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'Buy Cheap, Buy Dear!': Selling Consumer Activism in the Salvation Army *c.* 1885–1905

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the late nineteenth-century Salvation Army used consumer activism as a fundraising strategy, an impetus towards social change, and a means of consolidating its visible presence in public and domestic settings. It argues that the Salvation Army was unique in its combination of its own production systems with the creation and capture of an unusually far-reaching activist market. As much of its support came from lower-income communities, the Salvation Army developed ways to facilitate their participation in activist consumption. Harnessing consumer identity allowed the organization to cast its supporters as active participants, and both donations to and purchases from the Salvation Army were framed as positive changes in consumer behaviour connected to spiritual welfare. Much of this process was refracted through the Trade Department, which competed with secular sellers to produce a range of household essentials; but this also put pressure on the membership to use their consumer power to benefit the Salvation Army whenever possible. The article draws on the organization's substantial periodical output to interrogate the communication strategies that underpinned these consumer engagement practices. It offers a comparative analysis of two examples of the Salvation Army's commercial ventures during this period: the trading activities centred around the Trade Department, and the Darkest England Match Factory. It argues that while the Trade Department demonstrates the success of the organization's own brand of accessible consumer activism, the match factory shows a failure in the communication strategies designed to win consumers for the Salvation Army cause.

KEYWORDS: consumer activism, Salvation Army, social activism, religious activism, charity

The final issue of the Salvation Army newspaper the *War Cry* for 1884 carried an article introducing 'The Trade Departments of The Salvation Army', the hub of the organization's commercial ventures. The author, John A. Carleton, was a prolific officer – the term for the Salvation Army's ordained ministers – who was based at the organization's Headquarters in central London. The *War Cry*, which appeared twice a week at this time, had been the official public-facing organ of the Salvation Army for five years. The organization, founded in 1865 as the East London Christian Mission, had communicated with its following and the public through print publications since 1867, establishing a monthly periodical in 1868. As the organization grew, a more frequent publication with a wider reach was needed to promote its rapidly expanding work, and the *War Cry* was launched in December 1879. Itself an example of early Salvation Army trade activities, it was sold to the public as well as to Salvationists at the affordable price of a halfpenny per issue. This made it a valuable platform for explaining

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as well as advertising the Trade Department, which in December 1884 had just moved from Headquarters to dedicated premises on Southwark Street, south of the Thames.

Carleton's article anticipates incredulity from non-Salvationist readers. 'What a very extraordinary thing it is for a religious organisation like the Salvation Army to have a Trade Department!' he writes, adding: 'This is a remark frequently made by those who are only beginning to get acquainted with our work, and by many others who know nothing at all about us'.[1] In fact the Trade Department had been steadily enlarging its remit since its early beginnings as a small-scale publishing operation to support the Christian Mission in the 1860s.[2] The organization's first headquarters, the People's Mission Hall on Whitechapel Road in East London, had a printing press on which it produced its own publications as well as tracts and hymns, sold with the joint purpose of evangelizing and fundraising. When Salvation Army officers and soldiers (lay members) began to wear uniform, these garments and other branded merchandise were added to the production unit. By the 1880s it also sold home furnishings and even tea, and would go on to include items manufactured in Salvation Army institutions such as women's Rescue Homes (later Industrial Homes) and men's Elevator workshops, both of which offered accommodation and work to people without access to other social or economic support. In these ways, Carleton informs his readers,

> our Trade Department helps to spread Salvation, not only by supplying our Soldiers with uniform and their homes with numerous articles that constantly direct [their] thoughts to Salvation, but also by supplying The Salvation Army with funds to carry on and extend its spiritual work in this country and in foreign lands.[3]

Through buying from the Trade Department, readers of the *War Cry* could visibly express their support for the Salvation Army and its work. In other words, it added a consumer dimension to the organization's religious and social activism.

Frank Trentmann argues that an understanding of the consumer identity as involving civic responsibility emerged early in nineteenth-century Britain as part of the national commitment to Free Trade.[4] It follows that religious and social charities would seek to co-opt these responsible consumers into the emergent markets of faith and charity identified respectively by John M. Giggie and Diane Winston and Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe.[5] The consumer identity gave supporters of these organizations a more active and empowered role than the more passive connotations of donorship. Then as now, however, consumer activist practices tended to be associated with wealthier people who could exercise economic influence linked to their social position.[6] Although working-class consumers did

1 John A. Carleton, 'The Trade Departments of The Salvation Army', *War Cry*, 31 December 1884, p. 4.

2 For further information on the development of the Salvation Army as a religious and charity organization in the late nineteenth century see for instance Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

3 Carleton, 'The Trade Departments', p. 4.

4 Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). On the consumer as socio-political force, see for instance pp. 2–3 and 16–17.

