

THE KING'S SWORDS

The following speech was made by Admiral Sir Robert L. Burnett, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., LL.D., Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, at the Presentation of King's Swords, at R.N.E. College, Manadon, on 21st March, 1948.

Swords of honour are things which are awarded to distinguished leaders in war. They are presented by bombed cities and even on occasions by a grateful Government through the Houses of Parliament. The King's Swords, however, are in a completely different category, being received by officers at the start of their career before they have won battles and risen to fame. They are awarded because the officer owns and possesses potential officer-like qualities ; these Swords are presented by His Majesty because the recipient shows signs of these high qualities which are so essential in a Service such as ours.

And what are these qualities ?

An officer, to be a good officer, must first of all be a master of his craft. He need not of necessity be a king of coppersmiths or an emperor of turners, but there must be nothing in his profession which he cannot show to others and do well himself. Secondly, absolute integrity. Your men will follow you anywhere so long as they know they can trust you to act as you think right. They won't mind if they don't agree with you provided they know that you believe what you are doing to be right.

Thirdly, an officer must be a man of faith. I am not here to enter into a theological discussion. In whatsoever God you believe, follow him, and your men in their turn will follow you.

There are many other requirements, but lastly I will mention one which follows naturally on the last and one without which all your efforts will be of no avail—care for your men. You serve and you must care for your men. You must care for their welfare, their interests, their weaknesses, and their strengths. Hence, is derived, and must naturally follow, care in the other meaning of the word—an affection for those under you. Without the care and affection for those under you, you will never succeed in playing your full part in our great Service.

You are going out to take an active part as leaders in the Navy. I am reminded of a verse written by our greatest naval poet ; I am telling it because of my infinite gratitude to a certain Engineer Commander who served with me in *Rodney*, who played a great part in my being promoted to the rank of Captain, and who wholeheartedly lived up to these principles :

*Doth the paintwork make war with the funnels?
Do the decks to the cannon complain?
Nay, they know that some soap or a scraper
Unites them as brothers again;
So ye, being Heads of Departments,
Do your growl with a smile on your lips,
Lest ye strive and in anger be parted,
And lessen the might of your ship.*

On your shoulders rests a great responsibility for co-operation.

I ask God's blessing in the future for you and your labours.