

Heroism ...

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Yes, heroism of the loftiest kind people have known in their ancient and modern history, resting on that greatness which all people love, and in which all people find comfort, which stirs admiration in the hearts of great men, and stirs love and affection in the hearts of the humble, and surrounds its possessor with a clear, pure atmosphere of people's esteem for him, their devotion in loving him, and their taking him as the supreme model for everything that perfects the manhood of a great man — heroism of the loftiest kind people have known.

This is the heroism that distinguished King Albert, the martyr of the Belgians, the day before yesterday; for he lived the life of a hero, and died the death of a hero, and people will speak, until the end of time, of his great life, just as people will speak, until the end of time, of his great death.

Every person is liable to suffer what King Albert suffered — for his foot to slip, for him to plunge from the peak to the depths, and for death to overtake him in the midst of it — but kings are rarely exposed to what befell this king; for you may search among kings and presidents, indeed among leaders and lords and noble and wealthy men, for those who go out to exercise alone, unsurrounded by retinue, unattended by followers, unprecedented by vanguards, unfollowed by reinforcements.

You may search for this man of standing who goes out to exercise with no one but a servant, who goes out to exercise driving his car, who reaches the place of his exercise and leaves his servant with the car, and climbs the mountain alone and unaccompanied, just as the least of men, the slightest of consequence, climbs a mountain; and he goes on climbing alone and unaccompanied until he looks out from the summit, and then his foot slips, and death overtakes him, alone and unaccompanied as well; and then his servant, finding him delayed, calls on the police and others to search for him.

And people go on searching and probing until they find his small, great body lying somewhere below, and they carry him as one carries a small body, and bring him back to the king's palace as the humblest of people bring back the humblest of people to the humblest of houses and

huts.

A great death for a great man, a death that shows to what degree the souls of some men rise above the adornments of life, and the false displays of majesty within it, until they come to scorn the adornments of life and the false displays of majesty, and arrive, at last, at the life that deserves to be called by that name, and attain the majesty that deserves to be called majesty.

A great death for a great man, a death that shows to what degree a simple, unassuming philosophy can raise the souls of some men, stripping them of everything to which people cling, and lifting them to where people are not accustomed to rise, until it brings them, in the end, to equality in life in the most exact sense of equality, and then to that other equality which all people believe in, and in which they admit neither discussion nor dispute, because it is too plain and too evident to bear discussion or dispute — indeed, they do not even like to mention it, or to speak of it: equality before death.

A great death for a great man, a death that shows this hero to have made himself equal, in life, with other people, because he knew, and understood, that nature had made him their equal in death, and was not deceived by those transient conditions and appearances that gave him, among people, during his life, a privileged standing and an exalted place; indeed, he placed his trust, rather, in those eternal, higher truths that set him apart from other people by his keen heart, his gracious character, his superior forbearance, his patience unlike any other patience, and his steadfastness unmatched by any other steadfastness.

This man rose to the throne of Belgium, and no sooner had he settled upon it than his whole life was given over entirely to his people, and his soul readily gave up for this people's sake what other people's souls would not readily give up; he worked for nothing but his people, thought of nothing but them, found joy only in seeing them joyful, found peace only in seeing them at peace of mind. Life, then, was a life of peace, and so he walked the paths of peace in serving his people, until the people sensed the approach of war, when he prepared for war, and strove to strengthen his people and ready them to meet the disaster, should it come; and when war did come, it found in him no negligent man, no idle man, no man who fell short. Nor did it find, in particular, a self-seeking man, nor a hesitant one, nor a weak one, nor one who held dignity cheap, nor one careless of what virtue demands of free,

independent nations in the way of valor and sacrifice for the noble defense of freedom and independence.

And those who remember the early days of the Great War remember, at the same time, the admiration that filled their hearts for this man, who was neither ignorant nor vain, who gauged his people's strength and measured it against Germany's strength, and who knew full well that he was too weak to withstand this enemy whose power knew no bounds; and yet he did not weaken, did not surrender, thought of nothing but honor and dignity, never weighed dignity against advantage, and never doubted the strength of right, even when it appeared weak, nor the weakness of wrong, even when it appeared strong.