5 *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*, ed. by John M. Giggie and Diane Winston (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002) and Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870–1912* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

6 For a more comprehensive history of consumer activism see for instance Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

organize through the Co-operative Movement, activist consumption in the form of ethical consumerism or 'purchase-triggered donation' were often beyond the reach of people in poverty. They might well struggle to pay more for essentials with guaranteed ethical production or to buy branded items signalling support for a cause.[7]

Strongly aware that much of its support came from working people with little money to spare, the Salvation Army therefore developed forms of consumer activism that facilitated their participation. Branching out into the production of household goods and basic garments – products that the majority of people would be buying anyway – allowed them to capture working-class markets. As Carleton puts it:

> Many of our people are poor and cannot give much in the collections, or in subscriptions, but they all buy certain goods, upon which there is a profit; and if they purchase those goods from us they know that the profit goes right into the Lord's Treasury ...[8]

Jayne Krisjanous points to the parallels between the Salvation Army's trading strategy and the contemporary practice of '"marketing to the poor," where targeting those at the lowest levels of the economic market is thought to both increase corporate profitability and go some way toward reducing poverty and improving quality of life overall'.[9] Carleton's article expresses the same idea of mutual benefit in the trading relationship, but adds in moral and spiritual rewards for the consumer. This dynamic of mutual reward also characterizes the charity market. Roddy, Strange, and Taithe note that 'charitable giving has often been understood . . . in terms of reciprocal gift exchange, where both parties derive something from the relationship: money for the charity, and various sorts of intangible "symbolic capital" for the donor'.[10] The intangible benefits the Salvation Army promised in return for both donations and purchases could be spiritual as well as secular and spoke to different working-class traditions of giving and consuming, from established practices of community aid to individual desires to demonstrate organizational allegiance and house pride.[11]

This article explores how the Salvation Army experimented with the potential of the emerging consumer identity in the period 1885–1905 to capture a broad base of consumer power to support its global expansion. To achieve this, the organization relied heavily on its press as a line of communication to its membership and the wider public. Besides the *War Cry*, this included the *Darkest England Gazette*, a weekly penny paper dedicated to the organization's social work in 1893–1894. I examine these publications as advertising platforms for Salvation Army campaigns and products, considering how they frame the exchange of money for reward between the consumer-donor and the organization as a positive change in consumer behaviour.

The first section of the article, 'Finding consumer power', explores how the organization introduced the dimension of consumer choice into its appeals for donations and support. As it was understood that money donated was money not spent on consumer products, the

7 On 'purchase-triggered donation', see Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, p. 43.

8 Carleton, 'The Trade Departments', p. 4.

9 Jayne Krisjanous, 'Examining the Historical Roots of Social Marketing Through the Lights in Darkest England Campaign', *Journal of Macromarketing*, 34 (2014), 435–51, DOI: 10.1177/0276146714527109.

10 Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, p. 35.

11 On these traditions of giving and consuming in working-class communities, see for instance Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: The East End of London 1885–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), e.g. pp. 132–35.

Salvation Army returned symbolic capital in various forms including conspicuous acknowledgment of the donor's self-denial. The rise of the Trade Department, however, also offered an alternative to self-denial by making it possible to show support for the Salvation Army by buying essential goods directly from it in an accessible form of purchase-triggered donation. It went on, moreover, to launch products advertising allegiance to the organization and encouraged adherents to buy in this market as a sign of their salvation. This highly successful mixing of secular and religious markets allowed the organization to establish a funding cycle that supported its wide-ranging evangelical and social work, and to raise its own profile further through its visible presence both in individuals' lives and homes and in wider social settings.

The second section examines a failed experiment in the Salvation Army's marketing strategies during this period. The Darkest England Match Factory was opened by the organization in 1891 as a self-proclaimed site of ethical match production, in response to contemporary exposés of exploitative match production. The factory came closest to promoting ethical consumerism in the modern-day sense of spending more to ensure the ethical provenance of specific items. While it only operated for some 10 years, the Salvation Army claimed even its demise as a triumph, signalling its impact on the wider match industry. In this section, I will argue that the campaign to promote the 'Lights in Darkest England' matches in fact shows a moment of failure in the advertising and communication strategies that had previously assured the success of the Salvation Army's trading initiatives.

1. FINDING CONSUMER POWER: FROM DONOR TO CONSUMER

In *A Curate's Promise* (1921), a novel by non-Salvationist social writer Margaret Harkness, a Salvation Army officer jokes to a visitor: 'we are the cheekiest people in the world; for after telling people that they will go to hell if they do not repent and come to the mercy-seat, we send round a cap to pay the expenses of the meeting'.[12] Taking collections as part of religious services remains common practice across denominations; but this tongue-in-cheek remark reflects the Salvation Army's sustained focus on self-funding its ambitious schemes with popular support.

These funding plans had been articulated by Salvation Army founder General William Booth in *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), his blueprint for the social work that would save – in its combined spiritual and material meaning – what he called the 'submerged tenth' of the UK population who were victims of poverty and its attendant conditions, such as unemployment, addiction, disease, prostitution, homelessness, or slum living. The book's 'practical conclusion' stated that £100,000 would be needed 'as a first instalment' to scale up the social work nationally. The amount, Booth went on, was 'not much considering the money that is raised by my poor people . . . The proceeds of the Self-denial Week alone last year brought us in £20,000. This year it will not fall short of £25,000'.[13]

Booth's appeal in *In Darkest England* was a conscious reframing of the Salvation Army's fundraising strategies that was designed to exist alongside collections at meetings and initiatives like Self-Denial Week, during which members did without a luxury and donated the money saved. (The Self-Denial scheme survives today as the Big Collection.) By separating, for the first time, its evangelical and its charitable work, the organization acknowledged that it would welcome material support from people who approved of its social project without

[12] John Law [Margaret Harkness], *A Curate's Promise* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), pp. 27–28.

