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*Biography*

# **THE BRICK AND THE BOOK**

**(The Story Of Samuel Logan Brengle)**

By

*Eric Coward*

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without  
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

**Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World**

Wesleyan Heritage Publications

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# THE BRICK AND THE BOOK

(The Story of Samuel Logan Brengle)

By Eric Coward

Published as a "Liberty" booklet 1948

Second Impression 1954

First published in this series 1960

Made and printed in Great Britain  
by The Campfield Press. St. Albans

Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, Ltd.,  
Judd St., King's Cross, London, W.C. 1

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Crumpled up against the doorway lay a uniformed man, his head covered with blood. Nearby lay a brick, which had been hurled at him from not more than ten feet away. The force of the impact had smashed the man's head against the doorpost; it was a wonder he was not killed.

The man who threw the brick has long been forgotten. The man whose life it nearly ended -- for many months he was unable to resume his work -- became known and loved by multitudes in many lands. For that brick started to pave, for the victim of the assault, a new path.

For over a hundred years before his birth, the Brengles had been treading new paths, breaking virgin soil in the wildernesses of Maryland and Kentucky. Preparing a clearing, they built their log hut and cultivated the land -- rifle near at hand while they kept a look-out for redskins. Bears and wolves also had to be warded off, and malaria to be contended with.

Sam Brengle's father, more studiously inclined, became a teacher and moved to Indiana, where he took charge of a village school built of logs. By and by he fell in love with one of his older pupils, daughter of devout folk who had trekked from the Carolinas. The wedding was a great event in the little community.

It was in the white cottage next to the small school that William and Rebecca Brengle welcomed their first-born, Samuel Logan, on June 1, 1860.

The boy was two years old when his father left to fight in the civil war -- and to return as an invalid who survived only a few months. Sam's mother had taken over the school, and the little boy gladly did the "man's" chores about the house; cleaning the fireplace, filling the wood-box, fetching water from the well, and anything else his mother needed. After two or three years she married again: a doctor, though that meant only a precarious living. "Over a ways in Indiana," he declared, they would manage better, so with his own boy and girl, and Sam and his mother, he moved to a site just on two miles away. Not for long, however; a further move was made, and yet another. That was the doctor's way.

Interesting enough for a boy of eight. Beds, chairs, table roped inside the prairie wagon: pots and pans, axes and other utensils jangling outside ... Sam followed his stepfather as he led the horses through the forest, along the faint trail hemmed in by thick bush. At night the horses were unhitched, beds and supper things unpacked while the boys gathered firewood. The shadows lengthened, the stars began to appear, and by the light of the campfire Sam's mother read a chapter from the Bible.

School, in those parts, was held only in the winter months, and Sam had to trudge there with snow up to his knees. In spring and summer everyone had to work on the land. Sam grew up familiar with nature and with wild and domestic animals. When his bare feet felt the frost too keenly, he would often rouse the family cow from her chewing and stand for a while on the ground warmed by her body.

In games he excelled. So strong was he that he preferred to take on, in a fight, two boys at a time; he had a way of making them knock each other down and then sitting on both!

He learned to plow, and to wield an ax; but also, though books were rare, he grew to know and love them -- just the small variety, the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, Ivanhoe and Pickwick Papers, Josephus and Plutarch's Lives, and stories of wars and other fights. Words thrilled him; the dictionary was to him a source of joy. At nights, in bed, he would ponder on the beauty and the meaning of many words, short ones and very long ones.

At chapel, the preaching fascinated him. He loved all oratory -- the linking of words to beautiful, impressive sentences. But he also saw that the sermon meant something for him. He had a fierce temper. His mind, too, had been soiled by stories others had told him. He wanted to be pure and noble. He realized, one day, as he saw the preacher's face shine with glory, that there was a perfection far nobler than that of diction, gesture and exposition.

He had seen village folk marvelously changed by believing in what the preacher proclaimed, and he saw that there was a power to overcome evil which he, though only twelve, sorely needed. He accepted the invitation to kneel at the "mourners' bench". He knelt there on five successive nights, but nothing seemed to "happen". He even fell asleep as he knelt, wearied with waiting for the expected thrill.

