith. In William, Catherine recognized a kindred spirit.

William may have noted with admiration the outspoken young woman whom he met that day, but he later reported that it was on his twenty-third birthday, 10 April 1852, a Good Friday and some weeks after the Rabbits party, that he fell in love with his future wife.¹

After just a couple of meetings and one carriage ride, their future was sealed. But neither could have foreseen the consequence of their meeting: the eventual creation not just of a Christian ministry based on that “personal salvation” that William had preached about from the Binfield chapel pulpit, but of an entirely new “church”, a Christian organization that would change society, and which would extend across the globe. A “movement” of Christian people that would eventually become The Salvation Army.

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Just now, though, William and Catherine were two young people getting acquainted at the start of a great, lifelong love affair, with William, at least, expressing himself as lovers have done down the centuries.

PRINCE'S ROW

WALWORTH ROAD

My own dear Catherine

I know you will, at least I presume you will, forgive the liberty I take in writing you a line, altho' it is not so long since we met, but for some reason or other I am happier than I have been for some time back, and when there is a ray of sunshine in my heart I conceive you have a right to know it, especially seeing you have been so minutely acquainted with every dark cloud that hath flitted across the horizon of my soul of late. I have been thinking of you very much yesterday and this morning. I feel that the affection I entertain for you is a growing, deepening, expanding and extending feeling; I trust that on both sides it shall be ever & ever thus. To love as one, live as one, with one, only one, class of cares and anxieties and sorrows. What is thine in this respect shall be mine, and what is mine shall be thine.

... Farewell for a season, I shall soon hold you in my arms again, by the blessings of heaven...

Until we meet be assured that I am for ever, your dearest and most sacred friend and lover.

William



Although a respectable and once quite affluent Nottingham family, the Booths were certainly not prosperous. William had few economic prospects to offer any potential wife, and it worried him.

He had hated his job as a pawnbroker and, just a few weeks after meeting Catherine, on that same Good Friday on which he took a carriage ride with her and reported falling in love, he had resigned his post and was chasing his dream of becoming a Christian preacher. William knew that the life of a travelling evangelist presented little in the way of security and stability, economic or otherwise, so he was certainly not marriageable material. Society in general and most young women and their parents or guardians at the time would insist upon certain securities before entering into an “understanding”, an engagement, and marriage. Furthermore, while the young and sincerely devout William Booth might not have articulated the thought, any woman whom he would eventually marry had to share his deep spiritual sense of purpose, ambition, and Christian vocation.

But Catherine Mumford was no “ordinary girl” yearning for a grand love affair. She was far more practical than that. More than two decades later she would write:

Every courtship ought to be based on certain definite principles. A fruitful cause of mistake and misery is that very few have a definite idea as to what they want in a partner, and hence do not look for it. They simply go about the matter in a haphazard fashion, and jump into an alliance upon the first drawings of mere natural feeling regardless of the laws which govern such relationships.

In the first place, each of the parties ought to be satisfied that there are to be found in the other such qualities as would make them friends if they were of the same sex. In other words, there should be a congeniality and compatibility of temperament. And yet how many seek for a mere bread-winner, or a housekeeper, rather than for a friend, counsellor and companion. Unhappy marriages are usually the consequences of a too great disparity of mind, age, temperament, training or antecedents.²

Catherine, just a few months older than the sincere young man on whom she had set her heart, was as determined as he that any attachment would not just be about romantic love and physical attraction. Although the guidance she delivered in later life draws up strict criteria for finding a suitable mate, there is no indication that she thought otherwise as a young woman. When other young girls were dreaming about a tall, dark, handsome stranger and were already drawing up lists of requirements for their longed-for wedding day, by the age of sixteen Katie Mumford was already determining the sort of man she eventually wanted to marry.

First, she had decided, he must be truly “converted”. She had made this decision very soon after she was, in the language of the future Salvation Army, “saved” – when she gave her whole life to God to be used by Him in whatever way He saw fit – and she would settle for nothing less in the man she hoped to marry. A cousin had once declared love for her but she had turned him down on the basis that he was *not* “truly converted”.