[13] William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1890), p. 278.

necessarily subscribing to its religious aims. It also appealed explicitly to higher-income social groups when its emphasis had previously been on outreach within the communities in which it operated. This earlier work allowed Booth to contrast wealthier people unfavourably with 'my poor people', the working-class and low-income followers of the Salvation Army, strongly suggesting that people who had less to give gave more freely so that their combined donations added up to a substantial amount. In harnessing this monetary support from people in poverty, the Salvation Army may well have been tapping into the well-documented structures of '[c]ommunal sharing' and hyperlocal 'charity' to neighbours and co-workers that was 'closely associated with poorer communities and individuals'.[14] Many localized support schemes in low-income neighbourhoods, such as missions and crèches, themselves relied on fundraising within the very communities they served.[15] *In Darkest England* showed the middle and upper classes, who were much less likely to have personal experience of the Salvation Army, how their contributions would go towards a sound, established scheme that had the material as well as social support of affected communities.

Booth's arguments are strongly cognisant of the different levels of interaction between donor and recipient that worked to prove their mutual worth. The moral pressure brought to bear by Salvationists, from Booth to the officers sending round a cap, unashamedly relied on people donating both to feel good about themselves and to be better regarded by anybody watching. Those who responded to this pressure by giving their practical support to the Salvation Army were therefore rewarded with public commendation. The *Darkest England Gazette* featured columns registering donations to funds to alleviate child hunger in deprived neighbourhoods and to support unemployed people. Donors were listed by the names or pseudonyms they had given, and the smallest gifts were recognized, from monetary contributions as low as 6d. to material donations such as second-hand clothes. One 'Children's Breakfast Fund' column registered 2s. from 'Four Children, Clapham' and a 'Parcel of Goods' from 'Friends, Hanley Castle'.[16] As well as gratefully acknowledging individuals' gifts, these columns advertised the various schemes' ability to accrue donations, and both were also intended to lead other readers by example.

As the Salvation Army embraced conspicuousness in many of its strategies, it is not surprising that it quickly found ways of foregrounding this sense of reciprocity in more tangible forms of symbolic capital too. The long-running 'Grace-before-Meat' scheme, which was open to members of the public as well as Salvation Army soldiers and officers, was part of the strategy of advertising gifts both for the Salvation Army and for the donor by providing visible proof of participants' regular donations. Grace-before-Meat boxes were small tins that participants were encouraged to keep on their dinner tables. They were strikingly decorated with images of the social work and the people who used its services (Figure 1). Participants would drop a small coin such as a halfpenny into the box before their meal, and boxes were regularly collected by Salvation Army agents.[17] This practical equivalent to a thanksgiving prayer

[14] Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor*, p. 135.

[15] For instance, in her discussion of child welfare work 'Good and Bad Mothers: Lady Philanthropists and London Housewives before World War I', Ellen Ross notes that Margaret McMillan's crèche to support working mothers raised funds from local low-income households. In *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, ed. by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 199–216 (p. 210).

[16] 'Children's Breakfast Fund', *Darkest England Gazette*, 27 January 1894, p. 5.

[17] On the Grace-before-Meat scheme, see for instance Jenty Fairbanks, *Booth's Boots: Social Service Beginnings in The Salvation Army* (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1983), pp. 147, 148.

Figure 1: Grace-before-Meat box, early to mid-twentieth century (M689). The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, London. Credit: The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre.

allowed donors to share some of their good fortune with others who did not have the same access to food. These donation piggybanks were designed to appeal to people who could not spare enough for a substantial single donation, but who could over time accumulate significant amounts in spare change. Meanwhile the eye-catching tins displayed participants' commitment to the social scheme to anyone visiting their home, while dinner guests were likely to feel moral pressure to contribute as well.

While the Grace-before-Meat boxes were explicitly linked to the social work, broader allegiance to the Salvation Army was facilitated by the more directly consumer-focused activities of the Trade Department. Over the course of the 1880s and 1890s this had rapidly expanded to 'what amounted to a modern department store':

> offer[ing] everything any soldier in any part of the world could possibly need to carry out his or her duties: uniforms, musical instruments, pens, inkstands, books, boots and even boot polish. Other less directly Army-related items were also on sale. General clothing for men, women and children, sewing machines, cutlery, toilet items including razors, hairbrushes, light fittings, bicycles, home furnishings ranging from tea-sets to

> sideboards, bassinettes, luggage, mangles and wringers and myriad other products were advertised for sale, all of the profits going back to fund the Army's social and religious work.[18]

Diane Winston sees these commercial pursuits as part of the same 'bid to compete with secular culture' that also prompted the Salvation Army to appropriate popular music as hymn tunes and provide mass entertainment on a religious basis as an alternative to theatres and pubs. The reasoning, according to Winston, was that a 'religious person would prefer honestly marketed products made with an extra special something . . . its products had added value; the tea wasn't just tea, it was a salvation blend'.[19] Roddy, Strange, and Taithe point out that this work was substantially aided by the Salvation Army's access to a 'ready-made workforce', the people accommodated by and working in its institutions, as well as to the market created by its membership – although it also actively marketed its goods to the general public. In fact, '[f]ar from taking advantage of the charitable consumer in turning this profit, the Army claimed to compete favourably with commercial rivals'.[20] One example of this appears in the adverts regularly carried in the *Darkest England Gazette* which promised readers: 'You Can Help the Submerged by purchasing the productions of the Social Wing'. Advertising the brushes, mats, and 'social rugs' produced in the Elevators as a good cause, it also went out of its way to make the products attractive by promising discounted 'carriage' costs on orders of 5s. or more.[21]

