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HERITAGE OF THE INDIAN

Now and then we are greatly impressed by people and their achievements. Those things which are above the ordinary are truly worthy of our most serious consideration. The article above-named is reprinted from *The Indian Leader* of Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas, and was given as an address to the students of Haskell. Its author is Miss Ruth Muskrat, who is undoubtedly a most able young lady. We suggest that our readers give heed to this article, for to them all it has unusual significance. The article follows:

This is the first day of the New Year. There is no better time than this for us who are of the Indian race to pause and take stock of ourselves. There is no better time than this to ask ourselves what we are going to do with the great racial heritage that has been handed down to us by your forefathers. I know that you have been told you are the hope of the Indian race so often that you are tired of hearing the phrase. And the statement that our generation is responsible for the future of the Indian race has been repeated so many times that it has become a truism. But these two statements are the very things I am going to ask you to consider this morning. We can not hear them too often or consider them too seriously. For they are true. We are the hope of the Indian race! And on the shoulders of this generation of the Indian youth does rest the responsibility and glory of our race. I know of no better way to put it than to use just those words that you have heard so often, and come, it seems to me, to think about so little. The realization of this great responsibility ought to overshadow every action of our lives. It ought to color every waking thought we have or every action that we take with the fire of its challenge. And yet I wonder if it does?

I do not need to recall to you the history of our race. Every Indian youth knows, or ought to know, the heritage of greatness and nobility that has been handed down to us by our Indian forebears. You know the story of King Philip, that great warrior with his superb pride and his dauntless courage. Hemmed on every side by a people and a civilization he could not understand, betrayed by the friends he loved, forsaken even by the very ones he sought to defend, his home destroyed, his family wiped out, nothing but death facing him, still he fought bravely to the end without one thought of giving up the fight. He was not fighting for himself, for what life had left for him now, but he fought for the people who were his own and whom he loved. What a heritage of devotion there is for us in his life alone! What a heritage of courage and fearlessness.

There are hundreds of such examples. Noble leaders who saw the crises of their time and arose nobly to meet them. Another kind of hero, but a less great one, is Sequoyah who dared to accomplish the task he set for himself in spite of the jeers of the very people who should have been the first to encourage him. Sometimes in these days you and I are afraid to stand out for an issue in which we really believe, down in our secret hearts, because we are not strong enough to face the criticism of our associates. Listen to this story of Sequoyah. He was a comparatively young man when he first conceived his dream of a Cherokee alphabet. He had been a very skillful warrior, and a very popular youth among his tribesmen. But when he left off these lesser things to follow the path of his great dream he lost his popularity. Oftentimes that is the price a dreamer has to pay if he would make his dream come true. Sequoyah's friends jeered at him and called him a fool. Even his wife declared him to be crazy or possessed by a devil. Yet for ten long years Sequoyah labored at his task, heedless of the laughter and the mocking of his friends. Then one day, at the end of those ten years, his wife, in a rage of impatience with this husband whom she could not understand, burned all of his manuscripts and his records, the fruits of ten hard years of patient labor. In the face of even this devastating calamity Sequoyah did not give up. He started all over again, and this time with such earnestness that at the end of three years he had his alphabet completed much more perfectly than it had ever been before. It is said that no alphabet in all the history of mankind is more perfect than this invented by one Indian man, and that any Cherokee who speaks this language may learn to read and write it in four or five hours of hard study.

Sequoyah's struggles were not ended with the completion of his alphabet. The first thing he did was to teach his little daughter to read; and then the whole tribe began to cry out that the man was a witch; that he had bewitched his own child and that both of them must be burned at the stake. There was a long trial by the members of the council, and at last it was decided to call in some of the younger warriors from a neighboring town to sit in judgment on this man who had just offered such a priceless gift to his people. "For," said the old chief, "it may be that he is inspired by the Great Spirit and not by the evil ones." The young men sat in judgment. They proposed as a test that Sequoyah should teach his jurors to read and write his alphabet. He had only a few hours allowed to him for this great task but he succeeded, and in this way the Cherokee alphabet was given to

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