Second, the man Catherine hoped to marry would be a Total Abstainer. Drinking alcohol was not something she would tolerate. She had been a member of the Temperance Movement

since she was a young girl, and by eighteen would be writing articles on the dangers of alcohol.

Third, her future husband must be “a man of sense”. She wanted to be able to respect any potential spouse.

Finally, she determined that, if they were to be happy, they would have to think alike on all important matters.

However, this list of requirements for a future spouse wasn't apparently without a touch of romanticism. Catherine also secretly prayed that her husband would be a minister in the church, she rather liked the name “William”, and she yearned for him to be “tall and dark”.³

So did Catherine's heart skip a beat when William Booth got up to preach at Binfield House that day in March 1852? Did she immediately recognize in him all that she was looking for in a husband, partner, lover, and friend? Tall and dark he certainly was, already a budding minister and powerful preacher, and, judging from his words from the pulpit, not only “truly converted” himself but also desperately wanting the whole world to be similarly transformed by Jesus Christ.

If not on that first evening at Binfield House, then certainly by the time they had taken that Good Friday carriage ride, it is likely that Catherine had determined that William was the man for her. However, she was acutely aware that he felt insecure about his future. Right and proper behaviour was paramount and he wavered, one moment expressing deep, undying love, the next acknowledging the practicality and the reality of his situation.

Catherine backed off, not wanting to put pressure on the man she had very quickly learned to love and respect, recognizing that he had a spiritual destiny and not wishing to put any obstacles in his way. If William was to be a great evangelist, would a wife, and the inevitable family which, please God, would soon follow

marriage, be a hindrance? Unless they were both convinced that God wanted them to spend their lives together, neither would commit to the future.

WEDNESDAY 12 MAY 1852

My Dear Friend,

I promised you a line. I write. I know no more than I knew yesterday.

I offered as you know full well then and there to make the/an engagement. You declined on what without doubt are good grounds, but still I cannot do more... You know the inmost feelings of my heart, and I can say no more than that I have not, as I could have wished, seen anything striking to intimate the will of God. If my circumstances had not been so benighted I might not have desired this, but feel the importance of the affair, if I feel nothing else.

Now understand me. As I said yesterday, I offer now a step in the dark. I will promise you anything you wish for your own dear sake, but mind, my feelings are still the same. But the tie shall be as sacred as though made under the influence of sunnier feelings and in prospect of brighter days. You can write me your mind. I do not wish to trouble you for a long letter. Put down in a line what you think.

If you decline as yesterday, I ask the favour of being allowed to keep as sacred as my Bible and as full to me of inspiration, and as sacred as my soul's inmost feelings, the notes I already have in your writing. As you wish you can keep or burn mine. I could almost

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trust you with the keeping of the Title Deeds of my soul's salvation, so highly do I esteem your character. Perhaps I write wildly. Excuse me. I began calm.

After this is ended, this awful controversy, I shall call on you again. If you accept what I have stated, I will come Saturday. If not, I shall call as a friend in the course of a few days and show you how I bear the matter. If it be of man, if it be wrong, it will pass forgotten away. If it be of God He will still bring it to pass.

All I fear is your suffering and your mother's condemnation. But I cannot help it. Believe every word I have here said. If you accept, we are henceforth and for ever one. If you decline, the matter must be forgotten. I leave you in the hands of my God.

I am, Yours, etc., William Booth.



RUSSELL ST

(THURSDAY) MAY 13 1852

My Dear Friend,

I have read and re-read your note & I fear you did not fully understand my difficulty. It was not circumstances, I thought I had fully satisfied you on that point. I thought you felt sure that a bright prospect could not allure me, nor a dark one affright me, if we are only one in heart. My difficulty, my only reason for wishing to defer the engagement was that

you might feel satisfied in your own mind that the step is right. To cause you to err would cost me far more suffering than anything else.

I have deeply pondered over all your words at our last interview, especially the objections which you so honourably confessed had influenced your mind, & I dare not enter into so solemn an engagement till you can assure me that you feel I am in every way suited to make you happy & that you are satisfied that the step is not opposed to the will of God.

