

Had the Greeks not been a warlike people, the Iliad would never have been produced, nor appreciated. I will not affirm that this class of writers—the same is true of certain historians and orators—have not contributed to keep alive the war-spirit among men. And I cannot but think they have got more credit, or, if you will, more blame for this than they have merited. Asia, as well as Europe, has had different epochs, warriors of insatiable ambition, who neither had nor required the stimulus of poetry and oratory. It is in fact on the unsophisticated multitude that martial poetry, as well as martial music produce their true effect. The ambitious conqueror does not need to go to the harp for his inspiration. With high selfish aims and ample means, he will find that in the boundless pride of his own heart.

I offer no apology for the poetry or oratory which has prostituted the sacred gifts of genius, to celebrate lawless ambition, or throw delusive charms around deeds of rapine and blood. Yet, why should it be forgotten that our great poets. Dramatic as well as Epic, if they have not always taught a sanctified courage, have nevertheless by sentiments of justice, honour, and a generous forbearance done much to refine and elevate the courage of the warrior.—We know something of what war has been; yet, possibly, we know but little what it might have been, but for the humanizing influences of those great and generous minds who have celebrated martial exploits. It were well if certain persons, who are carried away, not, as they fancy, by a seraphic benevolence but by a spurious sentimentalism, would bear in mind that some of the loftiest poetry in the Bible is employed in celebrating the deeds of brave men on the field of battle. And who will say that the courage of the warrior, when employed as the instrument of Heaven's justice, is not a very sacred thing? It is true, mere physical courage of itself, as it may be the attribute of very bad men, and is the attribute of many brute creatures, cannot be spoken of in unqualified admiration; yet in a world in which injustice and other forms of wickedness can only be put down by opposing force to force—that physical courage, which fits men for meeting bodily sufferings, and even death, in a conflict with the enemies of God and of order, is a very valuable quality. It were well, if this never were needed. But, for all practical purposes, we must just take men as they are. Now, assuredly, he is a very childish person who needs to be told that there is much of the selfish folly and injustice of the world which can only be met by opposing force on the side of right to force on the side of wrong. Hence the necessity of physical courage for some of the high ends of justice. The injustice that has no ear for reason, and no standard of conscience to which appeals can be made, must be assailed in such modes as it can feel, and smitten down by such instruments as can reach it. The wise and virtuous man who is unintentionally doing you a piece of injustice, and the midnight assassin, are not to be encountered by the same weapons. These views at once explain and vindicate the commendations in the Bible of military valor. The fact is, the enemies of right have no wrong done them when they are opposed by just such weapons as can most effectually resist their aggressions.

Where lawless passions and appetites employ brute force to accomplish their ends, physical courage is indispensable for the existence of society. A community of wise and virtuous men would require few laws for its safety and prosperity; but in a community in which thoughtless and unprincipled men are numerous the best laws become nullities, if there be no physical courage to make them effective. The truth of this becomes strikingly apparent, when we reflect on the relations of nations to one another. If it be true that national greatness of a sort has sometimes been acquired by dishonesty and violence, it is no less true that the highest form of national greatness never can be founded on violence or dishonesty, but rests to a great extent on the bravery of a people. By the arts of peaceful

industry men acquire wealth, and by wisdom and virtue secure liberty, yet without courage their liberty will soon perish, and their wealth become the prey of cunning and rapacious neighbours. Indeed all acquisitions are but triumphs after conflicts. Without some courage you will not fight your way successfully through an intricate passage in Horace, or a difficult problem in Euclid. Courage is indispensable for these peaceful battles, if you would aim at success; yet it is still more needful in order to defend the various precious fruits which patient toil has accumulated. When a people can show to the unprincipled and ambitious invader that they possess courage to make all sacrifices rather than submit to one unjust demand, the probability is, that they will either not be invaded, or the invader will be defeated. Sparta long retained its independence, because all men knew that, whatever the assailant might find at Lacedæmon, he would be sure, at least, to find many hard blows ere he could, by arrogance or injustice, carry off even a jot of the black broth. All the possessions of cowards lie at the mercy of the rapacious.

And, although there has been much tyranny in connection with true courage, yet, assuredly, it has been under the rule of brave men that the weak have enjoyed protection and any measure of real liberty. This to some extent was illustrated in ancient times under Greek and Roman dominion; but has in modern times received far more beautiful developments under British authority. No one can deny that the bravest nations have been the best masters—the most wise, just and, on the whole, most merciful in governing those under them. But on the other hand, as sound reasoning might infer, all experience abundantly proves that the domination of cowards is the most meretricious tyranny.

