

Her Life in Letters

A SOLDIER OF UNCOMMON VALOR

by Karen Young

Judges 6:12 says that the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon with these words: “The Lord is with thee thou mighty man of valour (KJV).” Later commentators would suggest that Gideon was a man with a brave and active spirit, who lived in obscurity in his times. But, he was stirred up to undertake something great.

In Mabel Vivian Broome, we seem to have a “Gideon.” Little is known about her life other than what’s revealed in a few letters, photos and a service record. But, from these—and the historical events of her time—we can glean something of the life of this soldier of uncommon valor.

WAR WORLD I

In the early 1900s, a young woman drawn by the fervor of preaching and the relentless social outreach of a small gathering of Salvationist, responded to the call to become an officer in the Army of the Lord. Mabel Broome soldiered in the Chicago #3 Corps and tested the waters of service there as an assistant or “supply.” On January 29, 1915, she entered training college for an intensive six months where she would prepare to preach the gospel, meet the needs of the poor, and give guidance to troubled girls and homeless children. She was to become a Salvation Army officer on July 20, 1915.

What might life have been like for this young, single African American woman? The times give us some clues to the hurdles she might have faced.

Mabel Broome began serving in the Army just as the Great War — World War I — was beginning to gain momentum. The Salvation Army’s presence of care and comfort was already being felt in the battle fronts of France where “lassies” served coffee and donuts while bringing cheer to the soldiers there. In the United States, one of the most controversial films to this date, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), was gaining a wide viewing audience — a film where blacks were being reduced to caricatures that drew alliances with their slave masters against their liberators. And in response, the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan swelled.

THE “SLUMMERS”

Appointments for this young officer included the Austin Corps (now Oakbrook Terrace); Chicago #1 (now Chicago Temple); the Des Moines Rescue Home—a home for “troubled girls”; and the Glen Ellyn farm which served as a Children’s facility. (The Farm also housed the Officers’ Home of Rest and was known as a place of retreat—of inspiration and recreation.) But, perhaps the most challenging of the appointments for Mabel Broome would have been to the Chicago #2 Slums.

SLUM CORPS

Chicago #2 Slums was a center of diverse activity. Young officers who were appointed there had the responsibility of corps programs, as well as community outreach.

The slum corps were formed to sustain the work that had begun with those who were converted through the Army's ministry there. Allan Whitworth Bosch in his dissertation entitled The Salvation Army in Chicago: 1885-1914, provides an amazing and vivid account of the Army's "Slum" work.

The Slum Work involved house-to-house visitation where the officers shared the gospel, a hymn and a prayer. But, that was just the beginning of their service. Those involved in slum work found themselves involved in all kinds of physical labor from scrubbing floors and cleaning rooms, to helping mothers care for babies or helping the sick or those who couldn't care for themselves. They mended clothes and sought donations of food and clothing for the many needy families to whom they ministered.

Because of their involvement in daily manual labor, the 'slummers' or 'Slum Sisters' as they were sometimes called, were given a concession: They did not have to wear the uniform. This concession was made in part because of the "dirty work" they engaged in, but also because of the hostility towards the Army or any group that spoke about God and Christianity, in general.

In addition to these acts of mercy, the young officers had the full responsibility of corps programs—nightly services, frequent open airs, visits to brothels and saloons to share the gospel and to sell *The War Cry*. In almost every instance, the workers could expect to meet a disruptive and unresponsive crowd. Such a life required perseverance, faith and a tremendous amount of energy. It was in this kind of environment that Mabel Broome served.

In 1918, she resigned as an officer. Little information is given as to the reason, but the records state that she had been in "delicate health for most of her career." However, after a time, she returned to the work, and accepted a reassignment in the Eastern Territory where she served at the Boston Rescue Home. There she served until her death.

Mabel Vivian Broome was promoted to glory on October 6, 1930 and was buried in the Glen Oak Cemetery. She was thought to have been survived by her mother and sister, Edith.

Little more is known about the specifics of this soldier of uncommon valor's life. But, as a result of the work of young officers like Mabel Vivian Broome, the full scale social service program began to develop for which the Army is known today. END