

COMRADESHIP

Comrades and Friends, - During the first few weeks of the new year no fewer than fifty men and women declared, at the Officers of our Anti-Suicide Bureau, in the City of London, that they had resolved to end their lives, for the simple reason that they had no friends. They had no one with whom they had any friendly association, and they felt death to be preferable to the wretched loneliness of the solitary life they were compelled to live.

Is not something of this spirit, and the unhappiness which spring from it, in great or lesser proportion, to be found in society everywhere?

People walk about, eat and drink, talk and go through the ordinary duties of social life together, and yet have no real communion of spirit. Heart does not speak to heart. They are, in the truest sense, largely, if not altogether, alone in the world. I am afraid that there is a good deal of this experience. We meet, sing pray, and testify together, but heart-union is too often sadly wanting.

Yet a Corps ought to be, to all intents and purposes, a real spiritual family. Every Soldier on its Roll should regard his Comrades as brothers and sisters, not only in name but in practice. Instead of this, I am afraid that with some Salvationists there is a great deal of the cold, stand-off spirit, and with a great many much of that wretched indifference which is so painful to see, and more painful still to endure. This is especially so in the big cities; while the brotherhood and the sisterhood so often talked about by many so-called Christian people is little more than a name.

This is a great pity, and we can never tell how much we lose buy it, or how much suffering it entails upon many good and faithful souls who are shy and strange.

I can never forget, for example, what a disheartening and distressing effect was produced on me by this kind of spirit in the church to which I was introduced when, as a young man, I first came to London.



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I. — Let me mention two or three reasons why Salvationists should cherish a really brotherly and affectionate disposition towards one another.

1. The first reason is the personal pleasure which true friendliness imparts to all those who are the subjects of it. The joy flowing out of genuine friendship cannot very well be overestimated.

To know that there are Comrades who really feel affectionately towards you, whose eyes sparkle, whose hearts beat warmly, and whose hands are stretched out when you meet them, creates pleasure not only while you are with the, but when you think about them afterwards.

Yes! Friendship is a treasure, indeed, and every Salvationist ought to be able not only to find such treasure in his Corps, but be able to supply a share of the priceless blessing to others in return.

2. The Salvationist should cultivate this friendly spirit because of the comfort it will bring to him, and also to others, in the everyday sorrows and trials of life.

We all have our hardships. Some have bitter fights with poverty, affliction, and misunderstandings; many have to follow their loved ones to an early grave; and all of us, in one form or another, will have to face the last enemy, which is Death. In these trying hours how welcome is the practical, loving friendship which soothes the wounded spirit, cheers the despairing heart, and smoothes the dying pillow!

3. Then, how marvelous is the influence for good which this friendly spirit exerts on the ungodly world around us!

Nothing strikes the stranger who finds himself within our walls more forcibly, or affects him more favourably, than the loving faces and friendly intercourse of the soldiers who surround him on every side, no matter how small the Hall or how great the struggle in which the Corps I engaged. He is constrained to say, 'See how these Salvationists love one another!'

Oh, that this spirit of loving comradeship were more prevalent and powerful than it is! Let us cultivate it, my Comrades. One of the songs of our early days was, 'Love shall be the conqueror,



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to bring the glory in.' That song is gloriously true. Here is a method of spreading Salvation possible to the humblest Salvationists, whether Senior or Junior.

4. This spirit will make friends for The Army and secure assistance for its Work.

A perfect stranger died some years ago leaving quite a large sum of money to The Army, and his lawyer told us that he was really led to do so because on entering an Army Hall in town where he was quite unknown, some Salvationist shook him by the hand and inquired after his spiritual welfare. This kindly act was not brought about by the supposition that the stranger was a well-to-do individual, because although in reality he was well-off, he was dressed at the time as a working man.

II.— But how are we to obtain more of this spirit of friendliness?

1. Salvationists should be at more trouble to acquaint themselves with one another. While it is true that some of our people are bold enough to salute comrades who may otherwise be perfect strangers, others are too timid to speak to, or even look at, much less shake hands with, Comrades with whom they have had some acquaintance for years gone by.

What is the reason for this shy separateness? I should say that it arises very largely from Soldiers being too much taken up with themselves, and being too little concerned with the happiness and welfare of those around them.

My comrades, I recommend you, so far as possible, to be careless of what your friends may think about you or your looks, or your words; speak up and out in a loving way to all with whom you come in contact. Make yourselves at home, and show yourselves friendly.

You ought especially to act after this fashion with the new Converts, who are only too often caressed one night and passed coldly by the night after. Hunt them out in the Meetings; or, better still, fetch them from their homes. Why should you leave this duty altogether to your Officers? It is beyond question their place to search the Converts out, but every Salvationist ought to take his share in so important a business.



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2. Be sure you practice forbearance with what you count the shortcomings of your Comrades. It is very improbable that they will all come up to what you may consider the right standard of experience and duty. Have patience with them! Grace works in different ways in and by different natures. AN ounce of this precious article will fill some to overflowing with patience, zeal, and gladness, while others will hardly be moved to works of loving self-denial by a hundredweight.

3. Then I further advise that you should trust your comrades. Do not everlastingly suspect them of unworthy motives in their sayings or doings. Put the best construction you can upon their actions. Where you consider they are wrong, ask them for an explanation. Where you imagine there has been some unfriendly action, give them a chance of setting themselves right with you. Do not expect perfection all at once. Give them time. If you find them lacking in the performance of what you consider to be their duty, seek by your own prayers, counsel, and example to supply their need.

4. Look out for opportunities of befriending your Comrades. This is not only your duty, but your privilege. If a man would have friends, he must show himself friendly. Bless your Comrades, and your Comrades will bless you.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.