You say if your circumstances were not so blighted, you could not desire so striking an indication of God's will. I answer if you are satisfied of His will irrespective of circumstances, let circumstances go & let us be one come what will, but if there is an thing in me which you fear, anything which you think would mar your completest happiness, banish the thought of an union forever, & let us regard each other as true & tried friends.

But if you feel satisfied on these two points, first, that the step is not opposed to the will of God & secondly, that I am calculated to make you happy, come on Saturday evening and on our knees before God let us give ourselves afresh to Him & to each other; for His sake consecrate our whole selves to His service for Him to live & die. When this is done what have we to do with future? We and all our concerns are in His hands, under His all wise & gracious providence.

I wish you could see into my heart for a moment. I cannot transfer to paper my absorbing desire that the will of God may be done in this matter. I dare

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no more say I decline or accept (except on the before mentioned grounds) than I dare take my destiny into my own hands. The cry of my inmost soul is, "Thy will be done". If you come on Saturday, I shall presume that you are satisfied on those two points & that henceforth we are one. In the mean time I shall not cease to pray that God may guide you right. May He bless you & if He sees that I am not such an one as you need to be an help mate for you, may He enable you to forget me. I know you will rightly appreciate what I have said; you will not attribute anything to hardness of heart or indifference. I think I know you too well to suppose it.

What you said about my health is not forgotten. I have arranged to see Mr F[ranks] tomorrow in order to get his candid opinion of my present state of health & my future prospects, on which point I will not fail to satisfy you. God knows my sincere desire to act towards you, as I would wish you to act towards me. Again I commend you to Him. It cannot, shall not be that you shall get wrong.

Let us besiege His Throne with all the powers of prayer, and believe me yours affectionately, Catherine.



The sincere young woman with bright eyes could not say it more clearly. Her heart thumped as she put the final full stop alongside her name.

"Catherine."

She looked back at the letter, in her usual efficient manner. The handwriting was small, compact, and controlled.

“Yours affectionately”. Was that too formal a sign-off? It was certainly “proper”, but how would William interpret this? Would it be the word he wanted, an open door to her heart, or would he read into it a way out of their new attachment? Would he come to the Mumford home in Russell Street on Saturday? Would he make the decision to give his life in service to God at least for the time being, without the encumbrance of a wife, no matter how devout?

She took up the writing sheet, blew on it ever so slightly to ensure the ink was entirely dry, then carefully folded the paper and reached for an envelope.

Catherine grasped her pen once again to write – William Booth, Walworth Road.

Just a short distance from her home in Russell Street in Brixton, her letter would soon be in his hands, those hands which had already clasped her own. She remembered the first time they had touched. A simple, polite handshake and yet in that touch she had felt an immediate attraction to this rather dishevelled-looking young man with the strong voice and straightforward attitude.

Catherine shook her head at her sentimentality. She wasn’t one for romantic novels, having always preferred spiritual texts. Yet she could not help but feel excited by the thought of William. She took a long, deep breath, rose from the desk and made for the door, to arrange for the delivery of the letter.

For both William Booth and Catherine Mumford, it was obvious from the start that they shared the same desire not just for each other but for a world they saw as needing a new beginning, a new influx of faith, a new Christian revival.

William, a thin, gangling young man, was not classically handsome, with his large hooked nose that many suggested gave him the look of a Jew, though he had no eastern blood in his

heritage. His mass of thick dark hair often remained uncontrollable, no matter how slicked down, and a thick moustache-less beard framed his rather prominent chin. His heavy workload left him physically exhausted. For months he had juggled his work in a pawnbroker's in Kennington with volunteering as a lay preacher in the church and pursuing his own preaching ministry on the streets of South London. But he hadn't allowed the physical challenges, no matter how much he found himself dwelling on them, to affect his intensity of spirit, personality, and drive. And he suited Catherine.

Quiet and thoughtful, frail and sickly, having suffered ill health for a good deal of her life to date, Catherine was earnest and somewhat severe in appearance, with a high forehead, curls framing a pale face, and sparkling eyes that hinted of a deep intelligence and spirituality. Catherine captivated William.

