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COURAGE



AN ADDRESS

given to the

Transvaal Teachers' Association

on the

5th APRIL, 1916,

by

HOWARD PIM, B.A.,

Chairman,

RAND CENTRAL SCHOOL BOARD.



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By HOWARD PIM, B.A., Chairman, Rand Central School Board.

I am greatly honoured by your having asked me to address you for the second time, and I have given a good deal of thought to the line I should take.

Many features of our educational system are unsatisfactory and require much more attention than is given to them, but I am sure that all of us place our manhood and womanhood before our professional work whatever it may be, and watch, and brood over, and dream of the stupendous world-drama now being unfolded before our eyes.

We recognise in how many respects our vision has hitherto been unduly limited to our immediate surroundings, and that we have gone our several ways imagining that the primal passions and instincts of our strangely compounded humanity had taken gentler forms, or at any rate had been overlaid by such a weight of law, and convention, and kindly feeling, that they would never again display themselves in all their nakedness and brutality. This was our "great illusion" and not the ignoble side issue as to whether wars would or would not pay.

Human nature is far better and far worse than we had come to believe. Poor old dead level respectability, who thought he had found comfortable and permanent quarters, has been unceremoniously turned out of doors; and we know ourselves, as we never did before, for what we really are. Even the children we come in contact with are seen to have possibilities we had ignored, and we are impressed by the need of giving more consideration to the "qualities" that are common to all the human race, and whose development is necessary to its advancement and happiness. That is why I have come here to-day with COURAGE, the most lovable of all these qualities, for my theme.

It is necessary to all of us as individuals because no friendship can exist without it. Essential to the existence of our civilisation. "The greatest of the virtues," Dr. Johnson calls it, "because unless a man has that virtue he has no security for preserving any other." . . . "A quality so necessary for maintaining "virtue that it is always respected even when associated with vice"!

We have heard the argument that war is desirable because it develops courage; and its answering question, would you bring about a shipwreck or a fire in order to produce heroic deeds of rescue? But there remains in the argument the small element of truth, that in times of peace the importance of courage may be overlooked and our dependence upon it under-estimated. This is no argument for war, but one which should put us on our guard lest we undervalue courage.

It is true also that actions prompted by it range over the whole field of human activities, that its results are evil as well as good, and that while some of the deeds it makes possible seem but a mere momentary reflex of some instinct; others, in which it is combined with the element of conscious and willing sacrifice, are permanent landmarks in the story of the spirit of man. This is part of the central paradox of human life. The quality itself, indifferent; a tool, the use of which for good or evil is in our power.

History is full of splendid instances of it, but we may be indeed confident that the events of our own time will shine with an equal lustre. Take the conduct of the French nation in the present war. The courage of the Government in placing Joffre in chief command and making de Castelnau, a bitter opponent of theirs, but a brilliant soldier, his Chief of Staff. The courage of the quiet massing of the French armies, far inferior in number to the enemy, behind their eastern fortress barrier, the integrity of which was essential to the defence of France, the General Staff knowing all the time that German armies were massing far to the north even of Trèves. The courage of the blows in Alsace and Lorraine that won the French the initiative. The courage of the slow movement northwards as the enemies' advance through Belgium commenced. The courage that absolutely refused to expose their flank, by advancing across the Belgian frontier, to the five huge armies massed and waiting for them on the Belgian frontier in Luxemburg. The courage of the blow with which Sarrail at Virton on the 21st August drove back the Crown Prince into the woods and defiles of Luxemburg. The courage of the great retreat, after Larenzac on the 22nd August had lost the crossings of the Meuse and Sambre. The courage of its management. The courage of the French people abandoning to the enemy perhaps the most important manufacturing district in France without murmuring or the faintest hint of surrender! Indeed the only parallel that I can give you to this is to ask you to consider what would have happened in our case if another German plan, a landing on the coast of Lincolnshire, had been successful, and they had driven a wedge right across England if they could, but certainly to include Sheffield and the southern Yorkshire towns.

The courage of the soldiers marching south, larger and larger numbers leaving behind them with every mile of the road, the fields they had tilled, the shops they had tended, and the people that were all in all to them. The courage of the quiet massing of fresh reserves behind Paris, and to the south and east of it. The courage of the great attack on the 6th September when, although heavily outnumbered at every point on the long sagging line from Paris to Verdun, the Allies smote the enemy hip and thigh. The courage above all perhaps of the depleted eastern armies of de Castelnau in the two battles of Nancy, and especially on the same 6th September, when the Germans attacked its defences on the Grand Couronné, under the eyes of the Emperor himself, in masses of 50,000 men at a time, and found them impregnable.

