

Captain Benjamin

By Katharine Pearson Woods

THE Salvationists have got a new captain," said Miss Revel, leaning forward to look, through the fine veil of mist-like rain, at the tall figure under the "Blood and Fire" banner. He had mounted a keg, necessarily a stout one, at the door of a corner saloon, for convenience of preaching, and the electric light fell full upon him, reflecting itself in the rain-splashed face and the strangely luminous eyes. A brown-faced little woman at his side, with a face of dog-like fidelity, held the flag, aided by a small box and a long flagstaff, in such a way as to form something of a shelter for his uncovered head; but the preacher seemed as unconscious of her attention as men usually are of unsought devotion.

As Miss Revel drew away her head from the drops that gathered, fell, and splashed about the carriage window, the address came to an end, and a voice, not altogether uncultivated, began the hymn:

He's the Lily of the Valley, the bright and morning star;
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.

Dr. Hurlbut, who sat opposite Miss Revel, laughed slightly.

"Queer chap!" he said; "it seems strange that you've not seen him. To be sure, he's only been in town about ten days; but his is one of those insistent personalities that seem to pervade the place, don't you know. One can hardly believe that Fairtown ever knew itself without Captain Benjamin."

"Who is he?" asked Miss Revel.

"Who are any of these Salvationists? I believe he began the world as the son of a college President, whose heart he broke by his misconduct; then he was a tramp for ten years or so, and—well, I suppose lived the usual life under the circumstances. Within the last six months he has 'got saved,' and now considers himself privileged to inform decent, law-abiding fellows like myself of the decidedly warm and generally unpleasant quarters made ready for us in the next world if we don't mend our ways. Just a little cheeky, wouldn't it be, if it wasn't a part of his religion?"

Miss Revel nodded assentingly. "The last incomprehensible part of the whole situ-

ation," she said, "is these people's awful sincerity. I can't explain it—"

"Oh!" said Dr. Hurlbut, as she hesitated, "nobody can explain anything, except on what the Theosophists call the psychic plane." And he laughed again. "I don't doubt the fellow's sincerity, in the least; you can't, if you look at him. In fact, the most curious feature about this thing that they call conversion is that it does in many cases, to all intents and purposes, restore the lost innocence, so to speak. I have made a sort of study of the phenomena in several instances; and it really does seem as though some sort of shifting process takes place in the centers of consciousness, if you know what I mean, so that, as an actual fact, the former life ceases to be attractive. One can understand such a condition well enough as the result of a long educational process; the incomprehensible part is the suddenness of it. Of course this man says that the old sins have ceased to tempt him because he has been washed—but don't you see how it is? And, after all, we see the reverse process frequently enough in hysteria, and nearly always in insanity."

"So that is the materialistic explanation of an undeniable fact?" said Miss Revel; "and your reverse process, I suppose, is what the Bible calls possession by a devil?"

She laughed a little as she spoke, because she did not wish to give the effect of being shocked; she was a communicant of the Episcopal Church, and disliked to pose as better than other people. Besides, she was far from certain that the doctor might not be right; it sounded plausible enough; only, she meant to stand up for her own side as long as she consistently could. But until she had had time to study out this rather startling suggestion, it seemed better to change the subject. So they discussed the folk-lore society's meetings, and the dwellers in Miss Revel's reformed tenements, until the carriage stopped under the deep echoing *porte-cochère* of Revelrig.

Fairtown people, when they discussed the life and times of Theodora Revel, were accustomed to say that she was only waiting for her mother's death to turn the old family place into reformed tenements, an *asylum* of

some sort, or something else equally dreadful. Only by such a hypothesis could they account for the continued dwelling of two wealthy women in the old colonial mansion, around which had grown up a quarter of the town neither attractive nor savory. But, when one is a Revel of Revelrig, and a college woman into the bargain, one cannot expect to be understood by the general public. Theodora let them have their say. Her old home, with its great high-ceilinged rooms, its wide porches, its park-like inclosure, was, as she was well aware, many degrees better than the best of college settlements; she kept the house full, during a large part of the year, with people who would "take an interest;" for herself, she was personally acquainted with every child, and with most of the grown-ups, within a half-mile radius, and was president or secretary of half a dozen clubs, and nearly twice as many benevolent societies. But, according to her own account, it all happened in the most casual manner. The things were there to be done, and she, being on the spot, was evidently the one to take hold; besides, it was a simple requisite of mental health to keep as large a portion as possible of one's brain in active exercise; but to pose as one who tried to do good in the world was an abomination in her eyes.