But the fifth night -- Christmas-eve -- his mother prayed with him. Having made a public confession of his need, he must now trust God, she told him. Even then, it was only some weeks later that the assurance gripped him that he was a follower of Christ, and his soul was filled with deep joy.

He plunged into chapel activities, and studied the Bible. The teacher in him led him into Sunday-school work. This, coupled with his enthusiasm for good literature and his interest in words -- handling them effectively and creating rhythmic sentences, till language became an art -- fostered in him a desire to go to high school. Financial difficulties were overcome, and Sam made excellent progress. But amid his studies came the summons to his mother's death bed; and her spirit had fled before he could reach home. It was years before he lost the sense of loneliness, of "not belonging", which swept over him.

Sale of the farm, which had been left to him, made possible his entering a university, in 1877. He remained a faithful church-goer and took charge of a Sunday-school, which he made into one of the largest, and spiritually most effective, in the Methodist Church. His main interest, however, centered in studies that would perfect the orator in him. For hours, too, he would sit at a piano or organ, following the notes of the scale with a voice which became ever richer and more flexible. The law, then politics, seemed to be fields wide open to one who had mastered the arts of public speech. Wealth, fame, position and power beckoned this youth.

Alongside of these ambitions, there was a keen sense of humor, which expressed itself in many a practical joke, but also a certain pride and even arrogance.

Yet religion remained the predominant power in Sam Brengle's life. On the day of his greatest oratorical triumph, on behalf of the university he represented, he decided that he would be a preacher. True, visions of being a great preacher, even a bishop, possessed him at times, but preaching was to be his vocation.

Narrowly missing a desirable little city church for his first appointment, to his surprise the Rev. Samuel Brengle found himself in 1884, in a small rural community. However, facing wind and weather, at times a blizzard sweeping across the prairie and almost blinding his horse, he threw himself into the task of reviving the churches of this Indiana circuit. His very first sermon, preached in a village with fewer than four hundred inhabitants, resulted in the conversion of a high school principal and a post office clerk; the principal later became a missionary in India. Within less than a year the church membership of the circuit had been more than doubled. On sleighs or in farm wagons, whole families would come to his meetings, unloading their sleeping children, who were laid in the church.

Generous advances from two friends enabled him to take up further studies at Boston Theological Seminary, though, as his ambitions grew, dissatisfaction with his personal spiritual experience increased. It became more clearly apparent to him that his dreams of greatness were holding back the power of God from fully operating in his life. The eloquent preacher had to come to the place where he was willing to stammer and stutter so long as, to God's sole glory, he might win men and women for Him.

Among the books that had specially helped Brengle in his search for the experience of holiness, of spiritual wholeness, were at least two by a great woman preacher in England. Of Catherine Booth, wife of William Booth, this young American preacher said, indeed: "Her sword is the sharpest I have ever known any preacher to wield."

The Salvation Army, founded by the Booths in London, had only recently reached Boston. Brengle, having heard something of this peculiar movement, attended several meetings. Somewhat surprisingly, the officer, blowing a trumpet and then "preaching sermons with bite and fire in them," impressed him. In comparison, he found theological students "soft and easy, anemic." He admired the Salvationists' virility, and also their sacrificial spirit.

And then he met a woman-Salvationist -- a daughter of a banker and lawyer; slender, delicate, cultured. Her preaching searched men's consciences as fire. With Elizabeth Swift he fell in love at once. She shared his deeper spiritual experience, his recent whole-hearted consecration to God; and through her he learned much of The Salvation Army, which she had seen in Britain. A visit to Boston of General Booth only confirmed Brengle's conviction that his place would be with the Salvationists.

The charge of one of the finest churches in the State, erected by a millionaire who wanted him to be the pastor, was offered to him at this time. There was some hesitation -- consideration -- then decision to become a Salvationist. In May, 1887, Samuel Brengle left New York to enter the Army's training college in London -- Two days after his marriage, in the library of her father's home, to Elizabeth Swift.

