

HEROISM

In a careful examination of any object there are to be found, from a Philosophical point of view, two parts of prime importance, namely, the accidents or everything it in that falls under the senses, and the substance or essence of that object. The accidents may be easily perceived and are of relatively little importance, since they exert very little influence on the activities of that object. The substance or essence is all important. It is that principle in an object which exists and which is foundation of all the operations proper to that object. To know a body then it is above all else necessary to have a complete knowledge of its essence. In this manner heroism may be regarded from two points of view according as we consider it as that which is essential or that which is only accidental. The accidental and exterior view, which regards heroism only in its qualities and immediate effects, is a viewpoint which the world in general attempts to follow. When, however, one takes into consideration God, the ultimate end of all mankind and estimates what to Him would constitute true heroism and great deeds then one pierces the very core of heroism and arrives at the essential signification of the term.

A hero is a person who shows great courage, fortitude, bravery or some such quality in an important course of action. Heroism, then, is the sum of those great qualities in virtue of which a man becomes a hero. This is the accidental view of heroism and is, no doubt, the manner in which many would express themselves should they define these terms. Many would readily believe that these words adequately express their ideas concerning these two terms, yet they have a much more exalted idea of heroism than this. To them, a hero is a man far above the ordinary, a very superior person, in fact, almost a demi-god, and for this reason, there are many deeds heroic, at least, from the accidental point of view, which they will not consider and honour as such simply because the persons performing these deeds do not comply with their exalted and false ideas of what a hero should be. Their idea of a hero is a perfect man, and, as such, his deeds are of the highest importance and greatly to be honoured. In their minds heroism is the sum of the great qualities of that perfect man who, by reason of his perfection becomes a hero.

These are the ideals to be found in the minds of nearly all, but the popular heroes of the world today certainly do not measure up to these ideals. Such is the case not only in the present time but also for all past generations. In the heroes of past centuries, however, time has uncovered their feet of clay, until, today, we revere only those heroes, worthy to be honoured as such. In the present time there are many honoured, almost worshipped by millions, some of whom, if not precisely called heroes, yet, in the minds of those millions, are so considered. This being so, we might expect that their deeds should be heroic, that they might, at least, have some of the heroic qualities, but for many of them this is not the case. The vast multitude often seem to forget those false and puritanical ideals of theirs, or, at least, are easily led astray in choosing the objects of them while by a sort of mob madness, they are influenced to honour certain persons. Money, notoriety, publicity, and sometimes even a chance appeal to public fancy lead people to honour such persons. Actors, authors of frivolous works, winners of silly endurance contests, very few worthy of being lionized, yet all ever in the public eye, are honoured for shorter or longer periods, and are placed in the same category with the mighty heroes of old. It is not to be denied that there are some who, as heroes, are worthy of every honour which they may, and do receive. These however are greatly outnumbered by the so-called heroes who are unworthy of their honours, and also by those, who certainly are heroes, whose deeds without doubt are heroic but who are not recognized as heroes by mankind because their character and lives can never conform with those false ideals of humanity. The reasons for such conditions are founded not only in the loftiness of ideals respecting heroism but also in the fact that many persons very seldom make use of these standards to ascertain whether that person whom they would honour measures up to them. Man is always the idealist, always the dreamer, always seeking perfection in all things. Be his condition in life ever so low, even if all hope and ambition should be crushed, yet there always remains to him a mental picture of some perfect man, whom he would like to be, leading an almost impossibly perfect life. Idealism is a most consoling quality found in all men, a quality enabling man to endure life with all

its suffering and disappointment since it raises him above the hard realities of life and causes him to forget them in his admiration of others. The object therefore of his idealism is something far above the ordinary, in many cases, something even fantastic. From the very fact that his ideals are so exalted, it follows that he will not regard as a hero any person of his own class, but will seek that mythical hero of his, a person far removed from himself both in character and environment. Sometimes a person arises whose deeds, heroic or not, appeal to the popular fancy, who is at once acclaimed far and wide without any deep inquiry into his character and deeds as to whether they conform with the popular ideal. As a result, there are many popular idols, more honoured than those who are more truly considered as heroes, whose deeds, character, and lives make them not at all worthy of such honour.