The result of this attitude of disavowal was to win for her the reputation of a martyr who died daily; she was supposed to sacrifice her own inclinations, first, to her mother's affection for the old homestead, and, second, to the needs of the neighborhood. This, perhaps, was a retribution not unmeet for the only affectation of which she justly stood accused; and though her life suited her quite thoroughly, and her affection for her birthplace was not second even to her mother's. It was true that her serene unselfishness of disposition, and the tranquil nerves due to her perfect health, made an infinite succession of small daily sacrifices, whether of time or taste, possible for her, without involving overstrain on mind or body.

But the Salvationists, who had recently invaded the region about Revelrig, failed to accept the popular estimate of Miss Revel's character. Theodora said that she admired their adherence to principle and their independence of worldly considerations. It made no difference in their eyes that the barracks defended by their banner were Miss Revel's property, and were placed at their disposal rent free; that the lady herself was their

eager auxiliary in all plans for the economic welfare of the district, more than willing to have them work in their own way, and ready to put her hand in her purse whenever called upon. These things were good in their place, but they were not salvation.

Captain Johnson, who had just been removed from the command of the post, had dealt faithfully with Theodora. He had assured her, with her check in his hand at the time, that the chief reason for coming to work in her neighborhood was her evil influence upon the lost souls therein, whom she was seeking to save by means of carnal comforts; and he had spoken earnestly, and with tears, of her worse than uncertain prospects of everlasting happiness, inasmuch as she trusted in her own works, and had no sense of sin or need of a Saviour.

Theodora had been very sorry to lose Captain Johnson.

She was so accustomed to receive calls for aid from the wearers of the red jersey and big bonnet that it was no surprise to her, on the evening following that on which she had paused with Dr. Hurlbut under the shimmer of the electric light through the mist, to be told that "some of them Salvationists" were waiting for her in the porch. Several others, guests at Revelrig, awaited her there also; she had left them for only a moment, to make sure that her invalid mother, whom she tended with a care and devotion as absolute as though life held for her no other interest, was comfortable for the night.

The rain of the previous evening had passed away with the darkness; and the great porch—twenty feet wide, surrounding the house on three sides, floored with stout oaken planks that would last another century, and its roof upheld by stone pillars that a tall man could barely clasp—the porch was full of moonlight as Theodora stepped through the wide doorway. She was a wisp of a woman, looking, even under the daylight, younger than her years; and with the white moon-rays weaving a fairy texture out of her soft white muslin gown, and making a halo around the abundant waves of her brown hair, a man could hardly be blamed for finding in her presence something vision-like and mystical.

"Is there some one here to see me?" she said, looking about her with large eyes, dazzled by the change from the yellow gaslight. "Oh! it is you, Lieutenant," as the little brown woman arose from the shadow of a pillar;

"pardon me for not seeing you at once—"

"It does not matter about me," said the brown lieutenant; "here is Captain Benjamin."

Theodora moved a gracious step forward and extended her hand towards something long and black which erected itself out of the thickest of the shade. It was a silent figure; strangely silent for any but a Salvationist, who must never be expected, being led only by the Spirit, to do things like other people; and Theodora thought that she had never seen eyes so strangely luminous, or felt a hand-clasp at once so strong and tender. But it seemed that he knew not how to let her fingers go; she was compelled at last to draw them gently away. It was the brown lieutenant who placed a chair for Miss Revel; Captain Benjamin did not offer.

There was something intense, even a little strained, about the situation; or perhaps Theodora's nerves, usually sufficiently under discipline, had at last turned rebellious; she tried to bring them into line again by a markedly matter-of-fact tone and manner.

"Thank you so much, Lieutenant; you are always kind."

"We wish to be kind," said the Lieutenant, a little tremulously; "we wish nothing so much. And Captain Benjamin has been greatly blessed of the Lord in his words; we hope that he may bring peace even to your soul, if you will listen to him. It is why we have come to-night."

