WORK  
by John Ruskin

It is physically impossible for a well-educated, intellectual, or brave man to make money the chief object of his thoughts—as physically impossible as it is for him to make his dinner the principal object of them. All healthy people like their dinners, but their dinner is not the main object of their lives. So all healthily minded people like making money—ought to like it, and to enjoy the sensation of winning it; but the main object of their life is not money; it is something better than money.

A good soldier, for instance, mainly wishes to do his fighting well. He is glad of his pay—very properly so, and justly grumbles when you keep him ten years without it; still, his main notion of life is to win battles, not to be paid for winning them.

So of doctors. They like fees no doubt—ought to like them; yet if they are brave and well educated, the entire object of their lives is not fees. They, on the whole, desire to cure the sick; and—if they are good doctors, and the choice were fairly put to them—would rather cure their patient and lose their fee than kill him and get it. And so with all other brave and rightly trained men; their work is first, their fee second; very important always, but still second.

But in every nation, as I said, there are a vast class who are cowardly, and more or less stupid. And with these people, just as certainly the fee is first and the work second, as with brave people the work is first and the fee second.

And this is no small distinction. It is the whole distinction in a man. You cannot serve two masters; you must serve one or the other. If your work is first with you, and your fee second, work is your master.

Observe then, all wise work is mainly threefold in character. It is honest, useful, and cheerful. I hardly know anything more strange than that you recognize honesty in play, and you do not in work. In your lightest games you have always some one to see what you call “fair play.” In boxing, you must hit fair; in racing, start fair. Your watchword is fair play; your hatred, foul play. Did it ever strike you that you wanted another watchword also, fair work, and another hatred also, foul work?
Honest Work

Men said the old smith was foolishly careful, as he wrought on the great chain he was making in his dingy shop in the heart of the great city. But he heeded not their words, and only wrought with greater painstaking. Link after link he fashioned and welded and finished, and at last the great chain was completed.

Years passed. One night there was a terrible storm, and a ship was in sore peril of being dashed upon the rocks. Anchor after anchor was dropped, but none of them held. The cables were broken like threads.

At last the mighty sheet anchor was cast into the sea, and the old chain quickly uncoiled and ran out till it grew taut. All watched to see if it would bear the awful strain. It sang in the wild storm as the vessel's weight surged upon it. It was a moment of intense anxiety. The ship with its cargo of a thousand lives depended upon this one chain. What now if the old smith had wrought carelessly even one link of his chain?

But he had put honesty and truth and invincible strength into every part of it; and it stood the test, holding the ship in safety until the storm was over.

For Want of a Horseshoe Nail

adapted from James Baldwin

This is a legend about a real king, King Richard III of England, who is generally regarded as one of England's worst rulers. In 1485, Richard was defeated in a battle against troops led by Henry, Earl of Richmond. Many people remember the battle best because of a line written by William Shakespeare in his play, Richard III, in which Richard cries out, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" Read on to understand the meaning of that desperate cry.

The blacksmith paused from hammering the hot iron to wipe his sweaty brow.

"Hurry up, man, hurry up!" cried a man at his side. "You must shoe this horse quickly, for the king wishes to ride him into battle!"

"Indeed, sir," said the blacksmith, "so you think there will be a battle today?"

"Most certainly, and very soon, too," answered the man, with an air of importance. "Why, when I left the field, the king's enemies were on the march and ready for the fight. Today will decide whether Richard or Henry shall rule England. And as I am the king's groom, I charge you, sir, make haste, for the king prefers this steed to all others!"

"As you say, sir," muttered the blacksmith as he bent back to his tools, "though good work cannot be rushed."

From a bar of iron he made four horseshoes. Then he hammered and shaped and fitted them to the horse's feet.

smith: blacksmith; one who forges iron
wrought: worked; shaped by hammering, cutting, and stretching
heed: paid no attention to
painstaking: careful work with great attention to detail
fashioned: shaped; formed
in sore peril: in extreme danger
sheet anchor: a large, strong anchor used only in emergencies
taut: tight; without any slack
invincible: unconquerable; incapable of being defeated

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groom: one who looks after horses
charge: to command; to place a responsibility upon
Then he began to nail them on. But after he had nailed on two shoes, he found that he did not have enough nails for the other two.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said to the impatient groom, "but as I've had to shoe so many horses these past few days, I now have only six nails left, and it will take a little time to hammer out the rest I need."

"You say you have six nails?" asked the groom with a stamp of his foot. "And only two shoes left to put on? Then put three nails in each shoe. That will have to do. Come, man, be quick about it. I think I hear the trumpets even now!"

The blacksmith cast him a doubtful look but did as he was told. He quickly finished the shoeing, and the groom hurried to lead the horse to the king.

The battle had been raging for some time. King Richard rode up and down the field, urging his men and slashing at his foes. His enemy, Henry, was pressing him hard.

Far away at the other side of the field, King Richard saw his men falling back in confusion. "Press forward! Press forward!" he yelled. Then he spurred his horse to ride toward the broken line and rally the men to turn and fight.

He was hardly halfway across the stony field when one of the horse's shoes flew off. A few steps more and another shoe came off. The horse stumbled, and King Richard was thrown to the ground.

Before the king could rise, his frightened horse had galloped away. The king looked up and saw that his soldiers were fleeing in confused retreat, and that on all sides Henry's troops were closing in upon him.

He waved his sword in the air and shouted, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

But there was no horse for him. His soldiers rushed past, intent on saving themselves.

The battle was lost. King Richard was lost. And Henry became king of England.

And since that time, people have said:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost,
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost,
For want of a horse, the battle was lost,
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

spurred: urged on and directed with spurs
rally: to rouse; to inspire toward a common purpose