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THE CATHOLIC HOUR

PATRIOTISM BREEDS HEROES

BY

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PATRIOTISM BREEDS HEROES

A pagan poet once said: It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. None of us would challenge this statement. America has never lacked heroes who would die for the land of their birth. We were born in a bloody war of independence. The plains of Saratoga were consecrated by the death of brave men. The soil of Yorktown was hallowed by the triumph of our armies. We revere the name of Washington who led the forces of freedom through bitter and lonely days. We think of the martyr president, Abraham Lincoln, who died that the nation might be one. Above all, we honor the common man, the unknown soldier who was not to know fame, but who did know greatness. Many of our sons lie in foreign soil—in the Philippines, in France, in Africa—our airmen shot down over Germany and Italy and China—but though their honored remains are far from us, they are enshrined in our hearts.

There are heroes at home, too. Words of praise cannot express our debt to the wives and mothers who remain behind. Their courage is an inspiration to their loved ones in the field. Their burden of loneliness and anxiety is not light, but they do not complain. Strong of heart, like the valiant women of

all times, they have given everything and have claimed nothing for themselves. As the Virgin Mary on the Mount of Calvary consoled her dying Son, so they have been a comfort to the afflicted and a source of strength to those who are fainting by the way.

We honor the old who have returned to work, though they know it often means to them a literal sentence of death. There are doctors wearing themselves out in the service of the sick, to replace the younger men in the service. Nurses have returned to duty after years of home life. Other women have gone into our war plants and shipyards, living a life which is often hard and trying. Capital and labor, with few exceptions, have given without stint in the service of their country. Business men and workers have sacrificed the work of a lifetime, because their country asked this. Anyone close to the heart of wartime America must testify that this heart is great. We do love our native land. We will give, and give, and give again when our country asks of us. The spirit of our fathers is not dead within us. Honor and nobility dwell in our midst.

It is good to be able to say that

Americans will refuse nothing when the welfare of the nation is at stake. If ever we have failed, then it is because we did not see clearly; it was not that we shirked the burden. We may not have realized what our country demanded of us. Had we known it, we would have done it. Blindness, not malice, was our fault.

Yet, good will is not always enough. There are certain errors which are fatal. In good faith we may take poison, when we thought it was medicine. A hidden defect in our car may one day cause a fatal wreck. So it is with our country. Through ignorance, a loyal citizen may do it great harm. At times the nation may survive, but at other times, the damage cannot be undone. The cause is lost. Freedom has perished. Thus it was with France during the years between two great wars. In those days, the nation was divided. Quarrelling groups insisted that their course was the only one. Some of these were selfish. A few put personal interest above national honor. But we may be sure that most have repented with tears the mistakes which left a nation weak and divided in the face of the conqueror. At the time they thought that labor, or capital, or some political party was the enemy. Their strength was dissipated in the struggle against their

brothers, and when the invader came, they could no longer act as one. Once they said that these were honest differences among good men. Now they know that a divided people cannot defend itself.

Germany and Italy also traveled the same road. Their citizens were much concerned with the problems of the moment. Capital feared the growing might of labor. The unemployed cast desperately about for an avenue of hope. Farmers and middlemen found themselves crushed between big business and organized labor. As a result, all welcomed the new party which promised everything. They put on black shirts or brown shirts, practiced the party salute, and waited for a perfect world to come about. Today they have learned a hard and bitter lesson. Over the graves of their fallen sons and brothers they shed tears of sorrow and repentance. But the damage has been done.

The lesson is clear. There are problems of peace which are just as critical as the decisions made at war. A nation can perish from within as well as from without. Failure to meet great issues may be as disastrous as failure to prepare for attack by an enemy. Indeed, it is often more dangerous to be unprepared for peace than it is to be unarmed before the invader. Attack from without may

strengthen and unify a nation. Disruption from within kills the soul. The first is dramatic and clear. It brings forth hidden strength and provokes supreme effort. The second is confusing and deadening. It leads to apathy and despair. From the one a people may arise purified and strengthened. From the other, they may emerge debased and enslaved.

This, then, we may learn from Europe between wars: A nation at peace may face greater dangers than a nation at war. A higher patriotism is often needed to prevent disunity at home than invasion from abroad. When a nation is attacked, the issue is clear. All differences disappear before the common peril. But with the problems at home, the issues are often most confused. The more serious the question the greater the danger of division and dissension. Good men and patriotic men may feel it their duty to oppose their fellow citizens. Debate and compromise may result, when dramatic and definite steps are vitally needed. Here is a supreme test of good-will. Our nation may face it before many years are past.