"Oh!" said Theodora. "Do you not think it is pleasant here on the porch on so warm an evening? A little dark, perhaps; but we can go inside if we need a light."

"It is not too dark," said Captain Benjamin, dreamily, "to see your eyes."

Theodora's first distinct feeling was that she could have borne it better if Dr. Hurlbut had not been present to criticise; and yet, in reality, it was he who saved the situation. It is true that conventionality is quite defenseless against earnestness; but it must be earnestness of a certain grade, or perhaps one might better say of a certain voltage. At a lower degree, zeal is readily damped by the cool clamminess of a conventional handling of any given subject. And though the brown lieutenant was very tremulously in earnest, the situation yielded all the more readily to Dr. Hurlbut's treatment, because Captain Benjamin seemed scarcely awake to its needs, provided he was allowed to sit and look his

fill on Theodora. The brown lieutenant had tears in her eyes when she took him away at last, after she had answered the Doctor's questions as to the spiritual success and financial standing of the slum post, and had volunteered a remark or two, which she felt in her heart to be *banal*, though she would scarcely have used that word to describe them.

"I suppose it's a new experience for you to feel yourself a subject of prayer?" said Dr. Hurlbut, as he stood under the gaslight, hat in hand, taking leave of his hostess.

Theodora was conscious of a certain shock.

"I suppose it is," she answered, with a futility that enraged herself.

"Yes," said the man, easily. "Curious how literally these people take things. As if a woman of your education and standing was in need of, or a possible subject for, the psychologic revolution we were speaking of last night. If such a thing could happen, they would be the first to regret it; it could only be a change for the worse, you know. But when minds of that caliber learn to think consecutively, they will lose their hold on the very class where they do good."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said Theodora.

Dr. Hurlbut was by no means a coxcomb, and it was a rule of his life to preserve a dispassionate estimate of his prospects for the final winning of Miss Revel's hand and heart. To do him justice, he would not have accepted the one without the other, even with Revelrig and five figures of the income thrown into the bargain. But when he had left her, he permitted himself to question whether the inanity of her replies were due to the fact that he had held her hand a little longer than was necessary in saying good-by? As why should he not, with that Salvation fellow making love to her under his very eyes!

Miss Revel was rather relieved when Dr. Hurlbut had left her; there were times, she told herself, when one wanted something a little more human than his calm analyses of men and things: yet, against her will, she found herself analyzing Captain Benjamin very much after Dr. Hurlbut's fashion, with the result of a profound dissatisfaction, not unmixed with self-contempt. For it was impossible to resist the disagreeable conviction that Captain Benjamin was very human indeed.

She had not been an heiress for so many

years without feeling within herself the compensating ability to handle the situation as she chose, even though it differed materially from any with which she had hitherto been confronted; and her fine sense of justice combined with a delicate feeling for humor in causing her to retaliate upon the Salvationists by an effort to educate Captain Benjamin intellectually, in return for his spiritual endeavors on her behalf.

"For, really, you know, that is the essence of insanity—isn't it?" she said to Dr. Hurlbut. "The restriction of all brain activity to a small area of brain substance. Isn't it sure to produce disease? Or, at any rate, an abnormal and one-sided development of that section of the brain?"

The physician smiled, a little quizzically, perhaps, at her way of expressing herself. "You see," he said, "we know so little about it, after all; and if we were to send all the people who come under your definition to the county asylum for the insane—well, I am afraid it would be, as the English say, a very large order."

"How very like you medical people!" said Theodora; "to be helplessly ignorant when one really wants to know!"

"Oh! as to this fellow," he answered, "it is simple enough. If his brain had been in a healthy condition in his youth, he would have liked the ways of healthy-minded people, and not have turned prodigal and got himself side-tracked like this—if you will pardon the metaphor. And now, of course, his return to sanity would certainly be facilitated if you could get him to take an interest in something besides saving souls; the Cretan situation, for instance, or dress reform. But you'll only fret yourself in vain, if you make the effort; it's the way of all fanatics, from Caliph Omar to the present time: what is in the Bible or the Koran is unnecessary; what isn't is immoral: to the flames with it. The chief difficulty is, however, that you haven't the time to accomplish anything worth while. When Captain Benjamin was saved, it did not touch his physical nature, unfortunately; he has a very robust consumption now, and his present mode of living rather accentuates it than otherwise. I doubt if he lives six months."