I have dwelt the longer on this, inasmuch as I think there is a tendency in our times to undervalue the importance of true courage; because it was long the fashion to overrate the heroic virtues; let us beware lest we go to the other extreme. The danger of this is all the greater from a notion that, in proportion as men depreciate the heroic virtues, they are sure to cultivate sentiments of justice and true benevolence. This is a great error. Woe be to the weak and the helpless when they fall under the suspicious malice of the mean and the cowardly. Know ye not that cowardly malice finds no security but in the utter destruction of the object it dreads; while the cunning, which it so artfully employs, leaves its victim little opportunity to resist, and hardly any chance to escape.

If mere courage of itself be no virtue, yet, assuredly, cowardice is a great vice, and the parent of many frightful crimes. That some of the darkest of these crimes spring from base selfish fears, and are perpetrated to prevent these fears being realised, cannot be doubted. Nor as little, that men from cowardly apprehensions have in the hour of peril abandoned the post of duty, and involved multitudes in certain destruction. For a man to rush into danger, quite out of the path of duty, or expose himself to harm for no worthy end, and from no right motive, is not rational courage, but rather the fierceness of a beast, or the phrenzy of a fool. Hence it is that the boldness of many is but mere thoughtlessness, or the blind fury of some dominant passion. Nay—and not to speak it paradoxically—may not the most terrible recklessness be but the extreme of cowardice. A man wants firmness to face poverty or shame before the world, yet has the reckless hardihood to rush into the presence of his God. The suicide is either an utter maniac, or he is the most guilty and pitiable of cowards.

That physical courage depends to some extent on physical constitution is as little to be denied as it is hard to explain. Without stopping to investigate a matter so obscure, we may, nevertheless, safely conclude that some men, from their bodily constitution, have natural advantages for boldness. This is indeed apparent from different states of body in the same man. Certain disca-

ses produce a temporary pusillanimity, and the candid observer would infer that this is characteristic of personal cowardice. This, I doubt not, accounts for some painful occurrences in the life of men who were known to be, in general, persons of great bravery. Unless we keep in mind the complex nature of man, we never can understand that wonderful law of action and re-action betwixt the physical and mental, which throws so much light on the nature and conduct of human beings.

And yet, after all, how mysterious is courage? How little does it depend on the mere bones and muscles of men, or on the general physical constitution of things? The ancient Romans, we know, were rather below than above the average stature,—the same may be affirmed of the Greeks, if we set aside the fictions of poetry and keep to authentic history. Yet how astonishing was the courage of both peoples. But the probability is, that Italy, as well as Greece, contains men now, physically as powerful as were the inhabitants of the countries when they respectively gave law to the World. The bone and muscle are still there, but the spirit of the Roman is gone. Italy is now—and the same thing may nearly be said of Greece—the abode of slaves, who either bow to crazy despots, or waste their strength in abortive ebullitions after a liberty which they can neither acquire nor preserve. The truth seems to be, that national bravery depends very much on the mental condition of a people, and on those insinuations which nurse great thoughts and virtuous emotions. Without all this courage in man will either disappear, or pass into mere savage ferocity.

And, again, how wonderful to think how the brave spoken word, or the heroic act of one man will communicate itself, like an electric spark, to a whole army. That little band that went on the forlorn hope to bar the gates of Europe against the despotism of Asia, was assuredly composed of brave men; yet who can doubt that the heroic words spoken by Leonidas made each bosom glow with a double portion of Spartan fire. In all the Scottish lines there was not a man—the meanest Gillic—that saw the battle-axe of Bruce descend on the head of the English Knight, who was not, from that moment, an invincible hero. No thought of defeat after that. It might or might not be wise in the leader of an army at such a crisis thus to expose himself, yet all the Scottish host must have felt through that short summer's night that the crash of that battle-axe had decided the fate of the field of Bannockburn. How mysteriously does man influence his fellow-men; by a single word or act he may amble or he may debase multitudes.

You see that, on the whole, I think courage a valuable quality in such a world as ours. But then, gentlemen, it must be calm, manly, rational and virtuous; it must indeed be like charity, "capable of bearing long and of being kind." It must be the courage that can face danger when it comes, but never courts it; the courage that never boasts of its deed, but is amply satisfied when injustice is repressed and misery alleviated. He that has this courage is too just to trample on the weak, and too brave to injure any creature. The truly courageous is no bully among his companions, but a peaceful, kind-hearted and genial man. It were, however, to take a narrow and mistaken view of the courage. I recommend, were you to suppose that it only finds a suitable field when in conflict with the wickedness of men. It may not be questioned that it is often as strikingly exemplified in the conflicts which the scientific enquirer has to go through in overcoming those obstacles in nature which lie in the way of his researches. The courage displayed by Franklin in his first journey to the Polar regions, and no doubt also in his last, as well as by Parke in Africa, was equal to anything ever shown by the bravest soldier. And who can think of Columbus going forth on that strange voyage of his, with these three poor barks, without feeling convinced that there was not in all Europe a bra-