



The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

CHAPTER 8: The Quantity of Our Work

My DEAR COMRADES,

Having dealt with the question of the quality of our Work, let me now proceed to consider the question of the quantity. Is the amount of Work a man does a matter of choice with him? Or if he can manage to get along without any Work at all, is he at liberty to do so?

To this question I reply that, in my judgment, a man ought not only to earnestly strive to do good Work, but to definitely seek to do as much of it as he possibly can. A notion very generally prevails that, instead of doing all the Work of which you are capable, you should do as little as possible, and certainly no more than you are paid for. This, I admit, will be the wisest course to take, if you have Work to do which is injurious to your fellow-creatures. In that case, as I have said before, I say again – that, whether you get paid for it or not, you had better not do it at all. But, if you can do anything that will be of any service to the people round about you, I recommend that you get at it, by all means, and do as much of it as possible, irrespective of the benefits you may reap from it, or indeed, whether you reap any benefit or not.

For instance, take the crowd of able-bodied men that you can see every day hanging about the public-houses, or at the corners of the streets, for hours together, with their hands in their pockets, waiting for a gossip, or a drink, or a job, which the Devil, as is his custom with idle hands, will not be slow to furnish. Would it not be better for them to be helping their wives with the washing, or lending a hand at cleaning up the house, or digging in somebody's garden, or mending the roads, or doing anything else from the bare love of doing Work, that would be beneficial to their fellow-men? I think it would – nay, I am sure of it.

At a Railway Junction where I had to wait the other day, for a train, I saw about twenty navies sitting or standing alongside the line, some of them smoking, but otherwise doing nothing. It was a very cold, raw morning, with an East wind blowing up the gully in which the station stood, that seemed to pierce your very bones. For a time I could

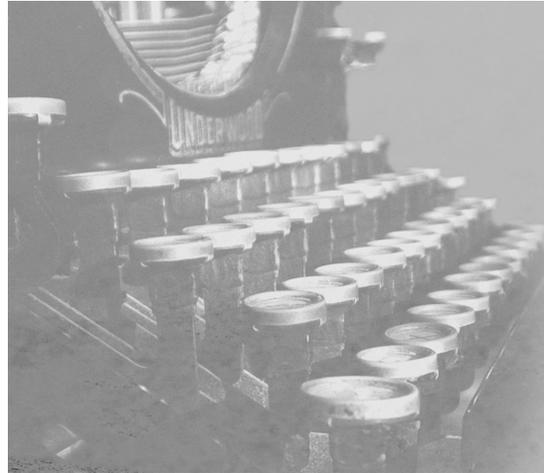


not understand why these men should be shivering alongside their work, without striking a stroke, while I could, see, with half an eye, that if they had been picking and shoveling, they would have been warm, and comfortable, while the Work would have gone forward, into the bargain. A little reflection, however, showed me that it was the breakfast hour, and that, having concluded their meal, they were simply waiting for the allotted time to elapse before they started afresh.

This method of doing things appeared to me to be wrong, both in principle and practice – anyway, wrong for a Salvationist, who looks at his life from the standpoint of the Bible, which teaches him the duty of doing as much good Work for his fellow-men as possible. Instead of standing there, shivering, waiting for the clock to strike, it would, I imagine, have been better for these navies to have resumed their task, as soon after the meal was concluded as they reasonably could, and I see several advantages that would have resulted from their doing so.

As these men and their Work are only typical of other men and their Work, I will mention some of these advantages.

1. They would have been more comfortable at Work than they were standing idle.
2. The improvement they were effecting on the Railway, whatever that might be, would have been forwarded.
3. Their employers would have been pleased with the disinterested manner in which they pushed their business forward, and would have been likely to have given them some extra payment.
4. They would have shown a good example of industry to all about them.
5. They would have done this, had they been working for themselves. For instance, if they had been cleaning or mending their own houses, or digging in their own gardens, they would have wanted to do all the Work they possibly could. But as the benefit of their labour was for other people, they did as little as they could do. This looked very much like selfishness.



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6. They would have allowed no reasonable thing to prevent them going on with their task if they had been doing it for their Heavenly Master, and had been influenced by the desire to please Him.

In describing the illness of her husband the other day, and her own part in nursing him, a woman informed me that she had not had her clothes off, for her ordinary rest, for seventeen days and nights. She did not complain of this hardship; on the contrary, she was pleased at having been favoured with an opportunity of proving her love for her partner. Her affection was the mainspring of her sacrifice. Now, love for his earthly master and his Heavenly Lord should be the ruling principle with every Salvationist in his daily toil; and when this is the case, his strength and the claims of other duties will alone limit the amount of work he will do.