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LETTERS TO SALVATIONISTS

CHAPTER 11: The Duty of Masters to Servants

My DEAR COMRADES,

We have described something of the Duty a servant owes to his master, which is to labour to promote his interests, as far as he can do so consistently with a good conscience. We have shown also, that the servant is to do his Work, not only for the benefit of his master, but for the love of it, for the esteem of his fellow-man, and for the satisfaction of his Father in Heaven.

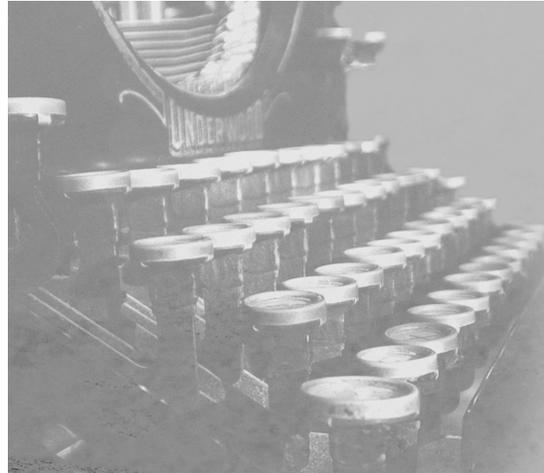
Now, I have no doubt that many masters and mistresses will agree with the wisdom and desirability of such conduct on the part of the servants. They will say, "That is just what we want our servants to do. That will be good for us, and it will be good for them. Let every servant do his Duty."

I come now to say, and that as plainly as I possibly can, that it is the Duty of the master to deal with his servants on the same principles, and from the same motives, that he expects his servants to deal with him – that is, he must promote the welfare of his servants to the utmost of his ability.

The servants are placed under his charge, by God, for this very purpose, and he is under an obligation to make them, as far as he can, happy, holy, and useful. And that obligation is, to a certain extent, as binding upon him as if the servants were his own children. For if masters and mistresses are not the parents of their servants, they are at least their guardians, and will have to give an account to God of the way in which they discharge their stewardship.

The obligation of the master to seek the interests of the servant, is based upon the same authority as that which binds the servant to seek the interests of his master. He is to do unto others as he would that others should do unto him.

Let us suppose that we have here a master named Brown, who lives in the City of London. He has a son who is the servant of a man named Smith, a Salvationist, who



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resides in the country. Brown loves his son, and, as a father, naturally, desires his welfare. He is, therefore, anxious that Smith, while grinding a reasonable amount of Work out of his boy, should at the same time care for his happiness and welfare. He would like him also to have an eye on his companions, and the way he spends his money and his leisure, At the same time, he thinks it quite reasonable to expect that Smith, being a Salvationist, will also care for the welfare of his soul.

Now, if this is what Brown would desire and expect from Smith, has not Smith an equal right to claim from Brown an equivalent amount of consideration and attention? For instance, is it not quit reasonable that Mr. Smith should say, "Come now, Mr. Brown, I want you, to do for my son, who is in your employ, just precisely the same as I have done for your son, for one good turn, you are aware, deserves another." That is, therefore, an equivalent or an expectation – I contend it is one which all fathers and mothers have a right to hold, respecting the treatment their sons and daughters should receive from their employers. It is an expectation which the servants themselves have a right to entertain: it is a Duty enjoined by the Master Himself.

Here I want to remark that there is nothing menial or degrading in the position of a servant. Neither is there anything in the relation in which a servant stands to a master that signifies the sacrifice, in any degree, of his natural rights. Men need to think and publish abroad, that a slave had no legal claim for anything beyond what his master thought proper to give him, and that seldom extended beyond the supply of the barest necessities of life. To be allowed even to live and toil for the benefit of his master, was by many looked upon as a favour. To treat a slave as a servant, or having a just claim for wages or any worldly comforts, was, with few exceptions, unknown. It is true that slaves were, in some instances, allowed to hire themselves out as servants to other employers, but in such cases, the masters were always careful to appropriate their earnings.