Advertisements were only one way in which the Salvation Army marketed its products. From around the turn of the twentieth century, the Salvation Army pedlar or 'lollard' became a well-known figure.[22] These women officers were door-to-door sellers of goods produced in Women's Social Work institutions, who took the items to potential customers, including in relatively isolated communities where access to shops, and therefore consumer choice, were limited.[23] They presented their wares as the product of good work in two ways: they were of good quality, and their production had already provided struggling women with an occupation and skills training. (Women in the Industrial Homes were not paid for their work.)[24] By buying these products, consumers contributed towards keeping these institutions open.

A similar principle was behind the 'Triumph Tea' sold by the Salvation Army from around 1885. Initial advertisements promised the proceeds would support the organization's evangelical work; by 1895 the so-called 'Missionary Tea League' had been set up, which asked customers to buy their tea by subscription to fund missionary work abroad. In 1896 the *War Cry* published a poem extolling the 'Tea League' signed with the typical Salvationist pseudonym

18 Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, pp. 40–41.

19 Diane Winston, 'Living in the Material World: Salvation Army Lassies and Urban Commercial Culture, 1880–1918', in *Faith in the Market*, ed. by Giggie and Winston, pp. 13–36 (p. 15).

20 Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, p. 41.

21 'You Can Help the Submerged', *Darkest England Gazette*, 2 September 1893, p. 11.

22 The term 'lollard' originally referred to followers of John Wycliff, who by the nineteenth century were seen as heroic martyrs of a proto-Protestant movement. It can also be used to indicate an idler or vagabond (*OED*). The intention may have been to combine the evangelism from the first meaning with the itinerancy from the second. The associations of martyrdom are also likely to connect to the renunciation of material and social capital that characterised the early Salvation Army and the Women's Social Work in particular.

23 See, for instance, 'Peddling for the Son of Man', *Deliverer*, November 1900, pp. 66–67.

24 For a detailed examination of retail and the 'rescue work', see Ruth Macdonald, 'A Labour of Love: The Role of Retail in Salvation Army Rescue Work for Women', forthcoming in *Retail and Community in Modern British History*, ed. by George Campbell Gosling and Grace Millar.

'Deborah Do-Better'. It was rendered in the voice of chatty everywoman 'Mrs. Johnson' who confides to the reader:

> We spend a tidy bit on tea, I tell you;
> It might as well be turned to good account.
> I wish *you'd* join the League, and let them sell you
> (They'll bring it to your door) a small amount.[25]

Again, the argument was clear: customers would be spending this money anyway, and as with the Grace-before-Meat boxes, even 'a small amount' could add up to 'a tidy bit' over time. The convenience of home delivery also added moral pressure by suggesting that there was really no reason not to buy League tea – unless one were actually opposed to the Salvation Army's missionary activities. The target audience, of course, was unlikely to include anyone who was openly resistant to the organization and its mission for political, religious, or personal reasons.

By 1902, another ingenious tea venture had been designed to draw in financially secure consumers by rewarding steady investment over time. Assurance Tea allowed customers to use their tea purchases to fund life insurance. Tea packets included a Life Assurance Coupon, the value of which was based on the price of the tea: 2d. for the 2s. variety, 1d. for that priced at 1s. 8d.. Coupons could be presented to a Salvation Army Life Assurance Agent 'who will accept it at its face value AS CASH in payment of Assurance Premium'.[26] In this way, it suggested, a household comfort could provide long-term peace of mind. Linking the purchases to the continuity of a life insurance policy ensured customer retention, while the connection between the price of the product and the value of the coupon encouraged customers to buy the more expensive product, and buy it regularly.

Each of the notions that underpinned the sales of Salvation Army products – the sense of reciprocity and symbolic capital, and the idea that it was supplying products that consumers needed anyway – is complicated by the prevalent Salvation Army narrative that linked spiritual and material salvation. Jill Rappoport analyses this question in her examination of the sacrifices made by the so-called 'Slum Sisters', women officers and cadets (officers in training) who engaged in practical and evangelical work in deprived urban neighbourhoods. She points to the contradiction inherent in these Salvationists' encouragement of people in poverty to aspire to property acquisition while they themselves renounced materialism to feel closer to the people they worked with. She notes that portrayals of saved families in Salvation Army publications often used property to signal salvation and new-found respectability. Religion was thus presented as an impetus to self-help that made people stop spending on vices such as alcohol, tobacco, and gambling in order to save and spend on improving their domestic environment. According to Rappoport:

> Slum Sisters make spectacles of their own vulnerable bodies to compel the reader to give up something material too, financial contributions which, triangulated around Slum Sisters' sacrifice and the shopping of the reformed poor, manifest as the chairs and cupboards of self-help.[27]

[25] 'Deborah Do-Better', 'Mrs. Johnson on "The General's Tea League"', *War Cry*, 15 August 1896, p. 10. Emphasis in original.

[26] 'Assurance Tea', *War Cry*, 21 June 1902, p. 15.

