THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FEAR.

CONSIDERED IN ITS RELATION TO HUMAN CONDUCT.

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FROM the beginning of human thought, fear has been regarded with contempt. To fear, to be afraid, is considered the earmark of cowardice, and as all the world is said to love a lover, so all the world scorns a coward. And because it occupies in our estimation such an unenviable position it serves a useful purpose. Since fear is considered contemptible man tries to divest himself of it; he is ashamed of its existence; he hates its profoundest and most beneficent manifestation. Yet the truth is that this useful emotion occupies an ignominious position unjustly, and should be lifted, by a more comprehensive understanding, to a plane of eminent respectability.

Fear is the great force that prompts to acts of self-preservation and operates as effectively in the brute as in the human animal. Even in plant life we can trace evidences that indicate the presence of a natural law operating very much as fear does upon brute instinct and the human mind.

When we analyze the fundamentals of the world's religions, we find they make their first and final appeal to man's inborn sense of fear. Religion provides a place of punishment and another of reward. The first appeals to man's fear, the second to his venality. The fear of hell and the pictured horrors of a place of eternal damnation, are intended to coerce man into righteous living; and a reward for such righteousness is offered in the form of a place of eternal bliss. On the one hand the fear of evil is calculated to deter, and fear of losing the delights of heaven is intended to lure man from his natural tendency to evil.

This reflection may not be stimulating nor gratifying to human vanity but it is nevertheless true.

Courage, the opposite of fear, readily divides itself into the

moral and the physical. One may be a moral coward yet physically brave; and obversely the physically brave may in certain circumstances prove a moral coward. It is not our purpose to praise the one or condemn the other, for this does not lie within the purview of this discussion.

At risk of incurring the indignant disapproval of the unthinking, it is necessary to say in some respect or particular all men are cowards—all in some circumstances are dominated by fear. The self-sufficient ego will naturally rebel against the charge of cowardice, but in the last analysis, if he is honest with himself, he will find the statement absolutely true, that no man can be in all things fearless.

As men differ physically, so they differ mentally, morally and spiritually, and what will delight the one will leave the other quite unmoved. If yielding to the domination of fear signifies cowardice, then as stated above, every man at some time, in some way, will prove himself a coward. Men living in communities yield their private views to the rigor of convention, and refrain from the pursuit of desires because they fear the condemnation of their fellow men—ostracism. It is due to fear of this condemnation that men observe the conventional laws.

Moreover, obedience to the decalogue is found to be due to the fear of consequences which may be either material or spiritual: thus, those commandments which deal with the spiritual side of man are obeyed because of fear of spiritual consequences already referred to; the other commandments, which involve the natural rights of man, and the breach of which results in criminal punishment, are obeyed by fear of public condemnation, arrest, imprisonment, or death.

The old Blackstonian dictum "that every law must have a sanction," meaning that every law must provide a punishment for its breach, makes its appeal to just that fear in man which causes him to shrink from the unpleasant, and deters him from the commission of acts that must eventuate in the loss of liberty or life.

Fear springs from the biological law of self-preservation. Scientists tell us that this law is necessary for the preservation of species and that it ranks in importance with the "survival of the fittest" and "the struggle for existence." Fear of injury and death makes every rational being fly from danger, and were this otherwise it is easy to believe life would become extinct because unresistingly yielding itself to the destructive forces of nature and human experience.

We may say then that every rational being is dominated by fear of consequences, mental, moral or physical, and only those devoid of rationality can be said to be devoid of this protective emotion. Lunatics, defectives, and those whom powerful emotions temporarily control because the sense of fear is either extinct or in a state of suspension, are without the range of this beneficent law.

We see in zoology constant manifestations of the influence of fear upon brute creation. Thus a lioness will brave dangers to herself in her efforts to protect her offspring. Here the stronger maternal instinct has overpowered the biological law.

It is common nowadays to speak of the man who in a fit of rage commits a murder as emotionally insane—as a victim of brain storm—which translated into plain English means that a state of mind has been created by anger, hate, revenge, blood lust, or a kindred emotion, which for the moment has mastered the natural fear of consequences and placed in suspension the law of self-preservation.

When analysis is made of acts of so-called heroism it will be found that immediately preceding their performance one or the other mental states, hereafter set forth, existed:

1. Absence of imagination whereby the individual becomes incapable of foreseeing, and therefore unable to count and measure danger.
2. Impulse whereby reflection is prevented and the individual unthinkingly assumes the dangers he has disregarded.
3. Superlative egotism which begets an inordinate appetite for the approbation and applause of one's fellow man.
4. Fear of contempt (which is the obverse of the last proposition) impels to conduct seemingly heroic.
5. An idealized selfishness which finds true happiness in the service of others, even though that service necessitates the assumption of serious personal risk.
6. An inordinate vanity whose development is so abnormal that it conquers, for the time, the biological law.

An illustration of each of the foregoing will suffice to make the meaning clear.

First: Lack of Imagination. Highly sensitive nervous natures have active imaginations which by emotional stimuli will picture, in exaggerated form, the dangers of the act. Appreciation of these dangers begets the deterrent fear, and an act or non-act results,

which the unthinking call cowardly, and the guilty wretch is spurned as a coward. Experience produces knowledge and knowledge of danger begets fear. A nervous nature in moments of stress exaggerates this knowledge born of experience. Thus a child is wholly fearless of fire until it is burned, but becomes fearful in its presence once experience has taught it that pain will follow from contact.