General Booth, confronting the young American at the London Headquarters, was reluctant to accept him. "You've been your own boss so long. We're an Army, and demand obedience!"

In those days both the General and his Chief of Staff, Bramwell Booth, regarded men of Brengle's background as of "the dangerous classes" and therefore gave him little encouragement.

But Brengle had not come by his own will: it was God who had led him hither. So William Booth relented. Readily the candidate for officership acquired a Salvation Army uniform (yet wore it at first with some misgiving) and presented himself for training at the Leamington Depot. A sharp and unexpected temptation assailed him with the first duty assigned him; for instead of an opportunity to test himself in some unaccustomed soul-saving activity, he was sent down to the cellar to clean the boots of his fellow cadets.

Brengle needed not to learn a lesson in humility; but this task seemed a waste of time and of his God-given talents. In his disappointment he prayed. In answer he saw a picture of Jesus bending over the feet of rough and uneducated fishermen. "Lord," he whispered, "Thou didst wash their feet; I will black their boots!" Then he tackled the job with a song.

Selling The War Cry, visiting folk in their homes, preaching in Army halls or in the open air, alternated -- as with other cadets -- with the scrubbing of floors, cleaning windows, washing dishes and cooking meals.

Back in America, Captain Brengle, with his wife, was appointed to the charge of a corps with twenty soldiers which before long became a very live center of evangelism. Two other commands followed, while also Brengle's preaching and personal concern led to a notable deepening of the Salvationists' spiritual experience. At the second place his assistant was lame, while his active "fighting force" consisted of [but two other humble individuals -- DVM]. Marching with them past an imposing church -- of which he might have been the pastor -- was a test to his faith, but gaily he continued their song: "We're the Army that shall conquer."

Brengle's fourth appointment was to Boston. He knew the place from previous visits. The hall was in a noisy side street, opposite one of the city's most disreputable saloons. He remembered the scanty, rickety furnishings of the officers' quarters -- a tiny place above the hall. He had sometimes

wondered how civilized folk could live in such a place. Now -- Was he to take his refined, frail wife there, with a baby four weeks old? Was he to march the streets, to have former acquaintances -- students, professors, ministers -- look at him and his people condescendingly, or even contemptuously?

The Brengles went. They had many "drunks" in the hall, every night; often with riotous scenes. They had to battle for the right to preach in the streets. But much was accomplished for the cause of Christ.

And then one night a "tough", whose unseemly behavior had led to his being gently but firmly ejected from the Army hall, flung the brick that nearly ended Brengle's life.

During the long months of his convalescence, when incapable of rendering public service, Brengle began to write for the Army's periodicals. Simple articles on the life of whole-hearted devotion to God, kept pure and worthy by the grace of His Spirit, they made a deep impression. There was a demand for more permanent publication, and the result was the book: "Helps to Holiness".

In the more than fifty years since that little volume was published, it has been translated into many languages, including Czech and Finnish, Korean, Japanese and Chinese. Considerably over half a million copies have been sold. Its spiritual influence has been immense.

In America, in Japan, in Australia -- where the Archbishop of Melbourne distributed many copies -- in Britain and in many other lands it has yielded a remarkable harvest for Christ's cause. Four brothers, as a result of reading it, were converted, three becoming clergymen. An Anglican dignitary, whose life Brengle's book had transformed, during an evangelistic mission in Belfast, gave copies of it to a group of young Irishmen: with the result that eight of them volunteered for "the hardest mission field in the world". They were sent, in due course, to Egypt, where the eight became eighty.

A few years after the publication of this book, having meanwhile occupied several administrative posts, Samuel Brengle was appointed traveling evangelist -- spiritual Special is the Salvationist term -- for the whole of the United States of America. For thirty years that was to be his grand ministry, including some six or seven years when this task took him to other lands -- to Britain, France, the Scandinavian countries and Finland, to Holland and Switzerland, to Australia and New Zealand and Hawaii.