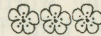
Heroism so far has been considered from an accidental point of view and also as it is falsely accepted by mankind. Now, the true, essential meaning of heroism will be considered. Heroism, from this point of view, is not incompatible with any walk of life nor with any deed which is not shameful or wrong, whether, from a temporal aspect, this deed is heroic or not. True heroism is found in that person who thinks of God first and who strives to exercise his capacities in accordance with the Divine decrees, in him who tries continually to perform his duty to God, to himself, and to his neighbour, according to the dictates of his conscience. It is simply the quality of being good. At first glance, this may seem paradoxical yet it is true, for, after all, heroism is only a quality of greatness in a person, exhibited particularly in his great deeds, and what deeds can be greater or more heroic than those which appeal to God, and which He has expressly designated as good and great? This then is the best, the truest and the most perfect type of heroism. It is based primarily on the faculty of will power, in virtue of which all the other good qualities are developed, which, summed up, constitute that one great quality, heroism. In this life, the deeds of such a hero may not be considered heroic. He may not be thought of as a hero either by himself or by others but, nevertheless, to God at least he is a hero, for he is daily committing great deeds and carrying on successfully that most important and life-long war of all

humanity against its threefold enemy. Since then, in regard to the ultimate end of man, which is God, this type of heroism alone is of importance, this alone is true heroism and heroism from the worldly point of view is a most wretched imitation of this only true heroism. The deeds of such heroes, considered one by one, may not be of great importance, but, nevertheless, the constant repetition of these deeds calling forth, as they do, all the reserve forces of the character should be objects of admiration for all men.

There are many reasons why such deeds do not receive from men the merit which is their due. Modesty is an important quality of true heroism which has not potentialities for those spectacular deeds which appeal to the popular imagination. In true heroism there is intrinsic worth without extrinsic show. Man, as a rule, does not seek so much the worth in anything as that which appeals to him and thus he admires spectacular deeds without considering their true worth. Many, through ignorance or lack of thought, do not recognize the true worth of such heroism. Again, there are many who act as though there were no hereafter, who plan and live their lives with no regard for other than their own selfish interests. They would, as a rule, look upon such heroism as foolishness. Many, though realizing the great qualities and true worth of such heroes, simply cannot admire them. To them such heroes seem too commonplace, too much like themselves to be honoured. They cannot appreciate the fact that often in an ordinary person without anything suggesting romance of heroism lies a character, greater and nobler than that of some of the most vaunted heroes. These people can idolize only those who, like great comets, flash across their horizon, dazzling them with their surrounding halo of fame and glory and at that their admiration is very short-lived. And perhaps, after all, it is only according to the Divine plan that seldom in this life should such heroes be rewarded for their truly great deeds, that, in the end, their reward may be all the greater.

These then are the two main types of heroism, the one blaring, spectacular, appealing to everyone, the other, quiet, humble, truer type, found in many, recognized by only a few. Even were the latter more widely known, it would not be greatly revered for, since it seldom blos-

soms forth in great deeds which in the public eye are the first requirements for heroism, to know is not to admire it. Yet, one can forgive mankind for seeking and admiring a less worthy type. Man is a born hero-worshipper, seeking in others what he has not in himself. To him, hero-worshipping is a game in which there is no harm for himself and certainly not for others, a game which supplies an outlet for his enthusiasm and relieves the monotony of the daily grind of his life. Nevertheless, there is a higher, a truer form of heroism, which the world should admire and attempt to follow, heroism which leads not to earthly honour and reward, but to that final happiness to which man was ordained. Whenever mankind does begin to practice that heroism, then the millenium will have arrived and man will have attained the greatest happiness that is reserved for him in this life.



I have read somewhere or other, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, I think, that History is Philosophy teaching by examples.—*Bolingbroke*.

Every absurdity has a champion to defend it, for error is always talkative.—*Goldsmith*.

Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remain'd to pray.
—*Goldsmith*

It is easier to go six miles to hear a sermon, than to spend one quarter of an hour in meditating on it when I come home.—*Philip Henry*.