[27] Jill Rappoport, *Giving Women: Alliance and Exchange in Victorian Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 125.

In other words, the combined visions of the Slum Sisters sacrificing materiality to approach the poverty that prevailed in slum neighbourhoods, and of the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods being socially raised by the acquisition of household property, worked together to encourage public donations. I argue that the Trade Department added another dimension to this structure by producing these signifiers of domestic self-help itself. If newly saved people could purchase their home furnishings directly from the Salvation Army, the donation stream encouraged by the Slum Sisters in effect flowed through the organization twice. Wealthier people would donate to support the work of the Slum Sisters – and the wider social work following *In Darkest England* – and the benefits this work brought to the people it saved were also returned to the Salvation Army as they purchased the outward signs of their improved position from the organization. The proceeds, which were likely to grow with each iteration of this donation-purchase cycle, enabled the organization to expand its project of salvation to reach ever larger groups of people around the world.

A further extension of the Salvation Army making itself visible through symbolic capital in its followers' homes is evident in the 1886 edition of the annual *Orders and Regulations for Field Officers*. These standard instructions for officers leading a local Salvation Army corps or church state that:

> [t]he F. O. should encourage his Soldiers to have the badges and signs of The Army about their habitations . . . so that their eyes may rest upon them whichever way they turn, and in order that these emblems may preach Salvation to everybody who comes inside their dwelling.[28]

This suggests that the symbolic capital was as much for outward display as for the benefit of the Salvationists themselves. One Salvation Army product that worked as such a visible sign of salvation were the so-called 'washing texts' produced in the Women's Social Work institutions. These were scriptural and religious phrases machine-embroidered onto textile wall hangings that could be washed, a useful attribute in homes and meeting halls where they were exposed to soot and smoke from fires, candles, and gas. Contemporary portrayals of Salvation Army venues and Salvationist interiors often show at least one scriptural text on the walls. It was logical that the Salvation Army should step in to supply this existing market, and with a product that was a demonstrable improvement on paper texts that could not be cleaned. The washing texts may be seen as a domestic equivalent of the uniform, proclaiming the owner's allegiance to the Salvation Army while materially supporting its activities.

Other related purchases were less clearly imbued with this symbolic capital, however, and occasionally, the pressure to buy seems to turn into a more explicit suggestion that the purchase – like the donations considered above – proved the buyer's worth. One example were the bicycles that the organization began to sell from the 1890s onwards and which promised to 'enabl[e] one to do in one day, double what he [sic] could otherwise do', thereby making 'the user of – Much More Value in the World!'.[29] This was clearly especially relevant to officers and soldiers whose worth was measured almost entirely in terms of their efforts on behalf of the Salvation Army and its causes. As members' dedication to the organization was expected to be visible as well as practical, furthermore, the Trade Department soon found

[28] *Orders and Regulations for Field Officers* (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1886), p. 222.
[29] 'Cycles!', *War Cry*, 8 May 1897, p. 15.

opportunities to extend the signifiers of allegiance beyond the uniform and interior decoration. In 1906, the *War Cry* proudly announced that 'A SPECIAL CASE has been devised for the Preservation of The Army Bonnet'.[30] This strongly implied that it was no longer enough to wear the characteristic bonnet; now, it seemed, there were set standards for its preservation by which one's commitment to the organization might be measured, and which required another purchase from the Trade Department.

Publicity had been key to the Salvation Army's strategies from the beginning; in fact, the *Officer* magazine devoted a six-month series to instructing officers in 'How to Advertise' to promote meetings.[31] The author's pseudonym 'Homme de Guerre' ['man of war'] demonstrates that advertising was considered an important offensive tactic in the Salvation Army's 'war' to save the world. Members' allegiance to the organization must be both visible and material to lead by example and attract further support. The extent and variety of the goods marketed by the Salvation Army and the tactics used to advertise them, however, sometimes seem to shift the focus from symbolic capital and donations triggered by the purchase of essentials to something much closer to secular brand shopping. It is impossible to trace the actual levels of pressure on low-income Salvationists to signal their investment in the organization through the consumption of products they did not necessarily need, but the language of the advertisements certainly varies from merely inviting and facilitating consumer activism to implying that customers' personal worth was directly linked to their purchases.

2. CASE STUDY: THE DARKEST ENGLAND MATCH FACTORY, 1891–1901

The example of consumer activism promoted by the Salvation Army that is closest to the modern-day sense of ethical consumption was linked to two interrelated *causes célèbres* of the late nineteenth century: sweated labour and specifically the plight of workers in the match industry. The organization opened its own match factory in 1891 in Old Ford, a key area for match production in East London: the large-scale producers Bryant and May and R. Bell both had factories nearby. Contrary to these, however, the Darkest England Match Factory produced only 'safety' matches, which were made without toxic yellow phosphorus and had to be struck on a special strip on the box, reducing the likelihood of spontaneous combustion. The factory also paid '[f]rom twenty-five to fifty per cent. more than others' for making both matches and matchboxes.[32]

The factory was a clear response to public interest in the match industry, which had gained prominence through two channels: the growing body of writing on sweated labour, including the high levels of overwork and underpayment in homebased matchbox making, and the high-profile protests of workers against exploitative practices at the Bryant and May factory which had culminated in the successful Matchwomen's Strike of 1888 and the formation of the Matchmakers' Union. The strike had been well publicized through the mainstream and political press including Annie Besant's radical *Link* and received support from prominent figures including Herbert Burrows and Charles Bradlaugh. Seth Koven notes that '[o]vernight, match girls . . . turned into the darlings of "new journalists" seeking copy for stories about East

30 'Important to All who Wear the Army Bonnet', *War Cry*, 14 July 1906, p. 15.