In ten thousands of hearts during those three decades, all over the world, a new vision of God was created, a new spiritual power born, as a result of Brengle's plain, penetrating teaching and preaching. His name came to stand for something unique in the globe-encircling Army. His voice, and the growing number of his books, brought to hungry and to half-indifferent souls the satisfying truth of God.

The far-famed holiness preacher liked to recall the saying that "next to virtue the fun in the world is what we can least spare"; and Archbishop Whately's remark that "we ought to cultivate not only the cornfield of the mind but the pleasure grounds also." With a chuckle he recalled his courting days, when Elizabeth Swift's sister had been biased against him because she knew of him only as a

holiness preacher -- till, after having met him, she rushed to Elizabeth, exclaiming: "It's all right! He has a twinkle in his eye. He'll do!"

Many simple folk, as well as not a few who have risen to positions of great influence, gratefully recall the slim, bearded man, with the gentle, friendly eyes, and love written all across his face.

In the days before his auburn beard turned white, Brengle was once traveling with a group of ministers, to whom he held forth on the value of diet. His own, he told them, consisted largely of shredded wheat, to which the Presbyterian Moderator quickly retorted: "It looks like it! We see it emerging all over your face!" None enjoyed the joke more than Brengle himself.

Young people and children quickly fell for him, for the nobility of his life never excluded a keen appreciation of humor. One of the things that endeared Brengle to multitudes, not least also those outside The Salvation Army, was the manner in which his lofty teaching was linked with the problems of workaday, possibly humdrum, lives. Forsaking the carefully cultivated oratory of early days, he expressed God's revelations in simplest terms. His listeners and readers never thought of a theological college when they came across such a passage as, for instance:

"It is not necessary to blot the sun out of the heavens to keep the sunlight out of your house; just close the blinds and draw the curtains.

"Nor do you pour barrels of water on the flame to quench the fire -- just shut off the draught.

"You do not dynamite the city reservoir and destroy the mains and pipes to cut off your supply of sparkling water -- but just refrain from turning on the main.

"So you do not need to do some great evil, some deadly sin, to quench the Spirit."

Or this delightful description of his visit to a sugar mill in Honolulu:

"There were acres of bewildering machinery working in every direction. There were great iron fingers that grasped the canes, lifting them from the plantation ears and dropping them on to an endless belt which carried them into the merciless grip of great steel rollers, which crushed all the sweet juice from the cane and poured its flood into boiling vats. There were fiery furnaces, hissing steam, cogs and wheels, belts and lifts and plunging chutes defying description -- but all working to turn out a hundred pounds of sugar every thirty seconds, so that little boys and girls in New York and London might have lollipops."

After which he tells how in the bewildering maze of life, with all its great upheavals, God can make things work to our ultimate good.

Often he is epigrammatic, with terse, pithy sentences. "Formalism will leave your house cold and freezing. Fanaticism will burn your house down." Or: "Let your love and your light keep pace."

One of his earliest interests had been words, and words had become tools with which he expressed very effectively what God would do for mankind, and particularly what He had done for himself. The glory of God breathed from his books, as it did from his addresses.

Uncompromising though he was in uncovering sin and declaring God's purpose, Brengle was noted for a tolerance which surprised some folk. He had little patience with folk extremely dogmatic -- "bulldogmatic", as he used to call it.

"Where in hell can we get a hammer?" once exclaimed an impatient furniture packer. To which Brengle quickly replied: "Well, you don't need to go to hell for it. We've got one right here." The effect on the man was better than a blunt reproof would have produced.

At the height of his fame he remained humble, unassuming, most approachable. One of his diary entries emphasizes that it was God who was using him. "The ax cannot boast of trees it has cut down. It could do nothing without the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, he used it, and the moment he throws it aside it becomes only old iron."

Large crowds would generally gather to hear this winsome, convincing preacher; and to large crowds he liked to speak of the power of Christ. But he never despised the small group. He saw in each person a "brother for whom Christ died". When, owing to heavy rain, only nine persons came to an afternoon meeting in one of his campaigns, he argued that they had taken the trouble to come at some inconvenience, and he would give them his very best.

