

THE ESSENCE OF HEROISM

By The Hon. THEODORE ROOSEVELT
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

HERE are two kinds of courage, moral and physical, and it is absolutely essential for a boy or man to have both if he wishes to keep his own self-respect and to deserve the respect of others.

On the one hand, he must be able to master himself, to master his own passions and overcome his own weaknesses. This is what we usually mean when we speak of moral courage. It is the courage which is required when a man says no to associates who would lead him to do something that is wrong, and who are sure to jeer at him when he declines to be led. It is the courage which keeps a man hard at work amid uncongenial surroundings at irksome labor year in and year out until he finally wins success, while his weaker brethren who lack the staying power, or who have thirsted too much after pleasure, fall by the wayside.

On the other hand, physical courage is the quality which enables the man not so much to master himself as to hold his own among outside rivals or enemies. It is the quality which is indispensable if a man is to be a good soldier, a good policeman, a good fireman, a good sailor; in short, if he is to succeed in anything requiring the qualities of bravery and hardihood. Physical courage is necessary to any man who would make his fellows respect him, but it is nearly useless if unaccompanied by moral courage. It will teach a man to hold his own in a cow camp or a mining town, but it will not save him from losing body and soul in the saloons unless it is backed up by its finer brother quality.

The Two Admirals.

OF course, down at the bottom, in the last analysis, the two kinds of courage blend, and the man of perfect courage alike on the physical and moral sides must have each of so peculiar a quality that it could not be distinguished from the other. Single deeds of heroism may be performed wholly under the influence of either.

but the essence of heroism, the heroism that shows itself not in isolated deeds, but in a long life, must be a mixture of both.

If we use the word hero lightly, as we use the word courage vaguely, we can say that men may be heroes on one side of their character, and yet have a very unheroic side, too. Nelson, the greatest of all admirals, possessed physical courage to the very highest point, and he also possessed the power of accepting and shouldering



responsibility, a form of moral courage which many men of high physical courage lack; but in his private life his qualities were anything but heroic, for he utterly lacked self-mastery and fixity of moral principle. On the other hand, Farragut, the admiral who probably stands nearest to Nelson, certainly in this century, possessed courage of every kind, the courage that endures and forbears, no less than the courage that dares and strives. All that he had to do he did as well as Nelson could have done it; he did not have the opportunity to do as much; but he was a far better man, and his type was a better type for the nation.

Many a brave soldier who has won deathless honor before the foe has shown himself both weak and wicked in civic life, whether public or private. A man who will undauntedly face the bullets of

the enemy may cower before the ballots of a misguided constituency or the insistence of corrupt politicians; while on the contrary, men who stand up boldly for what is right in private life, or as politicians in public life, may be found utterly wanting when tried on the battle-field.

The Courage of the Prize-Fighter.

HERE are also different kinds even of physical courage. The courage that comes from self-confidence may make a man behave very boldly under a given set of conditions and very differently under another set. Out in the far West it is a well-recognized fact that a bronco-buster who fears no horse may not be the best man to put on a posse which is to hunt down a man-killing desperado. Time and again the prize-fighter who will stand in the ring until his face is battered out of shape has shown himself inferior to a quiet, non-athletic neighbor when it came to be a question of facing an armed foe in deadly fight. Courage that springs from mere self-confidence sometimes vanishes when that self-confidence is rudely shocked. Such courage, which springs really from a feeling of superiority in prowess, is not to be depended upon, for the moments of greatest need are precisely those in which it is impossible to say on which side the superiority of prowess lies.

The fact is that in private life or in public life, in time of peace or in time of war, the man who consistently displays those qualities of courage which, raised to the highest point, mark the hero, ordinarily has back of these qualities others which are in part moral and in part physical. The highest nature is that which can show such qualities alike in the closet and on the field. Washington and Hampden, who in the arena of political strife withstood tyranny and anarchy, and who also showed the highest courage of the soldier when the call to arms came, stand as no mere soldiers, no mere statesmen, can ever stand. The really great leaders in war must possess

the mastery of self, the daring, the courage, the immovable steadfastness of purpose which also go to make up the qualities of a great leader in politics; and fundamentally these are merely striking forms of the commonplace attributes necessarily shown by the man who succeeds in business and does well by his family.

In any great war, success or failure depends primarily upon the steadfastness of the people, and therefore quite as much upon their moral as upon their physical courage. Hysterical or emotional elation or depression is thoroughly undesirable. It is very rarely that, as in the case of the Franco-German War, one side proves overwhelmingly victorious from the outset. Usually there is an alternation of success and failure, and when this is the case the courage of the soldier in the field must be supplemented by the steadfastness of the men at home, or failure will come.

The Heroism of North and South.

IN our own great Civil War the dogged resolution of the majority of the people North and South was quite as noteworthy as the valor of the soldiers in the field, great though this valor was. Two years of disaster merely nerved the

North to fresh efforts, while the South fought until every male of anywhere near fighting age was in the ranks or in the grave or the hospital, and until further resistance was literally hopeless. Any unwillingness on the part of the people to endure disappointment and suffering, humiliation and disaster, would have resulted in defeat. This is a lesson, by the way, which would be well worth learning by all sensation-mongers, whether in public or private life, and especially if their profession is journalism.

