

## HERITAGE OF THE INDIAN

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the world. What a heritage of perseverance his life is for all of us Indians who belong to this generation! What a vision for us to follow! What an example of patience and courage.

I do not think it was an accident that our past history is so replete with the lives of great men. Deep within the heart of our race must have been implanted a spiritual vision and a nobility of soul that produced great leaders! I believe that same nobility of soul, that same spiritual vision, still lives in the heart of the Indian race to-day!

But I am afraid that too often we allow it to lie dormant, buried deep beneath a load of trivial and unimportant things. You and I have a great heritage. But even a great heritage can be cast aside and trampled in the dust. Ours is the challenge and the responsibility to see that this does not happen to our race. Ours is the privilege of carrying forward the great past of our forebears. How are we going to discharge that responsibility?

I have believed for a long while that the Indian race is now at the greatest crisis in all its history! I believed we must literally live or die on the merits of the present generation. If we can prove our fitness to live, we shall survive as a race. If we can not, then we shall be condemned to a slow death and nothing except a tradition of our past shall be left to the world. You know that the old life has gone. And you know that already, whether we wish it or not, a new life has come to take its place. And you and I must either go forward on that new life or we must go backward. We can not stand still. We have a greater task ahead of us than any warrior kinsman of ours who ever lived! Ours is a greater challenge than any war cry ever sounded before in all the history of our race! For we must lead our people back into their ancient heritage of greatness. We must blaze new trails for a newer and greater glory. We must find the way for our race to come back once more into economic independence; back out of the stagnation of idleness and decay into which these centuries of dependence have plunged us. All of this is before us to do in spite of new and changing conditions. It is no easy task! Compared to this—the ancient warpath was an easy trail to follow! It is an easy thing, under the impulse of excitement and encouragement of war, to go out and die on the field of battle to save your people by this one act of bravery, compared to the strenuous job of living day after day to the level of the highest that is in you! And that is the kind of living you and I are called on to do. Because we are a small group, in the midst of an alien civilization, the focus of all eyes are centered upon us. Every success we make, every failure we make, is conspicuous. Because we are such a small group, no Indian boy or girl has a right to be a failure, for by failing we not only pull ourselves down, but we pull down our whole race. Everywhere people are looking to us, watching to see how we are discharging these responsibilities of ours. As I traveled over the country, time and again I have been asked these questions: "Does it pay to educate an Indian?" "Does the Indian boy or girl take advantage of opportunities

if they were offered them?" "Do the Indian people have any sense of responsibility toward his own race?" Those are fair questions! We are still a race of people with a reputation to make. People have a right to ask those questions of us. And how they are to be answered depends entirely upon you and me.

If our task is harder than our forefathers faced, we have also greater advantages for facing it. Our ancestors had only the traditions of their own tribe to help them look into the future. You and I not only have the past of the whole Indian race at our command, but we have all the civilizations of all the world to teach us. Greece and Rome, Egypt and ancient Assyria, Babylona and Palestine, all the past experiences of the whole human race is ours to glean wisdom from, if we but care to look into it. We have the golden key to unlock the treasure house of all the world. Any Indian boy or girl who wants it bad enough may have all the rich treasures of an education. Ought not our future history be far greater than any past record of the race? Would you not much prefer to live in this age and this generation with its rare privileges and its responsibilities? Your race needs the best that is in you. And it needs you more than it has ever needed you in the past or may ever need you again.

"Who knows but that thou art come into the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I do not know of any way we can face up to our responsibility as members of the Indian race, except as each individual of us resolves in our hearts to give to the world the highest and the best we have. After all, it is an individual matter. We can not all get together and vote to make the Indian race great and noble by popular ballot. It has to be done by the quiet and earnest living of every individual member of that race. And I wish that the resolution each and every one of us could make at this New Year, would be to let no action of ours dim in any way the bright heritage of our past. A great race must be made up of great individuals. And if we would be a great race we must put our minds to the difficult task of living greatly. There are many things along this life which I believe we Indians need especially to think about. One of the things we need most to learn is to put first things first. Once in the city of Tulsa I passed along the street where some new buildings were being erected. There among the scaffolding I saw a poor old woman picking up the chips and waste pieces of lumber to carry home for her fire. How often we are like that! We give good straight fine logs of our life to unimportant things, and leave the chips and the waste pieces to keep the fire of our existence burning! Our days here at school are crowded full of vital, rich opportunities, and yet how many of us let those opportunities slide by unclaimed and fritter our time away on unimportant things.

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