On their first meeting at the home of Mr Rabbits, William could not have failed to notice Catherine's ability to argue her point of view. He would soon discover her depth of spiritual experience and her scrupulous, exacting, and rather pious opinions on many matters of importance to her. But William loved the way Catherine could argue with him, standing up for herself in a way that women were not expected to do and which he may well not have encountered before. He loved the fact that her Christian faith was already well developed and yet she was still seeking a deeper spirituality. It thrilled him that they could already share their innermost thoughts on so many matters, both corporal and spiritual, and that they did not just speak about love and trivial matters but also quickly found themselves able to discuss deep spiritual concerns important to them both – God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit.

The couple were well suited. Both were already, in their early twenties, deeply religious, sincere, even austere, and somewhat

judgmental with regard to issues and circumstances that did not square with their highly principled views on life.

When William Booth stood up to preach in Binfield House he knew it was what he was destined to do. He already had experience as a Methodist local preacher but he wanted more. He desired to reach more people, not just those who went to church. His heart was for the “lost”. He was a young man on a mission.

He also felt he was destined for great things. Aged just twenty, while walking with his friend Walter James in his home area of Sneinton in Nottingham, he had discussed the future.

“Have you no ambition?” he had asked Walter.

“What do you mean?”

“Because I have,” William had continued. “I intend to be something great; I do not mean to belong to the commonalty.”⁴

Was he arrogant? Possibly. Ambitious? Certainly. But William Booth’s confidence was not based on selfish ambition, and in Catherine Mumford he would find a partner who would not just support him in his Christian ministry, but would also admonish him on his propensity to let his ego run amok and remind him of the need for focus on spiritual matters, and that he should continually consider how his actions would affect his mission in life.

It was important that Catherine shared his enthusiasm for the Reform Movement within the Methodist Church, to which William had quite recently formally attached himself. It was not coincidental that they had met at Mr Rabbits’ home, for the sponsor and friend was deeply committed to the movement that had been causing ructions among Methodists.

Although raised in a Wesleyan tradition, the serious-minded and devout Catherine had become entranced by the Reform Movement, which promised a revival of old-style Methodism.

She had embraced Reform thinking and as a result had been expelled from the Wesleyan congregation of which she had been a part since her family had moved to London. Although quiet on the surface, Catherine could be outspoken and opinionated and was already displaying a spiritual zeal and determination very similar to that of her future husband.

William had been born into the Church of England. His family had not been particularly devout, and from the age of thirteen he had sought a different spirituality after a friend had encouraged him to attend the Methodist chapel in Nottingham named after the “founders” of Methodism – the Wesley Chapel. In 1844, about the time Catherine was moving with her family from her birthplace in Derbyshire, a sincere fifteen-year-old William Booth was becoming more aware that he needed to be truly “converted” and one night, while walking home from a church meeting, he gave in to these innermost feelings of religious conviction and, standing in the street, offered himself to God.

In 1846 William heard the renowned American evangelist James Caughey preach with the passion he had been seeking. After this, with a small group of friends including his closest acquaintance, Will Sansom, the young Booth started speaking out and “spreading the gospel”. The lads organized street and cottage meetings and other activities and, aged just seventeen, William had been appointed as a Methodist local preacher, which allowed him to travel to different preaching appointments across the city. All this despite a lack of physical strength and a rather nervous disposition.

He balanced his busy schedule with a working life in pawnbroking, the business he had been entered into in Nottingham at the age of thirteen when his father, Samuel, a

speculator and failed businessman, could no longer afford to keep him at school. Soon after he was taken out of school and sent to work, his father died, and William's meagre wages helped to support his mother, Mary, and his three sisters.

William loathed and detested pawnbroking, which preyed on the poverty and insecurities of the poor working class who could not make ends meet, but by the late 1840s he had completed his apprenticeship, was beholden no longer to his taskmaster, and was determined to move on. However, when he relocated to London in November 1849, pawnbroking was the only experience he could rely on for employment and once again he was forced to take up work in a shop adorned with the infamous cluster of three balls.

He yearned to be a Christian evangelist and gave up all his spare time and his Sundays to work in his church as a local preacher, but he wasn't the only young man with such an ambition and he grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of opportunities to step into the pulpit as he vied with around twenty others who were also part of the local Methodist "preaching plan".

