

FEAR

BY DR. A. CORALNIK

ALL unexpected and quite accidentally, we came upon an old, an eternal wall. We have been striking this wall from time to time ever since we are here, as far back as human memory can reach. This wall is: fear. No other feeling do we try so hard to ignore, to hide, to deny—and no other emotion is so overwhelming, as fear. We do not want to admit it—but everyone can see it, hear it. Gather together all our courage as we may—there is still a quivering gleam in our eyes, an imperceptible trembling around the lips—It is fear. An American physician, Doctor Rusby, has discovered somewhere in the wilds of South America, among the Indian tribes, a certain herb which banishes fear. The herb is prepared with much ceremonial. No women are allowed to be present. And the man who drinks the preparation is first seized with a great horror, but a little later he acquires such power, so much courage, that he is free from all fear, all sense of danger leaves him. He throws himself into battle like a lion. He loses fear, and falls into a deep sleep. He awakes and again fear is upon him.

It is possible that somebody will bring to us this herb; will make it attainable to the whole world. Druggists will cook herbs, people will drink it, drink and lose their fear.

And then?

Among Anderson's fairy-tales there is one about a man who lost his heart. He cut from his breast the piece of quivering heart and put into its place a heart of crystal. And he was content. He felt nothing, feared nothing, and hoped for nothing. He grew rich and powerful, because he was stronger than the rest. In a world of hearts—beating, trembling and sensitive—the only one without a heart. Only—he felt cold. He missed the beating, the hammering, the restlessness, that "Merriment unlimited, and sadness unto death." He lacked the sense of craving after something. It is good to be

on a mountain. The view is wide, the air pure, you see so much—you are away from the rest of the world. There is wisdom on the mountain, but it is cold and lonesome. See? What is there to see? Look from the Eifel Tower upon the seething, beautiful, enchanting Paris—and all you will see is lines, black dashes, and tiny ants moving between them. What good is such a Paris? Wisdom? Of what use is wisdom in a world where all is made clear? The more transparent a lense is, the less can be seen through it. The most beautiful world is seen through a ray-breaking crystal. The best picture is a false one.

It would afford a wonderful theme for a new Anderson: the man who lost fear. Through an herb like that of the Indians in South America, or through some other, less pharmacal means: through philosophy. Do we not have such a philosophic herb? For thousands of years we have had it. Everyone can obtain it—as much as he wants. It is the Stoic philosophy, which teaches, "Fear nothing, no harm can befall you. The worst of all is death—and death is not terrible. The most dreaded thing is pain, but pain has no power on the human spirit." This was the teaching of Zeno, thus Epictetus, the Greek slave, the suffering, limping, beaten, comforted himself and his fellow creatures, comforted us, the future generations.

There is comfort in religion. "Are you afraid, say your prayers" mothers tell their children. This simple advice contains a deep philosophy. The mention of God, the thought of Him, this leaning against a world mystery—this alone drives away fear, and quiets, comforts, soothes.

We have all these, and yet, it avails us not. I do not know what is fear, nobody knows. The psychologists who tried to solve this problem, only describe it, they do not explain it. Darwin, Angelo Mosso, William James, and all the other investigators of the fear emotion, have tried to trace it to purely physiological causes, or to heredity. One turns pale, is covered with a cold sweat—when one is afraid. That is, says Darwin, because primitive man, or the beasts, threw themselves into battle with bowed head. The bowing of the head, the quick motion, have driven the blood from the head, and that is why we, the grandchildren, who no longer fight, still turn pale and tremble.

It is only an hypothesis, and that a questionable one. But one thing is true: all fear is connected with a desire to run, to escape somewhere, away from the danger to a place of safety. Take a man

