**From Courage, 1894**  
**By Charles Wagner**

Steadfastness is the indispensable quality of every man who one day does not wish to be obliged to say: “I have wasted my life.”

A man should not incessantly change with every impression of the moment, but should remain steadfast when he has once determined upon what is right. Of what use are the flowers if they do not produce fruits, and of good ideas if they are not transmuted into deeds? We must encourage stability, habituate ourselves to remain constant, and when we are sure that we are right, must fortify ourselves against invasion. Do not let criticisms or attacks disturb you.

Nothing is so difficult as to remain faithful. At each step of the way outside influences are brought to bear upon us to make us deviate or retrograde. And if there were only difficulties from without, it would not matter so much; but there are those from within. Our dispositions vacillate. We promise one thing with the best intentions in the world; but when the time comes to keep it, everything is changed–the circumstances, men, ourselves; and what duty demands of us seems so different from what we had foreseen, that we hesitate. Those who will fulfill on a rainy day a promise which they have made on a sunny one, are few and far between.

And so we go on casting our hearts to the four winds, giving it and taking it back again, breaking with our past, separating ourselves from ourselves, so to speak. And when we look behind, we no longer recognize ourselves. We see ourselves in the days that are past as a stranger, or rather as several strangers.

There is nothing like a steadfast man, one in whom you can have confidence, one who is found at his post, who arrives punctually, and who can be trusted when you rely on him. He is worth his weight in gold. You can take your bearings from him, because he is sure to be where he ought to be, and nowhere else. The majority of individuals, on the contrary, are sure to be anywhere but where they ought to be. You have only to take them into your calculations to be deceived. Some of them are changeable from weakness of character; they cannot resist attacks, insinuations, and, above all, cannot remain faithful to a lost cause. A defeat in their eyes is a demonstration of the fact that their adversary was right and that they were wrong. When they see their side fail, instead of closing up the ranks, they go over to the enemy. These are the men who are always found on the winning side, and not in their hearts would be found the courageous device: Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.

A profound duplicity, a discrepancy between words and deeds, between appearance and reality, a sort of moral dilettantism which makes us according to the hour sincere or hypocritical, brave or cowardly, honest or unscrupulous–this is the disease which consumes us. What moral force can germinate and grow under these conditions? We must again become men who have only one principle, one word, one work, one love; in a word, men with a sense of duty. This is the source of power. And without this there is only the phantom of a man, the unstable sand, and hollow reed which bends beneath every breath. Be faithful; this is the changeless northern star which will guide you through the vicissitudes of life, through doubts and discouragements, and even mistakes.