Second: *Impulse.* An act of impulse is one where the act follows so swiftly upon the will to do, that sufficient time does not intervene for reasoning reflection. Fear of consequences is therefore suspended, and only after the act is done does the danger become apparent. Women will perform heroic acts and then fall into a swoon when all danger is past. The realization of this danger produces the shock to the nerve centers and causes unconsciousness.

Third: *Superlative egotism.* Men attain to states of mind when they believe themselves divinely or otherwise appointed to do some act by which humanity is expected to profit, and that they are appointed to perform the act regardless of the incident danger. History affords many illustrations of this form of superlative egotism, and these, facing dangers, pursue their appointed course conscious of, yet overcoming, the biological law.

Fourth: Fear of contempt. In this class may be placed the so-called heroic soldier, who, standing on the firing line is impelled to run away yet stands bravely facing the enemy just because he fears the contempt and condemnation of his fellow men. Here pride overcomes fear and a hero may be the result.

> "He is not brave who in great danger knows no fear;
> He is who does, and masters it when danger's near."

Fifth: *An idealized selfishness.* All rational action springs from motive; motive impels the doing of the act. Without motive the act is irrational. What then is the fundamental motive that prompts man to action whether good or bad? Selfishness—self-interest. Thus greed may prompt a robbery and this would be base selfishness; altruism causes acts of beneficence and this we call idealized or refined selfishness. The robber selfishly wants the gold he robs; the altruist wants the approval of his own conscience and the good-will of his fellow man. The robber does an evil act from base selfishness; the altruist does a noble act from idealized or refined selfishness; the robber desires that agreeable state of mind which the satisfying of his greed affords; the altruist acquires a pleasant state of mind from the knowledge of having done right and won the approbation of society. The poverty of our language

makes it impossible for us to use a less odious word than "selfishness" for which fact we take no blame. As there is no other word that accurately describes the antithesis of selfishness we must resort to the use of this word, however unwillingly, and make the meaning reasonably clear by characterizing the one as "base selfishness" and the other as "idealized or refined selfishness."

Sixth: *Inordinate vanity*. The hunger for notoriety is so phenomenally developed in some persons that in the pursuit of its gratification dangers are assumed that the normally constituted persons would shrink from. To this class belong those law-breakers who, guided by vanity, commit crimes in order to attract public attention. In order that they may occupy prominent positions in our daily newspapers which unfortunately pander to their abnormality, these persons will defy law and order, go to prison and submit willingly to shame and disgrace and the odium of public condemnation in order to gratify their inordinate vanity. So long as these persons are influenced to conduct by their vanity, fear of consequences will be held in suspension, and they rise above or fall below (as the reader may prefer) the biological law.

It is not claimed that the foregoing list is by any means complete, but it is hoped it will suffice to make clear what we have contended for all along, namely, that the so-called coward is not nearly so contemptible as the world believes him to be; and that cowardice or fear of consequences, is as much a biological law governing conduct, and as useful in the preservation of the species, as hunger which is a desire for food and therefore provokes to eating, and thirst which is an evidence of the need of drink and therefore prompts to drinking.

Reference should be made to certain abnormal forms of fear for which no excuse can be offered except that they are congenital and perhaps due to ante-natal states of the mother; severe fright of the mother is known to mark the child by an unnatural sensitiveness to certain kinds of danger. As abnormal appetites are thus created, so an unnatural fear may be born in the offspring.

Fear is naturally produced by ignorance. In seeking a reason for an unknown phenomenon the ignorant mind will arrive at conclusions that associate such phenomenon with the supernatural or fearful.

It is said that when the early European explorers first landed on our shores, the aborigines were more terrified at sight of a horse than by a regiment of men. They had never seen a horse, and were ignorant of its innocent character, and therefore their

ignorance ascribed to it supernatural qualities. The same is said of the Rachshasas and Azuras of pre-historic India.

In ancient times ignorance begot fear of epileptics because supposed to be possessed of devils, and these unfortunates were consequently shunned; to-day man, being better informed, makes these unfortunates objects of pity and medical care. Ignorance of natural law, and priest-made fables, produce fear of death. Yet death is a beneficent law of nature and its terrors are entirely due to ignorance of the unknown hereafter which the vivid imagination of man has peopled with countless horrors, or equally impossible celestial delights.

Reflection on this subject would result in greater justice being done to so-called cowards, and a lessening of the exuberance in our hero worship.

Let us not forget that the real hero is one who in the face of evil is a coward.

MISCELLANEOUS.

GERMAN SCHOLARS AND THE LARGER VIEW.

Professor Wilhelm Ostwald, president of the Monistic Alliance, and the right-hand man of Ernst Haeckel, expresses his views on the present war in the official monthly organ of the Monists, *Das Monistische Jahrhundert*, page 860. He shows a conciliatory spirit, and we quote from his article the following paragraphs:

"Amid the noise and hubbub of war the scientifically minded man must not lose sight of the fact that war is after all an abnormal state. Peace is the aim and end of war. But this peace we must endeavor to shape in such a way that it does not render unnecessarily difficult the resumption of normal relations between the great civilized peoples of the earth. We are dependent, materially and spiritually, on other nations and states, as they are on us.

"Above all let us beware of imputing to a race or people the deeds of its government or of small groups of isolated states. Let us guard against generalizations which lead to rash judgments concerning the national character of individual peoples.

"It avails nothing to wage a war which has for its object the wresting of world dominion, or the acquiring of a political hegemony which would be but the prelude to a bitter struggle of the other nations against the formidable dominating people. We are waging war to preserve our independent national existence. We are battling for the life of our political organism, which is the foundation for the further development of German culture.

"We consider the community of German culture, however, as part and parcel of the international fellowship of men throughout the world. We value