31 'How to Advertise', *Officer*, February–July 1893.

32 'Four Interviews with Commissioner Cadman', *Darkest England Gazette*, 23 September 1893, p. 8. On wages for match and box making, see also resp. Louise Raw, *Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their Place in History* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 96, and Victor Bailey, *Order and Disorder in Modern Britain: Essays on Riot, Policing and Punishment* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2014), p. 85.

London life and labor'.[33] As a result of this exposure, the factory's low pay, long hours, and system of fines, and above all the horror of 'phossy jaw' – the necrosis of the jawbone caused by yellow phosphorus – had become the subject of public outrage. This pre-existing sympathy and compassion offered a ready context for advertising the ethical manufacture of matches, a nineteenth-century household essential.

The Salvation Army was well placed to make this intervention. The organization was very active in the London districts that were home to many match factory workers and matchbox makers and had first-hand knowledge of their working and living conditions. It is also worth noting that it had received some negative publicity after the vicar of Old Ford claimed at the 1888 House of Lords Select Committee on the Sweating System that the organization participated in sweated matchbox making.[34] Booth's son and right hand Bramwell appeared before the committee to refute the accusations, but it is likely that these events contributed to the Salvation Army's choice of match production for its practical stand against sweating.

The organization's relationship with the growing labour movement during this period was complex. It did not articulate support for trade unions or labour disputes, but its charitable activities on behalf of striking workers' dependants, especially the provision of cheap or free food, were widely acknowledged to play an important part in sustaining strikes which sometimes decided disputes in the workers' favour, as in the 1889 London Dockworkers' Strike.[35] It may have been relevant that the iniquities of the match industry could be related to workers' victimhood, particularly through the figures of the sweated matchbox maker and the phossy jaw sufferer. Koven also suggests that, by the mid-1890s, the influence of the Matchmakers Union, the radicalism of match workers, and the popular support for their labour cause were all receding, leading to the failure of a strike at Bell in 1894.[36] In this context, it was possible for the Darkest England factory to pride itself on its fair working conditions without directly aligning itself with trade unionism. The *Officer*, describing the match factory as 'a standing reproach to others', noted that '[w]e congratulate ourselves that no Trades Union in existence can complain that this institutional industry competes with any outside our corner of the world'.[37]

'Lights in Darkest England' matches were sold to the public from secular as well as Salvation Army outlets. They were also distributed through other religious organizations, wholesalers, and cooperatives. The brightly primary-coloured boxes set out in capital letters the reasons for buying these and no other matches: '1st To raise the wages of the match-box makers. 2nd To fight against sweating. 3rd To help the poor to help themselves by labour' (Figure 2). The trade union dimension is avoided here, and the focus is on matchbox makers rather than the match factory workers associated with strikes and labour organization. Like the Grace-before-Meat tins, the eye-catching boxes signalled buyers' ethical choice to others, making their purchase:

> simultaneously a simple way for charitable consumers to buy into a good cause, a show of support for the vision of working life the matches represented, a souvenir of the

[33] Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (Woodstock, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 78.

[34] See Bailey, *Order and Disorder*, p. 72.

[35] See for instance H. Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike, Told by Two East Londoners* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1889).

[36] Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, pp. 91–101.

[37] Adjutant McLaughlan, 'Darkest England Matches', *Officer*, December 1894, p. 360.

Figure 2: Lights in Darkest England match box, 1890s (M799). The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, London. Credit: The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre.

> donor's own virtue and, because of its everyday use and branding, an ongoing reminder, to them and to others, of the organization that manufactured and sold it to them.[38]

It is crucial to recognize, however, that the matches were sold at double the price of those produced by underpaid labour. As Krisjanous points out, this made their success 'contingent on individual behavior change' in consumers 'both within and outside' the organization.[39] To achieve this, the Salvation Army combined its existing sales strategies with increasingly current arguments of ethical consumption. In strong contrast to the Trade Department's advertising, 'the poor' here were no longer featured as active participants in fundraising but as the victimized subjects of the campaign.

The *Darkest England Gazette* became the matches' particular advertising tool, seeking to capitalize on readers' interest in the social work. By 1893, however, it was already clear that the high price was causing sales to fall, and even in the earliest issues of the *Gazette* the match advertisements blend optimism with disappointed realism. One repeated advertisement declared: 'Wanted, 100,000 Shop-Keepers to meet the demands of the readers of the "Darkest England Gazette," for Darkest England Matches'.[40] Readers were frequently encouraged to put pressure on their grocers to stock the matches, while lists of 'Darkest England Match Agents' in different towns showed where they were already sold. Nevertheless, it was also

[38] Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, p. 43.
[39] Krisjanous, 'Examining the Historical Roots of Social Marketing', p. 3.
[40] 'Wanted, 100,000 Shop-Keepers', *Darkest England Gazette*, 23 September 1893, p. 12.