Every kind of sensational agitation is thoroughly unhealthy and vicious. Incidentally it is also vulgar; but this need not now concern us. In a serious war sensational journalism is undoubtedly a very serious handicap to a country. Far worse, however, is the tendency in some nations, but fortunately not hitherto in our own, to cry out, "We are betrayed!" whenever a defeat comes. In our republic, which is preeminently a peaceful republic, and where we are very apt never to prepare for war because we never believe that war is a possibility until it is actually upon us, there is always a chance of heavy initial disaster. If such disaster should come, we may as well make up our minds that the only way to bear it is in silence and with unshaken front. Above all, there is no use in casting about for a scapegoat. If there is any delinquency, by all means punish the delinquent, but do not try to shift upon any one man the blame that attaches to the people as a whole.

Nor is the need of courage in any way limited to public life or to the military profession. In civil life there are plenty of callings that demand heroism not only of the moral but of the physical type. The deep-sea fisheries are proverbially dangerous, now as they ever have been. The men who sail from the New England coast towns to fish on the Banks or in pursuit of whales take their lives in their hands, and need unusual qualities of resourcefulness, personal prowess and physical daring, qualities which rank with anything that can be shown in actual war.

There are, moreover, plenty of other callings which demand essentially soldierly qualities. In every great city the men of the police department and fire department have continually to display the qualities that make men good soldiers. The list of policemen and firemen who have been killed or injured in the discharge of duty, or who have won medals for gallantry in saving life or in arresting desperate criminals, is a long one every year. Of course, no greater test of nerve, daring and physical address can be imagined than the performance of the feats so often done by firemen in burning buildings. Policemen have to their credit similar deeds. They are continually dealing with violent criminals; and the mounted members of the force have to be exceptionally good and daring horsemen, for a regular part of their business is the stopping of runaways.

Courage in Business.

HERE are other business occupations which make the same demands upon the hardihood of those who follow them. This is notably the case with the great railway industries. As the railroads are wholly a growth of our own time, and as they have now developed to such gigantic proportions, this means that in our day there has sprung up a great class of workers whose calling tends to develop—as no private calling with a like number of followers in the history of the world has ever tended to develop—power to assume responsibility, to take the initiative and to render intelligent obedience, together with absolute cool-headedness, fearlessness, good judgment, and the willingness to run any risks and suffer any extremes of fatigue and exposure.

All railroad employees have to show these qualities to some extent, and the higher they rise in certain lines of their profession, the greater the demand is for the highest form of manliness. Any group of engineers must necessarily be a group of men of a high physical and moral type. It is always a pleasure to deal in any way with such a body, for they are sure to possess not only physical courage and prowess but lofty moral qualities as well. They must have mastered their own passions. No engineer, for instance, can long continue his profession if he is in any way given to drink; and while of course in every walk of life brutal men are to be found, yet in a calling like this brutality is discouraged, not developed. Engineers make good citizens; for intelligence and courage are as necessary as honesty to good citizenship.

True heroism, the essence of heroism, may be found in any calling; and while in its most evident manifestations it can only develop in crises, yet it may be, and often must be, quietly shown all the time. At the risk of repeating myself, I want again to insist upon the fact that its presence in one form does not excuse its absence in another.

The hard-working man who does all his home duties well is nevertheless not to be excused if he does not possess the capacity to show in time of need the qualities that make a man die on the battle-field, and the stern, hard common sense and

civic resolution which insist upon decency and justice in public affairs.

So, on the other hand, no amount of headlong valor in the field, no amount of intelligent honesty in public affairs can in any way excuse or justify failure to do one's duty to those who are closest and dearest.

A man must do his duty by the state, but he can only do that duty by first doing his duty to himself and his family. His first business is to earn his own living and to take care of the weak and helpless beings who may be dependent upon him. The loftiest aspirations of soul, the greatest theoretical patriotism, the fiercest courage in the face of a physical foe are not offsets for sloth and idleness in the ordinary workaday, humdrum world, and still less for shortcomings in tenderness and affection toward wife or child. Courage and ability, if joined to brutality and selfishness, merely make the man a worse citizen. Strength which is abused is worse than weakness, for exactly the same reason that makes strength which is used aright better than weakness.

Heroism of the highest type is shown in countless lives where it attracts no attention. The man who, while suffering under some physical infirmity, goes on uncomplainingly year after year earning a livelihood not merely for himself, but for his children or for those dependent upon him, who stands between them and want, is a true soldier of civilization, is an American who deserves well of America. He is doing vital work for the nation.

Nor is it necessary that there should be any physical infirmity in order that the quality of heroism may be present. The average young man, in whom the blood of life runs red and quick, needs to master his own passions, needs to force himself into what may be uncongenial and monotonous work. If he finally fails in either respect he becomes a drone or worse in the body social and politic, and adds his might to the strength of the forces of evil.

Who is the Good Citizen?

IF, on the contrary, he does his duty in both respects, if he refrains from excess and also works hard, if he is a good son, a good husband and father, he thereby becomes a good citizen. He thereby joins the army of those whose work is finally to determine the greatness of our country. The state is of course merely the aggregate of its citizens, and the great qualities that lie at the root of healthy life in the state are simply the qualities that lie at the root of healthy life in the family. No matter how brilliant the outward life of a state may be, no matter how wonderful the material prosperity, how great the development in art, no matter even how remarkable the soldiership, ruin is impending if the average citizen is not a good worker, a good husband, a good father; if he does not leave his seed behind him to inherit the earth; if he does not train up his sons so that they, too, shall honorably continue the work that their father has honorably begun.

After all is said and done, the vitally heroic work is the work of the home. It is not a substitute for the fiercer heroism that is occasionally called for outside, but it is the indispensable prerequisite. The heroism of work, the heroism that consists in energetic, unceasing, uncomplaining doing of duty in the ordinary vocations of life—this is as truly the essence of heroism as the most splendid civic courage or military valor.

