

Recorded Speech by Emperor Wilhelm II, “Showing Strength in the Face of Pain” (January 24, 1904)

Abstract

This recording of Emperor Wilhelm II’s voice dates from January 24, 1904. He recites several short passages from the novel *Das Schweigen im Walde* (1899) by Ludwig Ganghofer, a prolific and highly successful author of sentimental novels set mostly in his native Bavaria [*Heimatsromane*] with whom Wilhelm was well acquainted. It is likely that Wilhelm chose the text passages himself. The text urges readers to accept their fate with humility and faith in God, a theme that frequently appears in Ganghofer’s novels set among the “simple, honest” people of the Bavarian Alps. The phonograph recording was made by the American linguist E.W. Scripture and was intended for the Library of Congress collection. Since the invention of sound recording technology (and before the invention of radio) many linguists and institutions had become interested in capturing the voices of political leaders and other famous individuals. Both in tone and content, this recording seems rather uncharacteristic of Wilhelm II, who gained notoriety for his martial and undiplomatic public speeches.

Source

Show strength in the face of pain, do not desire what is unattainable or worthless, be content with the day as it comes, seek the good in everything, and take pleasure in nature and in people as they are. Console yourself for a thousand bitter hours with a single happy one, and always give your best in heart and skill, even if you receive no thanks. Those who learn and can do this are happy, free, and proud, and their lives will always be beautiful. Those who are distrustful commit an injustice against others and harm themselves. We have a duty to consider every person good until they prove us wrong. The world is so big and we humans are so small that everything cannot revolve around us alone. If something harms us, who can know whether it is not necessary for the benefit of all creation? In every thing in the world, whether dead or breathing, lives the great wise will of the almighty and all-knowing Creator. Only our minds help us mere humans to make use of it. Everything in the world is as it must be, and however it may be, it is always good in the eyes of the Creator.

Source: Wilhelm II, Speech by the German Emperor, January 24, 1904. Edison cylinder. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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