

The
William Booth
Collection

LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

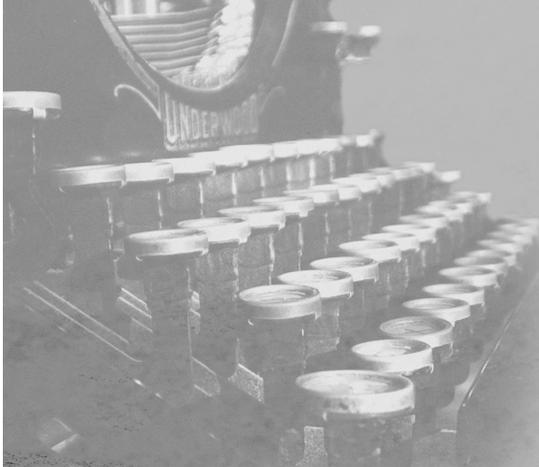
CHAPTER 20: Poverty

My DEAR COMRADES,

Many of God's people are poor. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" For a long time in the early history of the Church, poverty was, with few exceptions, a necessity. The man who embraced Christ had to leave his houses and his lands. Every door of business was closed to him, no one would employ him, buy of him, or sell to him. His own family rose up against him and cast him out. Unless he was seized and made a slave, the wilderness became his dwelling-place and the caves of the earth his home. It is true, that there were exceptions to this state of things, but they were not very numerous.

Poverty is the lot of the majority of Christ's followers to-day. Few who are not poor will comply with the terms of Salvation. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." It is still true, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" They are called, but they will not come, and even when those who might gain riches have entered the Kingdom, the opportunities for money-making are often closed to them, on account of their conscientious scruples and their high standard of right and wrong. However, they prefer poverty, with a good conscience, to wealth without it.

Now, while there is no doubt that extreme poverty is an evil, and is one of the results of "the thorns and thistles" that followed the first transgression of our first parents, it is also evident that to be poor, when there is not actual want of the necessities of life, is not an unmixed evil. On the contrary, it has many advantages, both for this life and the life that is to come. I am quite sure, from my own observation, that, as a whole, the poor, in the sense in which we usually use the word, are, as a rule, more content, are more usefully occupied, enjoy better health, are less burdened by anxiety, and, in fact, are happier than the well-to-do classes. And, when I come to consider the advantages enjoyed by the poor, in regard to things of God, it is manifest that poverty has some great compensations.



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1. A poor man is more likely to be saved than a rich man. That is, he will be more ready to hearken to the call to repentance. Being more loosely bound to the world, it will be easier for him to break away from it and fall in with God's offers of mercy. On the other hand, the rich man will be much better satisfied with his present condition and disinclined to leave it. He will be so comfortable, that he will not care about a change; and heavier sacrifices being demanded, in his case, than in that of a poor man, he will be far more unwilling to make the surrender.
2. The pride of a rich man will make it more difficult for him to face the scorn that comes upon the followers of Jesus Christ. The Cross, which the poor have to carry in making an open confession of Salvation, is heavy enough; but, in the case of the proud and well-to-do person, that Cross will be heavier still.
3. Poverty is favourable to Holy Living. The same things which operate in the favour of a poor man commencing a truly religious life, operate in favour of his persevering and attaining eminence in it.
4. Poverty is conducive to a life of usefulness, The greatest of the world's benefactors have been poor. Moses came of a family of bondsmen, and when God called him to deliver Israel, he was working as a shepherd in the land of Midian. The great Prophets of God to His ancient people were nearly all poor. David began life as a keeper of sheep. Elijah and Elisha were in a position answering very nearly to that of our Captains, without any Divisional Officer to fall hack upon when driven into a corner! Nehemiah, Daniel, and the three Hebrew Children were slaves. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and the other Prophets were all poor men, and the children of poor men. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, grew up in a cottage home, at Nazareth, and was a working man. The Apostles and Disciples who established the first Communities of Christ's people, and who shook the world, mostly came from the ranks of the poor, as also did the great bulk of the Fathers of the Early Church.

The Salvationists, with very few exceptions, have been poor people, poor not only as to money and houses and lands, but destitute also of the learning of the schools, and ignorant of the worldly wisdom of the colleges. And yet, they have done more to revolutionise the religion of the Nineteenth Century than any other people who have

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operated in the world during that time, and have been the means, also, of rescuing and saving multitudes of the most hopeless classes of society.

5. Poverty demands and encourages energy.

Luxury and ease weaken and destroy these traits of character which make brave men and women. "Necessity is the mother of invention;" hardship is the friend-of activity, of push and go, in the affairs of men.

6. Poverty is favourable to that sympathy and compassion which helps to make successful soul-winners – nay, without which, successful soul-winners cannot be made. Now, let me give a few counsels to the children of God who are called to occupy a humble position in this life.

1. Those Salvationists who are poor, should praise God for that measure of the good things of this world they do possess. Look around you, my Comrades, and you will find large numbers of people who are, so far as this world goes, much less favourably circumstanced than yourselves.

2. Remember, there is nothing in your poverty to shut you out from "the peace that passeth all understanding," and "the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." Some of the brightest and most triumphant Saints have been amongst the poorest of the poor.

3. If an opportunity of improving your circumstances presents itself, and, after prayer and reflection, you believe the position offered, will be in harmony with righteousness, the promotion of the glory of God in you and your family, and the good of The Army, you are at liberty to embrace it. There is no sin in the possession of wealth! It is the use which you make of it, which is the all-important matter.

4. If God prospers you, do not forget His goodness, grow proud, and cease to be the same humble, devoted, self-sacrificing Salvationist that you were in the days of your hardship and poverty. Let all you have be His.



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5. Whatever your lot may be, do not worry. Have faith in God!