Theodora was conscious of distinctly insane impulses at the manner, rather than the matter, of this speech; but Dr. Hurlbut never knew, as she honored him with a meditative stare and quietly changed the conversation,

what joy it would have given her to throw a pillow at him. For they were sitting on the great porch at twilight, and the pillow was conveniently at the back of her wicker chair.

Her calm good sense forbade her to regard Captain Benjamin's consumption as in any respect a martyrdom. Her emotional nature, however, took arms on the other side, and when she remembered that to leave him now was to leave him for this world, it was with some difficulty that she kept herself to her purpose of taking her mother away from Revelrig for the winter.

But before this design could be carried out, she had had time to see a good deal of Captain Benjamin, and to be a little weary of the efforts of the brown lieutenant to convict her, Theodora, of sin. Somehow, Miss Revel did not feel that it was any business of the brown lieutenant's. She did not admit that it would have been a different matter had the efforts been Captain Benjamin's; but in the depths of her consciousness she knew that such was the case. To do him justice, the man restrained his missionary zeal so perfectly that it scarcely seemed to exist; and yet, for some cause—to be traced, perhaps, with sufficient time and space, to the roots of woman's complex nature—Miss Revel rather laid herself open to it; attending upon all his sermons and addresses, and daily coming into closer touch with his state of mind.

This does not at all imply that she was converted to his opinions, which repelled her rather the more by what she considered their illogicality. But it is a great thing to any human soul to penetrate behind the bars of another human consciousness—to see, if but for the moment, with its eyes and through the medium of its personality. One brings out of such an experience either the best or the worst of the other's being; Miss Revel felt herself distinctly a gainer. She theorized about it greatly to her own satisfaction. For she willingly admitted that the corresponding portion of her brain to that which in him was abnormally active had lain rather dormant; religion, to her, had never been an enthusiasm; she was willing, she said, to learn from any one, even a dog.

Certainly, Captain Benjamin was not a dog.

Her plans for departure had been fully completed, but beyond herself and her mother had not been made known or discussed, when, one fine October morning, Captain Benjamin was said to be awaiting her in the white sitting-room. This was Theodora's favorite

apartment; it had been decorated in white and gold by some ancestor who had visited Paris during the period of the First Empire, and had brought back a taste for a classicism more or less illegitimate. But, veiled by the mists of age and association, it was a charming room; and the wide stretch of lawn to the river, with the clear reach of blue sky above it, had never appeared so attractive to Theodora, through the low, wide casement, as at this moment, when she saw Captain Benjamin's close-cut dark head silhouetted against the sunshine, like the saint of an ancient missal on his golden background.

It was a handsome head, as she had always been more or less aware; close-trimmed and of military erectness, with a straight, regular profile that might have been carved in some rare stone—she found herself engaged, all through the somewhat disconcerting interview that followed, in the effort to locate the particular kind of stone out of which Captain Benjamin's head might have been carved. It would be of a clear olive color, so dark as to conceal pallor, she thought, and yet—a certain shade of onyx, she believed, with a soft, clear light behind it, would not be a bad similitude.

He rose as she approached him, but did not extend his hand for hers, or in any respect receive her as Dr. Hurlbut would have done. For this comparison, also, Theodora found herself drawing in Captain Benjamin's favor.

"I have come," he said, without preliminary, "to plead with you to give your heart to Christ."

During the next few seconds Theodora was occupied in refusing to analyze her own emotions; then the dignity born of resistance to her first impulse enabled her to say:

"I am glad you have mentioned the subject, Captain Benjamin; for I have always felt the presence in your mind of the feeling to which you have now given utterance. Will you not be seated?"

"I am on my Master's errand; it is more fitting for me to stand," said Captain Benjamin.

Theodora felt herself at a distinct disadvantage. Her favorite chair stood, ready and inviting, within reach of her hand, and yet she felt forbidden to occupy it. Instead, she laid her hand upon the back of another, tall, straight, and heavy, and tried to retrieve herself.