"I generally draw the line at two!" he said with a chuckle, when asked what was the smallest number to whom he would speak; adding: "But -- Have you fewer than that?"

Fewer than that? Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, Zaccheus and others had been in his mind often as, in his incessant travels, he encountered various folk. Like his Master, Brengle had the art of making spiritual contact with unlikely people and in strange places. When, for instance, he shared a sleeper coach on a trans-American railway journey with a troupe of theatrical people, the pretty, painted young women seemed pathetic to the Salvationist listening to their idle chatter.

One sat on the arm of a chair in his berth, whilst the porters made up the berths for the night. A chance remark from him about the desert through which the train was passing led to the girl's telling of long hours of arduous rehearsals or spent in traveling, leaving but few for rest. Restlessness had so grown upon her that she now found it impossible to settle down.

Brengle, having sailed around the disappointed, world-weary girl, had found a landing-place. Quietly and kindly he sympathized. Years ago, he said Augustine had written, 'Thou, O God, hast made us for Thyself, and we are restless till we rest in Thee.' Then he told her of his own life, and of the restful fellowship with God he had come to know. With an eager, warm clasp of hands and earnest words of gratitude the actress slipped away.

To a liftman [elevator operator] he might say: "Your life is full of ups and downs, isn't it? Well, be sure that your last trip is up, won't you?" Which reminds one of an "elevator boy", Bible in hand,



whom Brengle met in the Southern States. He gave him a passage to read and to report on by the evening.

"Ain't he a fine gen-ulmun?" the boy asked one of his "customers" later in the day. "Why ... he even offered to run my elevator for me while I read!"

Liftman and dancing girl, college professor, Pullman porter, Salvationist comrade -- all testify to his gracious manner in imparting spiritual counsel. He never "laid down the law." Perhaps he recollected the revolution in the class-room of his boyhood days, when schools were run chiefly by teachers who believed in "No lickin', no larnin'". A new teacher declared that he would not make rules, but would expect order and quietness so that work could be well done. "Let us be kind to one another," he said, "and we shall have a happy time together." Mrs. Brengle, when her boy told her, had said, "You see, Sammy, that's the difference between Law and Grace."

The extraordinary success of his ministry in many lands he attributed in no small measure to the constant earnest prayer of the little woman from whom his task separated him for such long periods and by such great distances.

"The fondest lover in America," he described himself, and their voluminous correspondence remained, to the end, love letters. But above their passionate affection both placed their love to God, and so the wife who saw her husband depart for England a few days after their wedding -- in response to God's call was one with him in a surrender of their personal preference for the sake of His Kingdom.

"You are my ten talents," she once told him, remembering one of the parables of Jesus and expressing her willingness to put out to usury her most precious possession for their Master.

Nor did their son and daughter suffer unduly for their father's frequent absences. His love ever surrounded them, and his letters became increasingly valued. Neither, in their service for God, became a Salvationist; but grown up and established as a lawyer, George wrote to General Bramwell Booth:

"I have come to understand, from watching father, the spirit of the Army ... I trust that it may be given to me to catch some of his spirit. It is a great thing to have a father who is one's ideal of a man."

Every detail of his personal life he subjected to the searching light of the Holy Spirit. In his youth he formed the habit of giving a tenth of his income to God, even when he was struggling to pay off his debts. Many years later, when in Florida during that State's real estate boom and men were buying property and selling it for double the price within a few days, he resisted inducements to invest his meager savings, finding timely warning in his private Bible reading.

The rumor of a legacy coming their way threatened a spiritual crisis for Samuel and Elizabeth Brengle, so wary were they of the complacency and self-sufficiency that riches might bring. However, the expected bequest did not materialize and their peace of mind was restored.