The French have proved again the correctness of the words of the greatest of their Captains: "Success in war is obtained, not by large numbers, but by troops well placed and well disciplined"; and also of De Tocqueville's remark: "The discipline of a democratic army is strengthened in sight of the enemy because every soldier then clearly perceives that he must be silent and obedient in order to conquer."

What their temper is to-day I can best bring home to you by quoting from a letter written last Christmas night by an officer in the trenches:—

"On our left from Charleroi and Saint-Quentin and Paris came rumours of disaster, and just as at the first the most legitimate restraint on our hopes had been swept away by a torrent of confidence, so in these sinister days the strongest hopes wilted under the repeated blows of misfortune."

"But from that point date the great virtues of the armies of France. Like steel well tempered they stood these repeated tests. The victory of the Marne, though greeted with satisfaction, did not provoke in our ranks the great sense of security which it caused behind our lines. Because we knew what it had cost. We knew what it represented. But we never thought that it marked the end of our efforts.

"We had learnt to know our adversary, his resources, his tricks and his method. We felt he was wounded. We felt that we were so armed that we should beat him some day. But we never believed that this day was near.

"And because we did not believe it, because in the intoxication of the forward march we kept in our minds the clear sense of what was real and possible, because all of us, both officers and men, determined we should not be deceived a second time. Just for that reason, and for that reason only, we have been for seventeen months, and we are still after seventeen months capable of bearing what in this war is worse than death, worse than mud, worse than misery and vermin, the drag of it, its unchangingness, its boredom.

"Ask of a neutral who has seen us fighting, what he has most admired; he will say it is our dash, our audacity, our shock power. We would give you a different answer. The real strength of our army is its capacity of bearing without complaining and almost without suffering from it, the dreary running out of the days. It is terrible and magnificent to jump out of the trench when the hour of attack sounds; it is more terrible and more magnificent still to hold this trench through the months and years without attacking. Our principal duty is to endure, for by enduring we shall triumph.

"The soldier of 1915/16 has his ideas on this war. They are simple and modest. After months of experience we do not flatter ourselves that we shall obtain against the enemy results which we know that the enemy cannot obtain against us. We know if we wish we can obtain successes as in Champagne and in Artois; and we do not think that the enemy can obtain similar successes because for months past we find him less and less inclined to take the offensive. But having said this, we add that it is not through little successes of this kind that we look for that victory of which not one of us doubts.

"We are sure of success for one reason and one only; because we are sure

“ of our patience; and sure also, after comparing our enemy with ourselves, that patience can bring salvation to us alone.

“ Our enemy has changed too. When he came first he wanted to devour everything. But he has only bitten us. Now he does not even bite. A pessimist will say that he is biting elsewhere, but is it to conquer Serbia that he has declared war? Is it in conquering Serbia that he will master England, France and Russia?

“ Some day the inequality of effectives will tip the scale. When? We do not know. But as we are patient that matters little, and that is why we believe that it is our patience under all trials which will bring us to victory. See that people do not try to hurry us, and that they do not get over-excited themselves. We are serious people and are playing the great game. If the war had lasted three months we might be more timid in expressing our opinion; but after eighteen months spent in effort and pain, we have the right to give our advice, and our advice is this: As every day that passes increases the inequality of forces in our favour let the time pass, and let us make sure that we only strike when it is clear that we can deal the enemy a death blow. Until then we undertake, we soldiers, to carry our cross. Let the civilians carry theirs.”

Such is the temper of the French soldier, and I think we can adopt for ourselves the eloquent words with which De Tocqueville concludes his great book on “ France Before the Revolution ”:—

“ I venture to add that there is but one people on the earth which could have played this part. I know my country—I know but too well its mistakes, its faults, its foibles, and its sins. But I know, too, of what it is capable. There are undertakings which the French nation can alone accomplish; there are magnanimous resolutions which this nation can alone conceive. France alone may, on some given day, take in hand the common cause and stand up in defence of it; and if she be subject to awful reverses, she has also moments of sublime enthusiasm which bear her aloft to heights which no other people will ever reach.”

In saying this I do not forget the courage of the part that our small Army played, a part that was *essential to the success of the great retreat, and of all that followed*. But I wish to remind you specially of what happened later when volunteers for the new Army were called for, and free men, by the hundred thousand, of their own free will, offered their lives in a quarrel which only in a secondary sense was theirs or their country's. They belonged to every class, but they all took the large view of their duty, and of the way in which their country could best be defended. They were *educated* in the true sense of the word, and the credit of it is due to the homes and the schools that trained them.