"I do you the justice, Captain Benjamin,

to believe most fully in your entire sincerity and your desire to benefit me; but I think you do less than justice to a religious feeling which may be real, although differently expressed from your own. I am not exactly an irreligious woman, as you should know by this time; and—I am reluctant to wound you—while I believe thoroughly in your repentance—yet—"

"You think," he said, swiftly, "that, in spite of my repentance, the fact that I have been a great sinner should prevent me from pleading in this manner with one who has led your life. But you do not understand, that is all. Jesus has washed away the past; it is as if it had never been; and it is in his name and his power that I come to you."

"It seems to me," said Theodora, now fairly at bay, "that you employ, you Salvationists, that form of words, about being washed, and the rest of it, as an excuse for exalting yourselves at the expense of other people. Fact is fact, and truth, truth, in spite of you; the sins that you have committed *have* left their impress, no matter how you deceive yourselves; some of you fall back into them, to prove it. Now, from those sins, at least, I am saved, and you are not. There is the truth; if it pain you I am sorry, but you have brought the hearing of it upon yourself."

She spoke breathlessly, with her eyes turned away from his face, lest the sight of what she knew must be written there should hinder her defense. When he answered, there was no pain in his voice, only pity.

"I deserve all that you can say—more than you know how to say—as regards my past. If I let myself think of it as still alive, the bitterest thought of all would be that if it had been an innocent past you might have loved me. You will never love me now; but that is one of the consequences, and Christ has it in his keeping. And I do not ask it; it is enough for me if you will love Christ. He, at least, has done nothing to forfeit all that you have it in you to give."

Theodora shivered; was this faith or blasphemy?

"But you make it very hard to bear," he continued, "when you show me that if I had remained in the old life, and if Christ had found me there—as he surely would, who found me so far below it—I might then have been able so to speak to you, to put things in such a way that you might have been able to understand. But I must deliver my mes-

sage in such words as the Lord gives me to say. And I think you are missing the point—begging the question, I think they used to call it. It is not what any of us *do*, it is what Christ *is*, that is salvation. I am safe from the old sins; why? Because I have stopped fighting against them. When the craving for drink comes, or some other temptation, I do not waste time in resisting it; no, I carry it straight to Christ, and he conquers it for me; for who am I to set my strength against the power of the devil? He has conquered me too often.

"You—if sin ever touches you—I do not know—fight it in your own strength; there is your mistake. For some day there will come—Satan is very skillful—a sudden strong temptation, such as you have never known before. Perhaps you think you can ask Christ to help you; but how if the temptation is not only too strong for your strength, but too sudden for those slow prayers of yours? You will yield to that temptation; what else can you do? Why not, before it comes, give yourself up wholly to Christ, so that he shall always do all, and you nothing?"

Theodora's head had fallen on her hands, which were folded, one upon the other, on the back of the great carved chair. There was silence in the room; for Captain Benjamin, by the reality that was in him, had been delivered for the moment from his accustomed formulæ. Perhaps he prayed silently as he stood beside her; but if so, he gave no outward sign.

When Theodora raised her eyes, there was in them a truth as clear as in his own; and she spoke with a simplicity and directness which modern life had made impossible to her since her childhood.

"Captain Benjamin," she said, "you are willing that Christ shall do all for you, and be all to you. But for me, you cannot trust him. Do you not see that you are trying to do part of his work yourself?"

Then, with no farewell, she turned and left him; but from an upper window she watched how he went away down the winding road to the great gates, with his tall figure shrunk together, and his head bowed upon his breast. But Theodora did not feel that she had won a victory.

It was a day of early November when Miss Revel and her mother went away to the South from Revelrig; the little railroad station was upon Miss Revel's own land, and Dr. Hurl-

but said, as he stood before it, at the window of the carriage, that the weather had made a laudable attempt to be typical, in order to be worthy of Miss Revel's scientific intellect.

Theodora did not attend to him very closely; her eye had been caught by two figures who stood under the drippings of the scroll-work on the front of the station; the brown lieutenant nearest to the weather. As she had seen it first, so now she beheld it for the last time—the dark, thin face, above the lieutenant's red-crossed bonnet, gleaming with unheeded raindrops; but now the wistful, patient, dog-like fidelity and sorrow were written on the face not only of the woman. Something smote Theodora suddenly on the heart.

"Let me out," she called to the coachman, who stood near, his hands in the pockets of his shiny rubber garment. "Let me out; there is something I have forgotten."