A very similar, although perhaps not quite so selfish and degrading a view of the menial character of Work and of the serfdom of the Worker, appears to occupy the minds of many employers to-day. To get what you can out of your employees, whether men, women, or children, and give them as little as possible in return – nothing, if you can manage it – is not only the mastering idea, but, I am sorry to know,



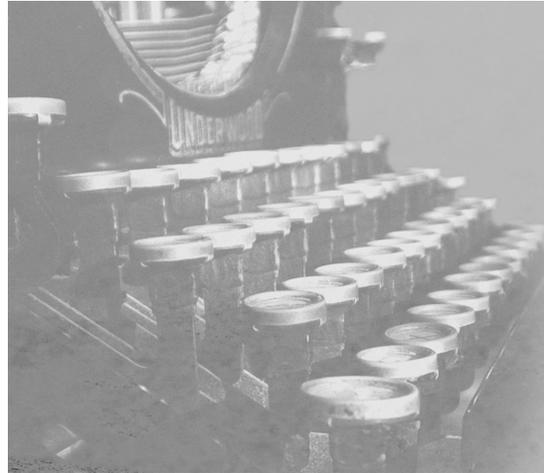
also the mean practice, of many in this generation.

This, I need not say, is as different from the teaching of the Bible – and as opposed to the spirit of our blessed Salvationism – as darkness is from light. My Comrades, you must beware of anything approaching it. "Am I not a man?" in earlier times, the slave might have said to his owner. "Give me my rights!" "Am I not a brother?" the servant can say to his master in our day. "Treat me as such!" And if that master is a Salvationist, I shall expect him to do so, and God will hold him responsible for fulfilling my expectation.

The least a master can do for his servants is to see that, as far as possible, they are supplied with those things which are absolutely necessary for a comfortable existence. In pleading for this I do not, in reality, ask for much more than the humane master was accustomed to give his slaves, or, indeed, for much more than the intelligent farmer gives to his cattle. In the matter of his horses, or his cows, he says, "If I want these cattle to do well for me, I must do well for them. I must give them warm and dry houses to live in. They must have nourishing food, be looked after when they are sick, and not overworked when they are well." That is the way to treat cattle, if you want them to be profitable to you and do well by you.

Now, I suppose that these were the feelings with which the average planter, in the Southern States, regarded his slaves forty years ago; and he would have considered that no man knew how to manage his human chattels profitably then, who did not do for them, at least, all that the farmer feels he ought to do for his cows and hogs to-day. Surely, surely, those employers of labour who would resent the idea of treating their servants with less consideration than the slave-owner did his slaves, will see that they, at least, do as much for them as he did for his human property in the old times!

Perhaps, some employers may say, "We do not take the responsibility of providing sufficient food, lodging, clothes, and other necessaries, for our servants. They are not slaves – they are free. We pay wages, and leave them to provide these things for themselves." But that explanation does not remove the responsibility from the master, for it may be asked, "Are the wages you pay sufficient to enable your employees to obtain these necessaries for themselves?"



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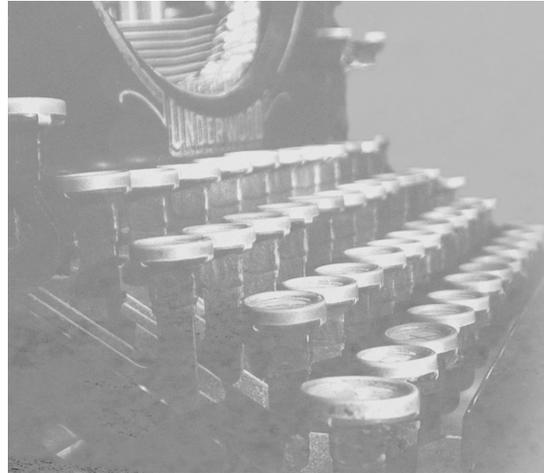
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If Brown stands, in the eyes of God, in the relation of guardian to Smith Junior, does the fact of his paying him wages, wherewith to provide himself with board and lodging in some other house which he hires for the purpose, instead of finding these things for him in his own, relieve Brown from the responsibility of supplying young Smith with sufficient money to obtain the necessaries that he requires? I do not think it does. It seems to me, that to do his duty by young Smith, Brown must, in return for his labour, supply him with substantial food, suitable clothes, and in a decent room to sit and sleep in, or he must give him sufficient money wherewith to purchase these things himself; and there should be a little over for helping his father if he needs it, or to make provision for a home when he gets married.