acknowledged that 'People Don't Live by principle, but by circumstances. Blood Matches at 1¼d. per dozen boxes are generally bought instead of honest, health-preserving Safeties at 2½d. per dozen'.[41] This was a further reason for readers of the *Gazette* not only to buy Darkest England matches themselves but also to inform others of the human cost of cheap matches and to prove to their grocers that there was demand for the alternative despite their higher price. Further persuasion came from endorsements from prominent activists including social purity and women's rights campaigner Laura Ormiston Chant and labour organizer and consumer activism pioneer Clementina Black.[42] Black's commendation was copied from the *English Illustrated Magazine*, the same platform in which she had reported on the conditions of homebased matchbox makers in the notorious Old Nichol slum neighbourhood two years before.[43] The matches were reportedly also used in 10 Downing Street under Gladstone.[44]

Once consumers were persuaded to buy Darkest England matches, it was important that they continued to do so. In response to falling sales in September 1893, Commissioner Elijah Cadman, director of the social work, and his secretary Major David Lamb endorsed the matches in an interview with the *Gazette*. Forced to acknowledge that many consumers, including Salvation Army supporters, still bought the cheaper matches, Cadman combined practical and moral reasoning to argue that this was 'a case of "Buy cheap, buy dear!" One half of them won't strike, and those that do are made of the flesh and blood and tears and starvation of the poor workers'.[45] In answer to the problem of how to increase and sustain sales, the article introduced the British Match Consumers' League (BMCL). In an echo of the signed temperance pledges that were in common use by various social activist organizations at this time, including the Salvation Army's Band of Love, BMCL members put their name to a membership coupon which promised:

> to buy and use only those Matches which, to the best of my belief and knowledge, are (1) of BRITISH MANUFACTURE, and (2) are MADE ENTIRELY FREE FROM SWEATED CONDITIONS, and (3) also FREE FROM EVERY RISK to the HEALTH and LIFE of the worker.

The signatory would also '"worry" their grocer, oilman, or other shop-keeper' to stock Darkest England matches 'at least twice a week until such time as he shall do so' and provided the names of two grocers they patronized. The article closed with Cadman's statement that 'if every Salvation Soldier used none but Darkest England Matches there would be a revolution in twelve months in the conditions of the poor match and match-box makers of the East-End'.[46]

Despite these concerted efforts to increase uptake of the Darkest England matches, the higher cost continued to repel buyers, evidently including Salvationists. Victor Bailey notes that, according to the *Officer*, most matches were bought by 'members of other denominations,

41 'People Don't…', *Darkest England Gazette*, 5 August 1893, p. 12.

42 'The Darkest England Match Industry', *Darkest England Gazette*, 5 May 1894, p. 9, and 'Use Only Darkest England Matches!', *Darkest England Gazette*, 3 March 1894, p. 12.

43 Clementina Black, 'Match-Box Making at Home', *English Illustrated Magazine*, May 1892, pp. 625–29.

44 'Four Interviews with Commissioner Cadman', p. 8.

45 'Four Interviews with Commissioner Cadman', p. 8.

46 'Four Interviews with Commissioner Cadman', p. 8.

Co-Operatives, and Trade Unions'.[47] It seems possible that the Salvation Army failed to reckon with the actual poverty of much of its membership, who could not afford to pay double the usual price for a daily necessity. Cooperatives and trade unions may have been able to buy the matches wholesale, or even to subsidise the cost with savings made on other goods to support the match factory's progressive agenda.[48] The more affluent social groups who could afford to spend more on matches rarely come into the advertising narratives and do not seem to have been reached or persuaded on the required scale.

Low sales forced the factory into temporary closure in 1894, and it closed permanently in 1901, only 10 years after its opening.[49] The Salvation Army claimed this as a victory, arguing that the need for the factory disappeared as commercial manufacturers followed its practices. Many retrospective narratives also present the factory's value as deriving in large part from its role as an inspiration to other match producers to embrace more ethical practices, and as proof that matches could be made without yellow phosphorus. In her germinal study of the Matchwomen's Strike, Louise Raw relates how Booth showed 'MPs and journalists around his "model factory", and also took them to the homes of sweated workers who were working eleven and twelve hours a day producing matchboxes for companies like Bryant and May'.[50] This suggests that the factory was always intended to be a performative example as much as a business; although itself unable to survive, it consciously contributed to the change in the national perception and understanding of the match industry required to pave the way for legal change. In 1999 James Read of the Salvation Army Ethics Centre in Canada asserted in the *Salvationist*, the modern-day magazine for the Salvation Army's membership:

> The Salvation Army was not trying to corner the match-making market; it was demonstrating that business could be done ethically. Employees could be treated with greater respect, they could be paid more and customers could get value for their money.[51]

There is an implication here that the factory's failure was of no great relevance if match workers could go on to fair employment in other factories, but in fact the reality lagged some years behind. David C. Mitchell, an expert on historical matchbox labels, notes that, while other match-producing countries agreed to ban yellow phosphorus in 1906, it took another couple of years for similar action to get underway in Britain, where '[a]n Act of Parliament passed on the 2nd of December 1908, made it illegal after the 31st of December 1910 to make or sell matches which contained yellow phosphorus'.[52]

While addressing a high-profile socio-political issue, the campaign for Darkest England matches steered away from explicitly politicized standpoints, appealing to consumers on a broad moral basis. The match factory stands out from the Salvation Army's other trading initiatives in several important ways. Match sales were based on a specific agenda directed against a particular social problem, rather than on the general support for the Salvation Army

47 Bailey, *Order and Disorder*, p. 85.

48 See also David C. Mitchell, *The Darkest England Match Industry Part II*. Pamphlet, British Matchbox Label and Booklet Society, 1980, 17pp. (p. 5).