Bregle might be said to have had more than his share of suffering. Rheumatic fever, whilst in Denmark; many illnesses brought on by exposure or exhaustion; three major and various minor operations; ailments, necessitating continual treatment and rigid diet; at the age of sixty-four a near-fatal motor accident -- out of such experiences he forged a philosophy, or rather an understanding of God's purposes, which strengthened him for the cure of souls exercised almost as much by correspondence and in private interviews as through public meetings.

"I shall never forget hearing him talk to God there under the car," said one involved with him in the accident. "There was no fear or doubt in the manner he used in addressing Him." This while Bregle lay badly injured under the car, oil from the engine pouring into his eye and ear and soaking him to the skin.

"If I am undergoing tribulation ... I must get close up to God," he declared; "and say: 'Lord, this hurts. But I know it's for my good. Help me to learn Thy lesson!' "

In 1915 he was unexpectedly appointed principal of the Army's New York training college. Much as he would miss his greater ministry, now he would be able to enjoy home life. But in the very induction ceremony he was stricken with pain, which led to several operations and nearly ended his life. And just then his wife suffered a breakdown which, in fact, resulted in her death. Only with difficulty was he able to rise from his bed to be with her before she entered the better world. To her he had dictated, many years before, during one of his most serious illnesses:

"I think there is a noble ... majesty in pain. It is pleasure strung to concert pitch. A great musician can discover harmonies where an ordinary fellow would hear only discords; and I seem to sense that there is, somehow or somewhere, to be discovered a great harmony in pain."

In the last of the Commissioner's six books, "Ancient Prophets," published three years before he relinquished his final appointment, he had written a chapter expressing his thought about this "abyss of retirement". He believed this would give him more time for counseling and letter-writing. Indeed, he was to prove that it did, until failing sight restricted the latter activity, when he courageously and philosophically prepared himself for the "abyss of physical darkness". His mind and spirit alert in spite of increasing frailty, his memory well stocked with strengthening verses of Scripture, he serenely came to the end of his earthly pilgrimage on May 20, 1936.

Bregle's name has become something of a legend with Salvationists everywhere. Even those too young to have known him can hardly ponder on the question of the necessity and privilege of a holy life without remembering the name of the man who translated the teaching into such simple terms. In his books the lawyer still patiently explains; the teacher is ever with his beloved "little people"; the preacher invites and pleads, his words made weightier by the care with which they have been chosen. Above all these shines out the fervor of the prophet and the virtue of the saint.

That influence has spread even to countries where the Army's evangelical operations have never functioned. Visiting his native Greece after thirty-four years' absence, a South American officer was surprised to find that there were a number of people who knew about the Organization, for he himself had first met it in the land of his adoption.

At one of the evangelical churches at which he was invited to speak the minister told him that it was through reading Commissioner Brengle's "Way of Holiness" that he was called to be an evangelist. The officer was delighted to see Greek translations of the Commissioner's books on sale at the church.

Another pastor told the officer: "If ever The Salvation Army commenced operations here I would send my children to enlist in it. I have read all Brengle's books and know what the Movement stands for." In Salonika the officer lectured for several nights on the Army's work. One of his listeners greeted him in English, saying: "Hallelujah! I enjoy full salvation. I have read all Brengle's books."

Commissioner Brengle needs no memorial whilst we have his books. Nevertheless, in his own land his name is perpetuated in the Brengle Institute, which ensures that officers who have platform ability or a gift for teaching doctrine are given the benefit of a ten-day course of prayer, study and discussion on the subject of holy living. Selected from among the younger officers of the four territories of the United States of America, they meet in the School for Officers' Training at Chicago during the summer recess. Their textbooks are the Bible, the Army's Handbook of Doctrine and the books of Brengle.

Although he is best remembered because of these books, the path of the writer was a new trail for him, entered when a vicious attack had disabled him for months. As he emerged from convalescence, eighteen months later, he found his wife painting on that brick the words of Old Testament Joseph, spoken to his brothers:

"As for you, ye meant it for evil; but God meant it for good, to keep much people alive."

In the strategy of God, the brick that might have meant death for one, led to the production of a book -- of books -- still bringing life to thousands.