There are deep cleavages in America which could lead to dangerous divisions. Even in time of war, we are painfully aware of the struggle between capital and labor, farm and city, government

and some of its citizens. Three times during this war there have been major campaigns against organized labor. First, it was the strike question; then the forty-hour week; and finally, the problem of absenteeism. While these campaigns were on, a stranger might have found it difficult to discover who was our enemy, Hitler and Tojo, or the American workman. While these minor wars were being waged, sensible persons advised caution. Each time they pointed to production figures to show that these attacks were based on wild exaggerations. Eventually the attacks died down and we heard nothing more about them. But the damage they did was great. They produced bitterness, and class cleavages will persist for many years to come. They turned our soldiers against organized labor at the very time that production totals were unbelievably high. For example, when our President set as a goal for airplane production the figure of fifty thousand planes a year, his statement was dismissed as fantastic. Many good people pardoned it as a war stratagem designed to deceive the enemy. Yet today we are almost doubling this impossible goal, and that in an industry which some consider one of our less efficient war industries. How then can we say that labor has not done

its part? or that capital is more interested in profits than production?

Equally dangerous is the setting of the farm against city. The farmer has had real problems during this war. He has seen a great migration of farm workers into the war plants, and this at a time when production goals were set higher than ever. In spite of these difficulties he has done his patriotic duty to the full. Incidentally, he has been making profits. But none will begrudge him this. Had things stopped here, there would have been no problem. But some busybodies felt that they could spare the time and energy to stir up the farmer against labor. They painted wild pictures of war wages, conveniently overlooking the costs of city living. Thus they would incite the farmer to seek unreasonable profits. They claimed that he should be exempt from the common struggle against inflation. As a result, unregulated food costs for a time threatened the entire economic structure of the nation. Here are the seeds of a dangerous class struggle.

There are other serious cleavages in America today. Thus there have been attempts to set one group of taxpayers against another, or against the government. There are complaints of impossible demands made upon our citizens. It is true

that taxes are high. But war is always costly, and this war is most expensive. Our pocketbooks have hurt, but other nations have borne greater sacrifices. Our taxes are much less than those of England and Canada. We are paying but thirty per cent of the cost of the war: They are paying over half. Are we less patriotic than they? Of course not! The average American may grumble a bit, but he will do his part.

Cleavage and disunity do not spring naturally from the heart of the common man. He is not complaining or reviling his fellow citizens. Our differences are rather the work of a few troublemakers, unwilling to adjourn private wars in the hour of peril. They are seeking political gain or promoting class interests, sowing confusion and doubt and distrust at a time when unity is imperative. They are weakening us as we face the fearful problems of peace, when millions of workers must return to private industry. If America is to survive the next ten years, it must be united as never before. The greatest crises of our history lie before us. Are we to meet them with capital in arms against labor? soldiers against civilians? farm in opposition to city? promoting disunity would be treason in time of war, for it might lead to the loss of a battle or a campaign. But

what of disunity which might lead to the loss of our country? We do not wish to be alarmists, but we cannot forget the formula which led to the rise of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe. It was a simple mixture—a great crisis, plus a divided nation.

Today, then, and tomorrow we need an even greater patriotism than we have shown in these days of war. We need unity in the face of the difficult social and economic problems which our nation must solve. Labor, capital, farm, and city must work together for the survival of a free America. Name-calling and selfishness will not accomplish this task; they will only lead to ruin. We must work together, submerging our differences in our devotion to the common cause. Unity must be real, not merely lip service to a name. It must mean a genuine effort to see the entire picture, to learn others' points of view first-hand, not by reading about them in our newspapers, or hearing them in our clubs. Furthermore, it means practicing unity now, each in our own community. May we offer one practical suggestion as a means of starting the practice of unity? What of a program like this: Businessmen in every city and town to have informal meetings at lunch with labor leaders. Farm leaders might well sit in at the

same table. At the same time service clubs and other luncheon groups would invite speakers to give a different point of view from the usual class picture. In these face-to-face gatherings differences could be ironed out in a friendly, open fashion, not left to bitter, heated controversy. When this is tried, and it has been tried in some parts of the land, then the results could be amazing. We would find out that the other man is a human being, a patriotic citizen, a reasonable type of person. Prejudices and misunderstanding would melt away like ice on a summer pavement. Some differences would remain, but nothing which could not be settled by reasonable compromise. And, above all, a great lesson in practical democracy and patriotism would be taught. We would learn how to work together by the only way it can be learned—by practice. This would be real patriotism.

Let us repeat: America faces its most critical hour, not in winning the war, but in saving the peace. It is the hardest problem we have ever faced. Divided, we cannot solve it. United, we shall be invincible. Here is the challenge to our patriotism, our love of country, which is second only to love of God. Here is the real test of that primary virtue of charity. We are a strong nation. Never have we

failed to meet a crisis. But now is the time for greatness. It is the day for heroism. For the love of our great nation, let us keep the sacred trust which has been given

to us—let us walk united, one people, dedicated to the cause of freedom and justice. May God give us this grace, that together we may honor His Holy Name.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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