

Dignity of labour

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By Labour we generally mean manual work that is work done with the hands as distinguished from mental work or work done with the head. In ancient times manual labor was looked down upon and the manual worker was treated as an inferior being. Most ancient states were based upon slave labor. Even the Greek citizens who devoted themselves to the higher slaves and yet it was ancient Greek that taught the world the lessons of political liberty and self government. In modern times slavery has been abolished by all civilized countries. Yet a hundred years ago slavery still existed as a recognized institution.

Manual labour is recognized today at least in theory as being worthy of free citizens and no stigma attaches to a man because he works with his hands rather than with his head. And yet the leisured classes still look down on the working classes. And many a young man of the middle class would rather wear a black coat and sit on an officer still at a paltry salary than soil his hands and earn double the money as an artisan. This contempt of manual labour is absurd and wrong and the distinction between manual and mental work is misleading. All manual work even so called unskilled labour requires some thought and the skilled work of the engineer the carpenter and the builder and the potter is really as much mental as manual. It takes more intelligence to be an expert electrician or even a mason than to be an officer clerk copying letters all day. But what we have still to learn is that honest work of all kinds is dignified and worthy of respect.

In Pakistan even the humble sweeper who does unpleasant and absolutely necessary work ought to be respected instead of being regarded with contempt and thrust down into the lowest caste. The only things we should

be ashamed of are idleness and trying to live by one's wits without labour. Work is worship and to work is to pray. We should take off our hats to honest toil and honour the honest workman.