That is a very low estimate, indeed. If Brown does not do this, then so far as life and health and food are concerned, Smith Junior would have been better off if he had been born forty years ago on a cotton plantation in one of the Slave States in America; and if Brown has the ability to do this and refuses, he cannot claim to be treating his servant in accordance with the law of Christ.

I simply ask that a master, while seeking his own welfare and comfort, shall at the same time, take the welfare and comfort of his servants into consideration, and plan and scheme for their advantage as well as his own.

In conversing with a gentleman some time ago, I remember his saying to me, "When I came to this estate, I found a large portion of it under the cultivation of the plough, but I laid it all down for grazing, with the exception of a few acres. As such, it has given me, infinitely less trouble than it would have done under the old system, and while not requiring more than a third of the number of men to work it, it pays me just as well, if not better, than before." That is to say, with much less anxiety on the landlord's part, the estate yielded him as much profit. But what had become of the men, who for years had earned a livelihood on the land, as their fathers had done before them, he did not say. They had to move off, I suppose, to the city, drifting down probably to the slums, or even lower still. Now this gentleman was a downright, kind-hearted man, and a Christian of loud profession; but he did not see, as he should have done, I think, that when planning for the easier management of his farm, he ought, at the same time, to have considered the welfare of his workmen.



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In pleading the servant's cause, and trying to show the Duty of the master or mistress, I do not think I have asked for anything impossible or unreasonable. Neither have I had money, or the supply of things that money will buy, exclusively in my mind. In addition to the supply of the bare necessities of existence, I have been thinking of the care and the sympathy, the counsel, and the thousand other things indispensable to the servant's well-being, for which the master ought to feel some reasonable concern. Everyone knows that James the coachman, Mary the housemaid, or Jones the shoemaker, cannot live by bread alone; and I have said, and say again, that every employer is responsible before God for supplying his servants, to the extent of his ability, with these things.

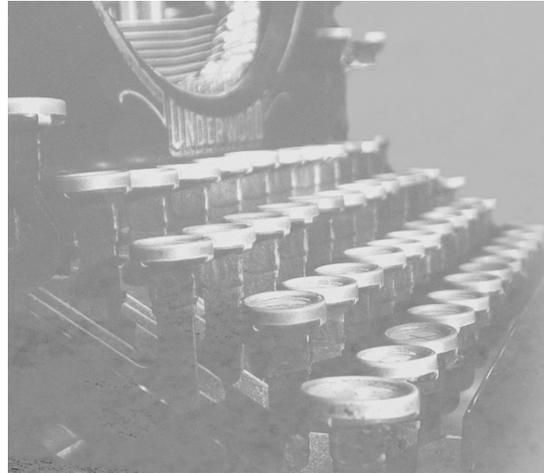
1. Not to consider and provide for the well-being of those in your employment, so far as you have ability, up to the level of this standard, is to place the servant on as low, or even a lower, level than the southern planter placed his slaves, or the farmer places his cattle. Those who act thus make it evident that they selfishly seek their own interests without any regard to the interests of those in their employ.

2. Those who treat their servants in this way ought to abandon all pretence of regarding men and women as being brothers and sisters. Their conduct plainly shows that, in their hearts, they consider that the accidents of power and money have given them the right to use their fellows simply for the promotion of their own selfish interests, without any proper concern for their well-being.

3. Those who act in this way, fly in the face of the Divine principle of doing unto others as you would that they should do unto you. If Smith will not treat Brown's son as Brown would like Smith to treat his son, were he in his employ, then there is an end, for ever, of that doctrine, in its bearing on the Duty which the master owes to the servant.