"Your common sense?" hovered as a suggestion on Dr. Hurlbut's lips; but he knew her too well to let it escape them.

"My dear Theodora, you will take your death," said Mrs. Revel, feebly; but Theodora, in her long blue traveling cloak, had already laid her hand upon the arm of the brown lieutenant, and noted the flame of joy that leaped at her approach into the eyes of Captain Benjamin.

"Come," she said, imperatively, "I must speak to you;" and when they were within the shelter of the waiting-room, she pressed into the hard brown palm something soft and silky to the touch.

"He is not well," said Theodora, hurriedly; "I want him to have every comfort, every luxury. Write to me about him; let me know what he needs; he shall have it, as if he were my own brother."

The brown lieutenant looked at the trust confided to her, and added up mentally the amount of the notes, with businesslike exactness, before she replied.

"Yes," she said, afterwards, "you may do this for him; it is very hard to know that any one whom you love is suffering for food, because what he has is too coarse to tempt his appetite; I will let you do this for him, Miss Revel. God gives me the nursing of him, and that is best of all. Yes, I will let you know; it will not be very long."

She laid a hand, in her turn, on the blue traveling cloak.

"You are grieving the Spirit," she said; "and that is killing him. If you would yield,

and tell him so, that would be better than jellies and broths and chicken."

"Your bill of fare seems already made out," said Theodora, smiling. But the water stood in her eyes; for the brown lieutenant's words contained a revelation that touched her.

The whistle of the approaching engine left little time for speech or action; she pressed the brown palm, and hurried from the room. Captain Benjamin stood where she had left him; but the train had now drawn up beside the platform, and Dr. Hurlbut had come to hasten her movements. It may be that he accentuated them in a sense very far from his desire; for Theodora was unaccustomed to opposition; moreover, the time was short, and what she had to say must be compressed into the smallest possible compass. And at that thought, the word presented itself; for, though it were a Salvation Army technicality, Theodora was not a woman to be deterred by trifles. Moreover, it would express her meaning all the better.

"Good-by, Captain Benjamin," she said; and as he clasped her hand, she added, with a smile, "ALLELUIA!"

The swift illumination of his countenance showed that he fully understood; and as she looked from the window of the Pullman car upon the rain-swept platform, she heard, above the noise of the moving train, the tinkle of the lieutenant's tambourine, and the voice of Captain Benjamin, singing:

He's the Lily of the Valley, the bright and morning star;
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.

Time passed, and summer returned; and Dr. Hurlbut drew his horse aside, one morn-

ing, from the great gates of Revelrig, which he had been about to enter.

"It is fitting that a mere mortal should give place to the chariot of Aurora," he said, as Miss Revel, in her dog-cart, passed through. The cart was piled, front and back, with flowers. "Or is it Schiller's

'Mädchen, schön und wunderbar'?"

"I am only going out to the cemetery," replied Miss Revel, with a grave sincerity, which she seemed to have brought home from her travels, and which the doctor found more disconcerting than her former jesting parries.

"How wonderfully well you have looked ever since your return!" he said, with more meaning than met the ear; "your winter improved you greatly."

"I trust so; there was need of it," she replied. "Shall I find you at Revelrig when I return? No? Then good-morning; for this is something I had rather do alone."

Dr. Hurlbut sat motionless, following her with his eyes.

"To the cemetery!" he said, presently, "where that fellow lies, near to her own father. Such folly! But at least she did not marry him, and—well, I suppose, in comparison with such an evil as that, a few cart-loads of flowers are a small consideration."

Wherewith he drove on to the house to visit the brown lieutenant, who was there being tenderly nursed through a cough which she had developed while caring for the last days of Captain Benjamin. Dr. Hurlbut was of the opinion that the brown lieutenant had had rather hard measure in this world; but there were still a few things which, for all his penetration, Dr. Hurlbut did not understand.

Autumn Fires

By Priscilla Leonard

Still is the air, sun-steeped and clear;
The golden ripeness of the year
Breathes from each peaceful field and hill;
Green are the woods, and wide; yet still
A flash of red, a touch of fire.
Lights here and there some leafy spire
To kindling radiance, whose blaze
Shall spread and burn through autumn days
Till the last torches, brave and bold,
Are quenched in chill November's cold.