

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COURAGE.



FRENCH writer has said that every mistake made in life can be traced to fear. Though this was doubtless written more to shape an epigram than to state a fact,—and epigrams are generally regarded as jewels purchased at the expense of veracity,—yet the more we reflect upon the remark the more we are impressed with its truth.

Fear, above all things else, enfeebls the vigor of man's actions, supplants decision by vacillation, and opens the road to error. When one seeks counsel of one's fears, judgment ceases to obtrude advice.

Courage, on the other hand, is universally recognized as the manliest of all human attributes; it nerves its possessor for resolute attempts, and equips him for putting forth his supreme efforts. Powerful aristocracies have been founded with courage as the sole patent of nobility; kings have maintained their dynasties with no other virtue to commend them to their subjects. A once popular farce set forth these two opposite traits in human nature under the title of "The nervous man and the man of nerve."

Courage has so many different natures, assumes so many different forms, and is subject to so many eccentricities, that it is hard to define it. To separate it into the two grand divisions of moral courage and physical courage is a simple matter, but when the subdivisions of these are to be determined, the task is confronted with formidable difficulties.

Few men possess all the various forms of courage. One man may be utterly fearless in the most perilous storm at sea, while on land he may be afraid to travel at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour on a first-class railroad, and, sailor-like, expends his sympathies in pitying "poor unhappy folks ashore." A locomotive engineer on an Eastern railway, who was always selected for his "nerve" when a fast "special" was to be sent out, and whose courage, repeatedly displayed in appalling accidents, had become proverbial, was afraid in the quiet of his own home to go upstairs alone in the dark.

In ascending a Southern river on a steamboat, towards the close of our civil war, we had an officer on board who, during three years of fighting, had treated shot and shell in action with an indifference that made him a

marvel of courage; but on this expedition he manifested a singular fear of torpedoes, put on enough life-preservers to float an anchor, and stood at the stern of the boat ready, at the first sign of danger, to plunge into the water with the promptness of a Baptist convert. He once came very near jumping overboard at the sound of a sudden escape of steam from the boiler. He made no disguise of his nervousness at this new form of danger. I recollect a company officer of infantry who never seemed to know what the word fear meant under any circumstances until his promotion to a higher rank compelled him to mount a horse, and then his mind knew no peace. A sudden snort from the beast alarmed him more than the opening of a battery, and the pricking up of the animal's ears had more terrors for him than a bayonet charge.

These instances, though numerous, are the exceptions, not the rule. They can often be accounted for by the fact that the victim had suffered a severe fright, perhaps in childhood, which produced a permanent shock to his nerves, and made him timid ever after respecting the particular form of danger to which he had been exposed. An acquaintance of mine whose repeated acts of gallantry in the field had convinced all his comrades that he had been born without the sense of fear was seen to give a wide berth to any horned animals that came in sight. Whenever a drove of commissary's cattle were encountered on the road, he began a series of well-timed maneuvers with a view to getting a fence between himself and them in the shortest possible time. Their approach seemed to demoralize him as much as a cavalry charge of the enemy elated him. The providing of an army with "beef on the hoof" was one of the methods of military logistics which had more terrors for him than a prospect of starvation. When twitted on the subject, he one day said in explanation, that, when a child, a cow had once chased him, thrown him down, and then tossed him on her horns, and he had never recovered from the shock, or been able to banish from his mind the sense of terror the circumstance produced. It was the burned child dreading the fire.

This instinct is common to all animals. At a country station on one of our railways a pig used to be a constant visitor, and drove a thriving business in picking up stray grains of corn which dropped from the bags as they