49 See Bailey, *Order and Disorder*, p. 85.

50 Raw, *Striking a Light*, p. 96.

51 James Read, 'Fair Wages for Fair Work', *Salvationist*, 7 August 1999, p. 15.

52 See Mitchell, *The Darkest England Match Industry Part II*, p. 15, and *The Darkest England Match Industry Part I*. Pamphlet, British Matchbox Label and Booklet Society, 1973, 41pp. (p. 30).

that sales from the Trade Department entailed. This might have been expected to give the matches a wider appeal; but the price seems to have put the matches out of reach of many Salvationists who may have been more ready to purchase other necessities at the competitive rates offered by the Trade Department. It is arguable that, as Read suggests, sales were not the only or the most important effect of the advertising given to the matches. Even people who did not buy them could not avoid the awareness-raising function of the column space they earned in mainstream as well as Salvation Army publications. There is no direct evidence, however, that the Darkest England Match Factory advanced legislation for safer match production. The factory's performative importance was certainly present from the start, but it received more emphasis retrospectively: the factory was clearly designed to be a successful business venture and the increasingly forceful advertising in the face of low sales shows that its failure was not planned for. The Darkest England Match Factory illustrates the reliance of ethical consumerism on sustained engagement and expanding outreach to consumers willing and able to pay a higher price for ethical goods. This ultimately proved impossible to achieve with a household staple like matches for an organization that drew much of its support from lower-income working communities.

3. MATCHING THE ACTIVISM TO THE CONSUMER: CONCLUSIONS

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the Salvation Army trialled different ways of harnessing the consumer power of its supporters among its membership and the general public. Its use of purchase-triggered donation, dating back to the organization's early sales of periodicals, tracts, and hymns, had expanded into the department store-style Trade Department by the 1880s, with the profits supporting the organization's expansion. Following the publication of *In Darkest England* and a clearer separation between the evangelical and social work, channels were opened for purchase-triggered donation to specific causes: the 'Tea League' promoted global missionary work, while the products of the Women's Social Work, peddled by dedicated officers, supported the institutions that produced them. The experiment of the Lights in Darkest England matches most closely resembles present-day consumer activism as consumers were encouraged to pay a higher price for an ethical product to contribute to eliminating harmful conditions in its manufacture. Each of these strategies emphasized the power and moral impact of consumer choice and strongly suggested that consumer-donors could buy themselves better by spending in the salvation market, a dynamic that Salvation Army archivist Ruth Macdonald compares to modern-day retail therapy.[53] While schemes such as Self-Denial Week and Grace-before-Meat promised spiritual benefits, the property-based self-help the Slum Sisters encouraged foregrounded material advancement.

The Trade Department and the Darkest England Match Factory represent two important experiments in the Salvation Army's approach to its supporters as consumers. While the match factory closed permanently after 10 years, the Trade Department remains active as Salvationist Publishing and Supplies. The Trade Department targeted the Salvation Army's lower-income membership by marketing a competitively priced range of products, many of which members were likely to buy anyway. By contrast, the match factory depended on customer retention for a single product sold at a cost which seems to have been prohibitively high for much of the Salvation Army's usual consumer base. Paying wages at trade union standards

[53] Ruth Macdonald, 'Retail Therapy? The Role of Trade in Salvation Army Rescue Work for Women', conference paper, 'Retailing and Distribution in the Nineteenth Century', University of Wolverhampton, 10 September 2019.

was a flagship policy for the match factory but not for the Elevators and Industrial Homes which supplied much of the Trade Department's stock. The Salvation Army consistently repudiated accusations of sweating or underselling in its industries, but their complicated relationship between employment and social service provision meant that working conditions in the institutions differed from ordinary workplaces, while charitable donations subsidized running costs. This divergence from the usual dynamics of market competition laid the institutions open to complaint and attack from organized labour as well as employers and competing sellers.[54] As the match factory was designed to set an example to the wider industry, however, it had to be run as a regular commercial venture rather than a charitable institution.

While the match factory's defined aim was to benefit match workers and improve the match industry, the Salvation Army's other trading activities existed to support the organization itself. This had a significant impact on how their products were promoted, and to whom. Its press gave the Salvation Army a direct line of communication to persuade its loyal following to express their allegiance through branded alternatives to household items. The wider social cause of the match factory required public support well beyond the Salvationist core, but in fact missed both target audiences. While wealthier, non-Salvationist consumers seem to have been largely beyond the influence of the Salvation Army press, the Lights in Darkest England campaign also failed to reckon with the specific requirements of the lower-income supporters of the Salvation Army who made the Trade Department such a success.

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[54] For further details of claims of sweating, underselling, and trucking in Salvation Army institutions, see for instance Bailey, *Order and Disorder*, p. 86. For a response from the Salvation Army to one such charge, see the pamphlet *A Calumny Exposed: Reply to the Unfounded Charges of Sweating Brought against the Hanbury Street Labour Home* (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1909).