Yes, those who remember the early days of the war remember that firm, blazing language with which this king used to speak to his insolent enemy, as he called it, and to his noble nation, as he called it; and those who remember the war remember, with it, how patiently this man bore disasters, how steadfastly he withstood calamities, how the enemy's victories never drove him to despair, how the ally's defeats never drove him to hopelessness, how his heart filled with faith in right, so that his soul rushed to sacrifice for the sake of right, and how he gave himself — indeed, how he kept giving himself, every hour of the war, as a ransom for his people — and how he stood his ground, on what remained to him of his homeland's soil, weak in appearance but strong in truth, defeated in appearance but victorious in truth: victorious not over Germany alone, victorious not over Germany and its allies alone, victorious not merely over those disasters and calamities that surrounded him and assailed him from time to time, but victorious over the whole world, and over the whole of humanity; for he had triumphed over himself, and taught it how to rise above events, how to rise above calamities, and how to leave no way in to despair or doubt.

Then the war ends, and victory is granted to this king and his allies, and he returns to his royal capital triumphant and noble; victory does not make him haughty, triumph does not make him vain, and he covets, from his people or from anyone else, neither honor, nor reverence, nor reward, nor anything resembling reward, for all that he bore and all that he sacrificed, and for his excellent service to the homeland; for he did not believe he had done more than fulfill his national duty, just as any other member of the people fulfilled it. He bore the burdens of war only as long as war lasted; and once its fire went out, he took up the works of peace, as kings ought to take up the burdens of peace. He had been weary and

worn during the war, but he did not rest, and did not grow still, in the times of peace; he merely exchanged one weariness for another, one toil for another, one hardship for another, and he never wearied himself for his own sake, nor toiled for it, nor thought of it; his weariness, his toil, and his thought, in war and in peace alike, were for his people, and for his people alone.

Those who remember the Great War will not forget King Albert's valor, and those who remember peacetime will not forget King Albert's devotion to his people, and his aid to them in every branch of life. He was, between the political parties, as fine an arbiter as an arbiter could be — just, fair, free of self-interest, and above rivalry. He was as fine a patron of learning and letters as a patron of learning and letters could be, encouraging scholars and writers to research and produce, tempting them toward research, tempting them toward production, creating for them means of support they had not expected to obtain; he granted them of his own money, and granted them, by appeal, of other people's money too, calling upon others to give, and he did not shrink from standing as an advocate for subscriptions to aid learning and letters, not only in his country, but in every cultured, civilized land.

It is no wonder that a king like this king should win the love the people bore him, and their devotion to him. I visited Belgium more than ten years ago, and arrived there on the very day the Belgians were celebrating the king's birthday, and I have described elsewhere what filled me with admiration at the Belgian people's love for their king, and the Belgian people's joy in their king's feast day.

This feast was not the king's feast, nor was it, taken as a whole, the people's feast; it was, rather, a feast for every single member of the people — a feast in every household, a feast in every place, a feast sincere and wholehearted. I saw him, when he had invited the members of the Historical Congress to his palace; and when he had received them all, as kings are received, shaking their hands, and offering each of them a word of the usual courtesy, I looked, and found all the delegates together in a single room around tea, and the king and his family among them, just as you or I might be among the guests, moving from place to place: speaking to this one, then speaking to that one, then lingering in conversation with whichever scholars he knew — and how many of them he knew! — and cutting the conversation short, gently, with those he had not known before, finding, in any case, something to say, and receiving, in any case, with grace, kindness, and warmth, whatever he heard,

whoever said it. There I learned that monarchy can truly suit democracy; there I learned that monarchy need not be what some Europeans portray it to be.

It need not be that thing which refuses to evolve, and resists the progress of life — but rather a thing that suits the advancement of people, the advancement of their minds, their hearts, their feelings, and their need for freedom and equality; and there I learned that monarchy of this kind is not, as its adversaries say, a relic of past centuries, but a system capable of life, and capable of a fruitful, productive, useful survival.

And there I learned what the love of free European peoples for their kings can be, and what the love of kings for their peoples can be, and how a European throne could stand firm while the thrones of Europe collapsed around it after the Great War.

King Albert was a worthy example, a good model, not for his people alone, but for his whole family as well; people remember how his granddaughter — the wife of the crown prince, and Belgium's queen tomorrow — used to go out to walk her son, pushing his little carriage just as any woman of the people pushes her little son's carriage.

This calamity that has befallen the great Belgian people, in their great king, is no light thing; for it is not confined to Belgium alone, but is a calamity for the whole of humanity, in one of the supreme models of the truly perfect human being. May God grant the Belgian royal family fitting consolation for their leader; may God grant Belgium fitting consolation for its great man; may God grant humanity fitting consolation for this eternal, supreme model.