lying alone on his bed at night. Something pains him. He does not know what it is, but he imagines: it might be a dangerous disease. He might have to undergo an operation, maybe he will have to suffer pain, perhaps death is lurking in wait for him. And he tosses about on his bed, sits up, has a desire to run away somewhere—and falls back hopeless. He knows there is no place for him to run, cannot escape. And that is the real agony, the bitter cup of fear. Let some one come at that moment and tell this man: This or that is your ailment, and so and so will cure you—and immediately fear leaves him. The man knows—he is no longer afraid. Nobody fears that which is, what he can see; it is that which is not, either not yet or no longer, which frightens us. The dead are stronger than the living, that which is to be, more powerful than that which is. In the numerous books issued during the war, one finds almost invariably the same motive: the soldier loses all fear when he stands face to face with the enemy. Only a moment ago he shook like a leaf, could not face the common danger: tomorrow it will happen; tomorrow he will go on to the field of battle; tomorrow he may be blown to pieces by a bomb; a bullet may pierce his heart, a bayonet may cut into his flesh, and a deathly horror takes possession of him. He would flee were he not afraid of being caught and courtmartialled. But here is the next day: He stands on the field of battle, bombs explode all around him, the cannons thunder, a command is heard: To the Bayonets!—and the same soldier forgets fear and makes for the enemy falling or conquering. A moment ago—he was a mere worm that curled and wriggled with fear; a moment later he is again afraid—of that which he himself has just done—but between these two moments he is a lion. He has stood before reality. And reality is never terrible.

And in this lies the whole secret of the creative power of fear. It creates the place to which to escape. It seeks a refuge, and thereby extends the boundaries of being (existence). "Fear has created the Gods," said Lucretius Carus, the poet philosopher of Rome. The religious thinkers of Christendom have contested this interpretation of the religious sentiment. Religion is not fear—said they—religion is love. God is the creature of love, not of fright.

But in this, as in many other things, the Christian thinkers shut their eyes in order not to see the truth, surrendered under the hypnotism of the word—rejecting what is beyond the word. They did not realize that the great fear, "the Awe of God"—in whatever form—is the first wisdom—the beginning of all thought. He who

fears nothing cannot think, because he does not know that anything exists beyond the present, the passing moment. Fear is the bond between the darkness and the light, between yesterday and today—and tomorrow. Fear means, conquering what is here and seeking what is beyond. Primitive man fears the animals and he runs to where he thinks they cannot get him. Or, if he cannot run away, he makes peace with them, conquers them, uses them for his own purposes. Man fears pain, he tries to find a way to avoid it, and science comes into being. He fears the unknown—and the result is poetry.

Swinburne once said of William Blake, that under the cloak of every phenomenon he felt the tremor of secret powers, and often he saw the cloak rent by thunder and lightning. Everyone familiar with the poetry of Blake, whoever remembers the peculiar pictures he painted around his poems, knows the poetry of fear. But he also knows the world of fancy. Cool people, peacefully constituted, have no imagination, and their life is poor, without beauty. Only he who sees and feels infinities knows fear. "The immensity of the infinite frightens me," complained Pascal—and this is what has made Pascal one of the profoundest thinkers, both scientifically and morally, that Europe has produced.

And the further civilization advances, the deeper grows the fear sentiment emotion. Primitive man has little to lose. The Buddhist, who has renounced everything, who seeks suffering and pain, is anxious to lose, because he craves Nirvana. Only he who has given to his life a meaning and a purpose, knows there is cause for fear. And here is where the two extremes meet: primitive man and the new, super-civilized being. In both the instinct for life is keen and powerful; the difference between the two is only in the consciousness. Primitive man fears and does not know what or how to overcome it; civilized man knows where fear is lurking—and the way of escape. It is easy to renounce it—that is what the Stoics did—but that does not bring one very far. One may renounce pain—attempt to conquer it with will-power. Balzac somewhere describes a man who tried to conquer pain—by going out to meet it. He put a drill into his tooth. He did conquer pain—but life along with it. He died with the drill in his mouth. The world has not accepted the no-fear doctrine, either in the form of Stoicism or in the Christian form of non-resistance. The healthy life instinct has rejected it. The only philosophy it has accepted, consciously or unconsciously, is that of the Ecclesiasts: "We cannot add anything nor take away from those things which God has created that He may be feared."

The ethical world,—not merely that of man to man, but also the one of man to himself—rests on fear, for that is the only incentive for action, for activity, for energy, for seeking after something. Fear of pain, fear of solitude, of crowding, of distance—all forms of culture spring from it.

And I question whether the world, intoxicated by the South American herb and free from all fear, would be any happier. Life would perhaps be easier—but it would also be more monotonous, poor, less beautiful. The gates would close on heaven and on hell—there would be only black lines and ants . . . a world without gods—and without the will to wander, to run away, to rescue or be rescued. A transparent world—without colors and without illusions.