4. Everyone who acts thus contradicts the principle of fairness and reciprocity. If a mother would like a nurse to care for her children, which most mothers would, then the mother must care for the nurse.

If a husband would like a maid to care for his wife, wait upon her in health, and watch



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her in sickness, then he must show, in some suitable manner, his consideration for the maid.

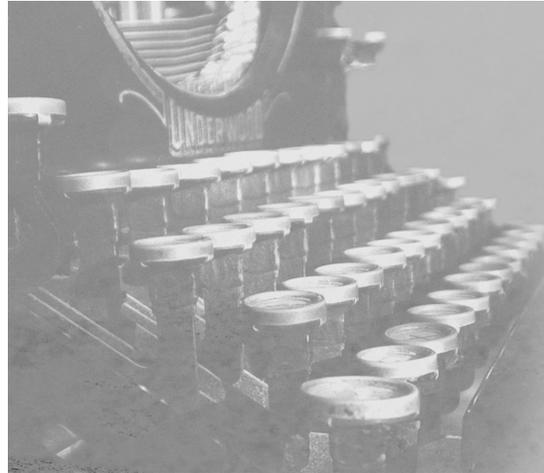
If the master would like his employees to give their whole souls to the promotion of his business, making that their first concern, and working all hours, reasonable and unreasonable, for its prosperity, then he must minister to the welfare of those employee with the same practical anxiety.

5. Those who act in this way contradict the law of Love, under which every Christian master is laid, by his professed obedience to the law of Christ. Paul asserts, as clearly as possible, that no master has any rational claim to be living a life which is pleasing to his Saviour, if he does not care for the interests of his servants. Could he more plainly teach this than he does when he says: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in Heaven"?

6. Further, those who act thus, must directly oppose their own interests, whether those interests lie in the house, on the ship, in the field, or elsewhere. Men and women, ordinarily, work from the motives of fear, or gain, or love. Of these forces, love will ever be found to be the most powerful. The great business, then, of a master who has his eye on securing the largest amount of work from his servants, is to create this feeling of affection towards him, and nothing will do this so effectively as fair, kind, and generous treatment. That will seldom fail.

But are there not difficulties in the way of the practical working of the doctrine here laid down? Of course there are. But no plan for the improvement of mankind can be proposed that is not open to some objection or other. Let us look at one or two of these objections.

1. Supposing the circumstances of a master will not allow him to give his servants such wages, or to bestow upon them such care, as they manifestly need what then? To this I reply, Let that master do as well for them as he can. Paul lays down the rule, "It is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." The Apostle here plainly affirms that God does not hold us responsible for going beyond our ability in the discharge of any duty to which we are called. He will, therefore, be



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pleased with any master who does for his servant what lies within his power; and if the servant only knows that his master does so, he will be likely to be satisfied also. Anyway, let the master act after the fashion of the Captain whose ship is in difficulties. When provisions run short, a true-hearted Captain will share with the passengers and crew what food he has; and see to everyone's safety before his own, and if the ship goes down, he will be the last to leave her, or possibly even go down with her. God and man will approve and admire such conduct.

2. But is a master to pay his servants more wages than the value of their earnings? To this it may be replied, If a servant earns more at one time than he receives, which is not an uncommon occurrence, it is only fair that the master should pay him more at another time than he earns; that is, if he is able.

3. But, it may be asked, ought not servants to be treated as men and women well able to look after their own interests, and not as children? To that I reply, If they are intelligent men and women, able to judge and do well for themselves, all that I ask is that the master should give them the means to do so; that is, as far as he has the ability. But if they are children in intelligence, which is very often the case, then I demand for them the care which Ignorance and weakness require. We all know that many servants are sadly wanting in those qualities that have to do with the direction and management of their own affairs. Especially does this apply to domestic servants, whom we often see toiling, morning, noon, and night, without regard to proper food, or rest, or clothing, or recreation, or other things that have to do with the maintenance of their health and strength. What ought the mistress to do for such? Take advantage of their ignorance and good nature? No; she ought to help and care for them as she would if they were her own children.