William wasn't about to stand around and wait for the opportunities to drop into his lap. Instead, he resigned from his honorary position as a Methodist lay preacher and took to the streets around Kennington, just south of the River Thames, to preach to whomever would listen.

About this time the Reform Movement was growing in popularity, and, although William was not aligned with them, his minister assumed rebellion. He struck the young man's name from the membership list of the church, despite William's protestations. He had resigned his official lay ministry in the Methodist Church so that he could pursue his own ministry,

but he still wished to remain a Methodist. William felt hurt and discarded, but no sooner had he been formally removed from the “roll” of his church than the Reformers invited the fervent young preacher to join their ranks.

Edward Rabbits, a leading Reformer, had been greatly impressed when he heard William speak at the Walworth Road Chapel: the young man had tremendous vigour and sincerity and was as devoted to revivalism as Mr Rabbits himself. Only through revival – people again seeking true Christian faith and holy living rather than just the “religion” of churchgoing – would God’s world be set straight. Mr Rabbits agreed to sponsor William in his ministry at least for the first three months, and, not a man to turn down an opportunity, however small, on 10 April 1852, his twenty-third birthday, William left the hated pawnbroking trade for the final time. He was taken on as a minister of Binfield House, the Methodist Reform chapel attended by Sarah Mumford and her daughter Catherine, who had also recently been thrown out by the Wesleyans.

On that Good Friday, at the end of a “tea” meeting at the Cooper House School off the City Road during which Catherine had felt unwell, William had agreed to take her home and on that “little carriage ride,” paid for by one Edward Rabbits, they had fallen in love.

Barely one month after this ride and having known Catherine for only a little longer, William Booth put aside any doubts he might have had about marriage, and on Saturday 15 May 1852 he and Catherine Mumford announced their engagement, committing themselves not just to each other but, together, to God, for whatever purposes He intended for them.

SATURDAY OR SUNDAY MAY 15 OR 16 1852

My dearest William,

The evening is beautifully serene and tranquil, according sweetly with the feelings of my soul. The whirlwind is past and the succeeding calm is in proportion to its violence. Your letter – your visit – have hushed its last murmurs and stilled every vibration of my throbbing heartstrings. All is well. I feel it is right, and I praise God for the satisfying conviction.

Most gladly does my soul respond to your invitation to give myself afresh to Him, and to strive to link myself closer to you, by rising more into the image of my Lord. The nearer our assimilation to Jesus, the more perfect and heavenly our union. Our hearts are indeed one, so one that division would be more bitter than death. But I am satisfied that our union may become, if not more complete, more divine, and, consequently, capable of yielding a larger amount of pure unmingled bliss.

The thought of walking through life perfectly united, together enjoying its sunshine and battling its storms, by softest sympathy sharing every smile and every tear, and with thorough unanimity performing all its momentous duties, is to me exquisite happiness; the highest earthly bliss I desire. And who can estimate the glory to God, and the benefit to man, accruing from a life spent in such harmonious effort to do His will? Such unions, alas, are so rare that we seldom see an exemplification of the divine idea of marriage.

WILLIAM and CATHERINE

If, indeed, we are the disciples of Christ, "in the world we shall have tribulation"; but in Him and in each other we may have peace. If God chastises us by affliction, in either mind, body, or circumstances, it will only be a mark of our discipleship; and if borne equally by us both, the blow shall not only be softened, but sanctified, and we shall be able to rejoice that we are permitted to drain the bitter cup together. Satisfied that in our souls there flows a deep undercurrent of pure affection, we will seek grace to bear with the bubbles which may rise on the surface, or wisdom so to burst them as to increase the depth, and accelerate the onward flow of the pure stream of love, till it reaches the river which proceeds out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb, and mingles in glorious harmony with the love of Heaven.

The more you lead me up to Christ in all things, the more highly shall I esteem you; and, if it be possible to love you more than I do now, the more shall I love you. You are always present in my thoughts.

Believe me, dear William, as ever,

Your own loving, Kate.

