

"Any officer of the staff who 's afraid can go back to camp." The officer at once turned his horse about, touched his hat, and with a quizzical look at his commanding officer said, "Good morning, General, I 'm afraid," and rode off to a position where he could be of just as much service and not be a party to an exhibition of recklessness. Such an act before his courage had been tested would have cost him his commission. Now he could afford to exercise the wisdom of a veteran, and no one dared question his motives.

There have been many instances which go to prove that a young soldier ought not always to be hastily sacrificed for flinching in his first engagement. Upon one occasion, during a desperate assault in which the attacking column was under a withering fire, I saw a company officer desert his men, and run to the rear, as pale as a corpse, trembling like an aspen, the picture of an abject craven. He even tore off his shoulder-straps that he might not be recognized as an officer. He heeded neither urgings nor threats; he was past all shame; he was absolutely demented. It was the more distressing because he was a man of great intelligence and possessed many good qualities. When the engagement was over, the only question seemed to be whether he should be cashiered or shot; but he begged so hard of his commanding officer to give him another trial, to grant him one more chance to redeem himself from disgrace, and gave such earnest pledges for his future conduct, that he was finally released from arrest and allowed to go into battle again with his company. He fulfilled his pledges most religiously. Wherever there was danger he was seen in the midst of it; his conduct in every subsequent fight was that of a hero; and he was finally promoted to the rank of a field officer. He had effaced the blot from his escutcheon. The man was no coward at heart; he had for the moment, in army parlance, "lost his grip" under that first murderous fire.

Boucicault, in his play called the "Relief of Lucknow," introduces the character of a young English officer fired with professional ambition, who has just joined the service, and finds himself in the beleaguered city, surrounded by rebels. He is ordered to make his way through the enemy and carry a message to the column advancing to the garrison's relief; but his heart fails him, his courage deserts him, and he turns back and stands before a brother officer a miserable poltroon. This officer brings him to a realizing sense of the wretched position in which he has placed himself, and procures him an opportunity to wipe out his disgrace. He embraces it, and afterwards becomes one of the most heroic

figures in the siege. In conversation with Mr. Boucicault, I once asked him whether this scene was founded on fact. He said it was not, that he had introduced the incident merely because he considered it dramatic, and somewhat novel in a military play. I then told him the story related above, about the company officer whose nerves were unstrung in his first encounter with danger, as confirmative of the truthfulness with which the distinguished author had held the mirror up to nature in his admirable military drama.

The cases of recovery, however, from the disease of fear are rare. Cowardice is generally a constitutional malady, and has to be recognized and dealt with as such. General Sheridan used to estimate that about twenty-five per centum of the men were lacking in the requisite courage for battle, and he at times tried to have the weak-kneed troopers singled out and assigned to hold the horses of the other men when the cavalry dismounted to fight on foot. He said we had this complement of the faint-hearted in the ranks; we could not very well deplete the forces by getting rid of them, and the only philosophical plan was to utilize them by giving them some duty which their unsoldierly nerves could stand.

A curious characteristic of fear is that it generally affects persons when death is threatened in an inverse ratio to the value of their lives. In battle an officer upon whom the fate of a command depends will risk his life generously unmoved by a sense of fear, while a shirk whose life is of no earthly use to anybody will skulk in the rear and dodge all danger. When encountering heavy weather in a sail-boat an able-bodied young fellow, with every prospect of a career of usefulness before him, often sits calmly through the danger, while some aged invalid, with one foot already in the grave, will prove himself a martyr to his fears, squirm at every lurch of the boat, and summon all hands to stand by to save him.

A sense of cowardice seems to rob a being of all his manhood. When you see a person acting the coward you may sting him with reproach, hurl at him every epithet of contempt, even cudgel him as you would a cur, and there is usually not enough manhood left in him to resent it; no sense of shame to which appeal can be made; no sensibilities to wound.

The question is often asked whether men in battle, when they break, run to the rear very fast. Usually they do not; they often do not run at all; the most provoking part of it is that they deliberately walk away; and as to reasoning with them, you might as well try to reason with lobsters when they scramble out of a basket and start for the water.