

in hand and control them, and this implies a great step forward in the moulding of character. It has even been held that, with this last purpose in view, people should seek out dangers and difficulties, not, of course, to the limits of foolhardiness, for that would be overstepping the balance of reason or, as we might say, of thought. How much greater still and more ennobling the result when dangers are willingly met under a great moral conviction within oneself and acting from out of free will, and, it may be, demanding the highest sacrifice possible. Herein lies surely the education of the will by the spirit itself, and a courage very near to genius is sometimes the result—a courage inspired. It is a gift of the spirit, this courage "never to submit or yield," a crusading courage; and those crusaders of ours in sea and land and air—do they not seem to revive again for us the old spirit of the crusading ages? They have conquered the elements, they have conquered themselves and shall they not conquer what is evil and wrong? In putting comparison between our time and that of the Crusades, might we not draw an analogy farther when we see the Sisters of the great Nursing Services in their distinctive uniforms (that we have learnt to associate with fine traditions from the days of the Crimea onwards) and recognise their prototypes in such as Agnes of Rome, in the very early days of the Crusades, Ubaldesca in Acre, the beautiful Queen Eleanor of Castile (wife of Edward I of England), in Palestine, and others who cared for the wounded in those times of old, with their very primitive methods of nursing?

#### What Courage Comprises.

It is interesting to consider how many virtues and qualities are linked up with courage. Dr. Johnson once remarked that, unless a man has courage he has no security for preserving the other virtues. Beauty is one of the aspects that has, in very many instances, been brought into being by courage; how many a dazzling and glorious tale of heroism adorns our literature because of the light these have brought to poets, artists and others who have had the imagination to recreate them in great word pictures or in other ways. Generosity of the highest order, even to the heights of the supreme sacrifice, goes hand in hand with courage. Then alertness, intelligence, patience, endurance, even imagination itself and many other qualities and gifts—are they not all living in acts of heroism as developed by those who possess courage? There is indeed sound wisdom in the remark of the learned lexicographer we have quoted, and it may seem to some that we are creating an antithesis when we quote alongside it the words of Sir James Barrie, but the one remark is a complement, not an antithesis, to the other. When he spoke to the youth of St. Andrews University, Barrie said: "All goes if courage goes." Courage makes its owner equal to each problem as it arises, and, if it does not always follow that he conquers his difficulties, at least he will find it a good staff for his journey, especially when it is developed *in* him and not imposed *upon* him.

#### A Great Possession.

We remember an incident that happened once to someone overburdened with calamity and sorrow. In her grief and despair she went to a great philosopher, a great Christian gentleman, to seek counsel or comfort. He listened to what she had to say of the shattering events that had come upon her, listened to her silently, with calm sympathy and quiet kindness. Then he replied in just four words that, she afterwards said, seemed to transform her outlook in the space of a moment—"But *you have courage*." The words implied that she had still left one priceless possession that would be hers all the way—her courage. Henceforth if she would not exactly "greet the unseen with a cheer" yet she found that she had a staff to take her way among life's wreckage which, till now, she had unconsciously overlooked—her courage.

The will at the present stage of evolution is, to a great extent, still not fully awake, but courage can rouse it, as nothing else can, and reveal to man what he really is. Over the temples of ancient Egypt appeared the words "O man, know thou thyself." Some seek to follow the mandate and perhaps grow depressingly censorious of themselves or of others. But, in courage, we have a kind of "candle of vision" that must bring comfort to those who despair of human nature at times and inspire them to give heed to the lesson of the ancients. Every day, in this time of testing, the higher personality, the true ego, shines forth and shows how self can not merely be renounced but forgotten; the spirit triumphs over muscle and bone, over herd instincts and self-aggrandisement too. So many of our members' lives must seem overshadowed by sadness at the present time, either by the loss of dear ones or by witnessing the sufferings of those whom it is their privilege to succour; they might well add to their thoughts of sadness the words "But *I have courage*."

#### A MEMBER'S EXPERIENCE ON THE "ATHENIA."

While we were at tea on a Sunday afternoon recently, one of our Australian members (Mrs. Aimée Estrella Edgecombe, *nee* Buckhurst) came in and, as we were talking of the events of the war, it transpired that she had been a passenger on board the ill-fated *Athenia*. We begged her to tell us something of her experiences, and a thrilling story these made, despite the quiet and matter-of-fact manner in which they were related.

Mrs. Edgecombe had set out on her return to Australia and, for the first few hours after the ship left Liverpool, the journey promised to be as pleasant as could be expected under existing circumstances. But, when the ship had proceeded some 300 miles and while the passengers were at dinner, there came suddenly the noise of the impact of the torpedo; lights fused, the saloon was put into darkness, and furniture, cutlery and the like were thrown in all directions. Then followed the loud explosion of the shell. Passengers struggled to keep their feet as the vessel listed, and Mrs. Edgecombe made a suggestion—at once adopted—that all should join hands and those nearest to the staircase of the dining saloon would lead the others up this. So gradually, in orderly manner, the procession went on towards the second deck. A slight panic threatened among those at the back of the saloon, and immediately there came from the staircase end the steady tones of a woman's voice—"Fear not, God is with us." The effect was instantaneous. In a moment all was going on again, according to arrangement, in calmness and silence.

Mrs. Edgecombe told us how, at the top of the staircase, she linked the hands of the passengers on either side of herself and set out in the darkness to feel her way to her cabin, where she got a warm coat and her lifebelt and started to feel her way back again; as she got near to the end of the alley a steward opened a door which let in light, and she was able the more quickly to find her way to her boat station, where already many passengers had been transferred to a lifeboat. She entered this boat with about 40 others and it pulled off after some difficulty with the ropes. In the boat were three men who could row; one of these acted as coxswain and each of the others took an oar. Two women also took oars and Mrs. Edgecombe a fifth, with which she was able to give some little assistance in keeping the boat adrift and thus from being sucked down in the wake of the sinking *Athenia*. Throughout the long eight to ten hours the boat was rising and falling on a somewhat choppy sea, and Mrs. Edgecombe says she will never forget all the experiences of that night, which we can well believe. What, she says, impressed her most was the silence of the women and their great courage.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)