And what of our other silent service, the one over-mastering factor in the whole terrible business, providing throughout the world: “ A security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions.” Surely courage and devotion *in excelsis* have always been in evidence there.

Take one phase of their work calling for the highest and steadiest courage in times of peace, and let us remember that we hold the Roman Empire to be

among the greatest civilizing Powers the world has ever known, largely because of the roads they made through their own provinces for the purposes of their own Government.

Our Navy has spent over 100 years and many lives in charting the seas of all the world, and *has done the work for all time*. More than this, the results obtained have been given—given to the whole Brotherhood of Seamen! Was there ever such a lordly gift? Not a ship of any nationality puts out to sea, not a German Dreadnought, or liner, or catboat shows her nose outside Kiel or Wilhelmshaven without the charts and sailing directions of the British Admiralty; and yet these German up-starts pretend they are fighting for the freedom of the seas! Those charts *are* its freedom and what unasked we have already given, is not now for them to win. Certain it is that in doing this work we have learnt to know the sea as no nation has ever known it before, and surely in challenging us there, Germany has tried a fall with nature. What happened the Spaniard? What happened Napoleon? And do we know less of the sea than we did then? “The German is no more capable of sea-power than an elephant. Sea power does not come from bookish theories and an elaborate organisation; sea power is an instinct, arising out of the seafaring habit. . . . The master-key to Admiralty is the sea-genius of a whole people.”

And what of the courage of our enemy. “A people does not become a world-empire by the book. World-dominion grows out of the very marrow and instinct of a race, and needs generations for its building. The German genius, but lately freed from serfdom, thought, like a parvenu, to become an imperial force by mechanical organisation.” . . . “But lately having risen out of slavery, it was inevitable that *her valour should be the valour of the slave-folk*.” Surely history can show no more tragically pathetic sight than a people arming themselves to go forth and conquer the world, who have not yet arrived at self-government—a people so lacking in master-valour that they have not had the courage to acquire government over themselves.”

Probably nothing of its kind has ever equalled the *efficiency* of German education, just as the efficiency of her army can be said to surpass that of all others. So completely are her children educated that they fall of themselves into their places in the State; but their training from beginning to end is imbued with the spirit of the fitters’ shop rather than with that of teachers of men and women.

The German idea of a citizen is less that of a human being with a free mind governed by universal law, than that of a perfectly fitted cog in a great machine. This machine is the State. “The State is Power, and it is the highest moral duty of the State to safeguard its power. The individual must sacrifice himself for the higher community of which he is a member, and the State is itself the highest in the external community of men. Therefore the duty of self-elimination cannot effect it at all. The Christian duty of sacrifice for something higher has no existence whatever for the State. . . . The State is no Academy of Arts. If it neglects its power in favour of the ideal strivings of mankind, it renounces its nature and goes to ruin. The renunciation of its own power is for a State in the most real sense the sin against the Holy Ghost.”

Thus far Heinrich von Treitschke. So you see the claim of the State is

absolute. In other places HE qualifies it, but his Government has accepted this position in its entirety.

We know our own deficiencies, and so far as my limited knowledge of French educational matters goes, I find their writings full of complaints that their system is not practical, does not give pupils the knowledge they want for ordinary life, and does not fit them for the everyday duties of citizenship. But be that as it may, both of us can claim, I think, that we have not forgotten the root of all that is human; the essential, inexplicable fact that every human soul is an end in itself, a whole without parts, a sacred thing. Or the truism expressing this in other words, viz.: That the aim of all education should be to bring out the best that is in man.

On what fulcrum then can we rest the lever of our energies when we desire to use them for the development of true courage, of "master valour"? The answer came 130 years ago from a bare room in the Prussian town of Königsberg. If we had entered it we should have seen a tiny little man, almost deformed, but with piercing blue eyes and an expression of gentle thoughtfulness. His name was Immanuel Kant, and he is one of the immortals. What he has written reads as follows:—

" Nothing can probably be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a GOOD WILL."

" Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named; or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health . . . inspire pride and often presumption, if there is not a Good Will to correct the influence of these on the mind, and with this also to rectify the whole principle of acting."

Teachers, our race *has* courage, and the children in our schools have the germs of character and Good Will. It is your task to develop these germs, your privilege to light up your pupils' minds by your teaching, and steady them by your example. You are the torch-bearers. Be of good Courage.

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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