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A LETTER FROM TILlich

By ROBERT E. L. STRIDER, II

IN early May of 1950 Dr. Paul Tillich spent an evening in New London, Connecticut, at the home of President Rosemary Park of Connecticut College, where I was at the time an instructor in English. Some fifteen to twenty faculty members were invited in to hear Dr. Tillich read a paper entitled "Anxiety and Guilt in Religion and Psychotherapy." A thoughtful and highly suggestive paper, it provoked a lively discussion. Indeed, the discussion continued off and on for several weeks in informal gatherings and conversations among several of us who were present.

One point that we found ourselves puzzling over was Dr. Tillich's use of the word "courage," a quality which he described as capable of counteracting the anxiety that is born of doubt, guilt, or a sense of the meaninglessness of existence. After a week or so I decided to write to Dr. Tillich both to thank him on my own part for giving us such a provocative evening and to ask him to clarify, if he might, his use of the term "courage." His courteous and helpful reply was as follows:¹

May 27, 1950

Dear Prof. Strider:

Please excuse me for the delay in my answer to your letter of May 7, but my secretary is seriously ill and I cannot use her help at all.

I should like to answer your question about the German word for "courage". It is "Mut". The German word "Mut" has connotations which transcend the meaning of "courage". The word occurs as a part of terms such as "Schwermut" (melancholy), "Gemut" (heart, ~~spirit~~, soul). Perhaps I should not use the word "courage" for what I meant, because it might not have the same expressive power.

Thank you for your interest in that evening which I remember with great pleasure.

Sincerely yours,



¹This letter is now in the Edwin Arlington Robinson Treasure Room at Colby College.

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It was not for two years that Dr. Tillich was to deliver the Terry Lectures at Yale, published by the Yale University Press under the title *The Courage to Be*. It is clear that Dr. Tillich's use of "Mut" in his paper in 1950 was of crucial importance in his formulation of the position enunciated by *The Courage to Be*.

Throughout the book Tillich is engaged in definition. Quite early he says, "The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation. . . . Courage is the affirmation of one's essential nature. . . . In the act of courage the most essential part of our being prevails against the less essential." As the argument progresses it becomes clear that the particular kind of courage Tillich is describing is, according to his thesis, a bulwark against the anxieties that are historically characteristic of the human condition. Among the Greeks they arose principally from a fear of fate or death; during the time of the Reformation, from a sense of sin and guilt; and in the present day, from the fear that life itself is meaningless. Courage, manifesting itself in different ways, enables one to overcome anxiety. Tillich describes, for example, what he calls a characteristically "American" kind of courage as "the affirmation of one's self as a participant in the creative development of mankind." Finally, it is possible even to accept despair itself with a kind of courage, arising from the power of "Being-itself." This power is accessible to those who believe and those who doubt. It is a manifestation of what Tillich elsewhere calls "ultimate concern." "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."

One cannot, of course, comprehend either the profundity or the subtlety of Tillich's argument from a bare summary. One must read *The Courage to Be*, and read it with close attention. But these few excerpts and comments indicate the degree to which the meaning Tillich assigns to the term "courage" is significant in the development of his thought. In the opening pages of the book he explains what he means by "courage" in terms reminiscent of the letter of May 27th:

The German language has two words for courageous, *tapfer* and *mutig*. *Tapfer* originally means firm, weighty, important, point-

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ing to the power of being in the upper strata of feudal society. Mutig is derived from *Mut*, the movement of the soul suggested by the English word "mood." Thus words like *Schwermut*, *Hochmut*, *Kleinmut* (the heavy, the high, the small "spirit"). *Mut* is a matter of the "heart," the personal center. Therefore *mutig* can be rendered by *beherzt* (as the French-English "courage" is derived from the French *coeur*, heart). While *Mut* has preserved this larger sense, *Tapferkeit* became more and more the special virtue of the soldier—who ceased to be identical with the knight and the nobleman. It is obvious that the terms *Mut* and *courage* directly introduce the ontological question, while *Tapferkeit* and *fortitude* in their present meanings are without such connotations. The title of these lectures could not have been "The Fortitude to Be" (*Die Tapferkeit zum Sein*); it had to read "The Courage to Be" (*Der Mut zum Sein*).

The letter from Dr. Tillich is focused precisely on this point, and written at a time when he was engaged in determining the exact meaning of the term and in exploring its broader significance.



CHARLOTTE FISKE BATES: CUPBEARER TO
DEMIGODS

By RICHARD CARY

ONE of the occupational hazards that celebrated masculine authors can count on is the acquisition, willy-nilly, of a glowing "circle" of female zealots. Frequently these women suffer from *furor poeticus* and haunt the master in hope that some of the divine essence will rub off. Just as frequently they are motivated by vanity, surrogate fulfillment, or even a kind of refined voyeurism. Sometimes, rarely, they throb with mystic kinship and desire purely to serve. In any case, they enshrine their idol securely atop a crystal stylos and take up orbits as closely as they dare.

Over the short era of American literature, reaction to this phenomenon has been mixed. Whittier acceded beatifically, as one might accept a halo; Poe, half in rapture, half in wrath, exacted from it tenderness and legal tender; Hawthorne flailed it down with lugubrious dispraise of that "damned mob of scribbling women." None of these attitudes ruffled the en-