

# Fear

**F**EAR is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed, the disinherited. There is nothing new or recent about fear—it is doubtless as old as the life of man on the planet. Fears are of many kinds—fear of objects, fear of people, fear of the future, fear of nature, fear of the unknown, fear of old age, fear of disease, and fear of life itself. Then there is fear which has to do with aspects of experience and detailed states of mind. Our homes, institutions, prisons, churches, are crowded with people who are hounded by day and harrowed by night because of some fear that lurks ready to spring into action as soon as one is alone, or as soon as the lights go out, or as soon as one's social defenses are temporarily removed.

The ever-present fear that besets the vast poor, the economically and socially insecure, is a fear of still a different breed. It is a climate closing in; it is like the fog in San Francisco or in London. It is nowhere in particular yet everywhere. It is a mood which one carries around with himself,

distilled from the acrid conflict with which his days are surrounded. It has its roots deep in the heart of the relations between the weak and the strong, between the controllers of environment and those who are controlled by it.)

When the basis of such fear is analyzed, it is clear that it arises out of the sense of isolation and helplessness in the face of the varied dimensions of violence to which the underprivileged are exposed. Violence, precipitate and stark, is the sire of the fear of such people. It is spawned by the perpetual threat of violence everywhere. Of course, physical violence is the most obvious cause. But here, it is important to point out, a particular kind of physical violence or its counterpart is evidenced; it is violence that is devoid of the element of contest. It is what is feared by the rabbit that cannot ultimately escape the hounds. One can almost see the desperation creep into the quivering, pulsing body of the frightened animal. It is one-sided violence. If two men equally matched, or even relatively matched, are in deadly combat, the violence is clear-cut though terrible; there is gross equality of advantage. But when the power and the tools of violence are on one side, the fact that there is no available and recognized protection from violence makes the resulting fear deeply terrifying.

In a society in which certain people or groups—by virtue of economic, social, or political power—have dead-weight advantages over others who are essentially without that kind of power, those who are thus disadvantaged know that they cannot fight back effectively, that they cannot protect themselves, and that they cannot demand protection from their persecutors. Any slight conflict, any alleged insult, any vague

whim, any unrelated frustration, may bring down upon the head of the defenseless the full weight of naked physical violence. Even in such a circumstance it is not the fear of death that is most often at work; it is the deep humiliation arising from dying without benefit of cause or purpose. No high end is served. There is no trumpet blast to stir the blood and to anesthetize the agony. Here there is no going down to the grave with a shout; it is merely being killed or being beaten in utter wrath or indifferent sadism, without the dignity of being on the receiving end of a premeditated act hammered out in the white heat of a transcendent moral passion. The whole experience attacks the fundamental sense of self-respect and personal dignity, without which a man is no man.

In such physical violence the contemptuous disregard for personhood is the fact that is degrading. If a man knows that he is the object of deliberately organized violence, in which care has been exercised to secure the most powerful and deadly weapon in order to destroy him, there may be something great and stimulating about his end. Conceivably this is a lesson that may be learned from one interpretation of the slaying of the giant Goliath. The great Goliath, the symbol of the might and prowess of the Philistines, is equipped for battle, armor replete, sword and protectors in order. Then there is David, just a lad—perhaps in short shirt, possibly without even sandals. For him no armor, no sword, no helmet—just a boy with a slingshot in his hand. David's preparation for battle may be thought to reflect David's estimate of the might and prowess of the Philistines. When the great Goliath beheld David, and the full weight of the drama broke upon

him with force, it well might be literally true that under the tension growing out of a sense of outraged dignity he burst a blood vessel, resulting in apoplexy.)

Always back of the threat is the rumor or the fact that somewhere, under some similar circumstances violence was used. That is all that is necessary. The threat becomes the effective instrument. There was a dog that lived at the end of my street in my home town. Every afternoon he came down the street by the house. I could always hear him coming, giving a quick, sharp yelp in front of certain yards along the way. He was not hit by flying stones; each boy would catch the dog's eye and draw his arm back—the yelp followed immediately. The threat was sufficient to secure the reaction because, somewhere in the past, that particular motion had been identified with pain and injury. Such is the role of the threat of violence. It is rooted in a past experience, actual or reported, which tends to guarantee the present reaction of fear.

The disinherited experience the disintegrating effect of contempt in some such fashion as did Goliath. There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person. The threat of violence is ever present, and there is no way to determine precisely when it may come crushing down upon you. In modern power politics this is called a war of nerves. The underprivileged in any society are the victims of a perpetual war of nerves. The logic of the state of affairs is physical violence, but it need not fulfill itself in order to work its perfect havoc in the souls of the poor.

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 Fear, then, becomes the safety device with which the oppressed surround themselves in order to give some measure of protection from complete nervous collapse. How do they achieve this? In the first place, they make their bodies commit to memory ways of behaving that will tend to reduce their exposure to violence. Several years ago, when I was in India, I experienced precisely what is meant here. It was on our first evening in the country that a friend came to visit and to give advice about certain precautions to be observed. Just before he left, a final caution was given about snakes. He advised that we should not walk around at night without a light, not go into an unlighted room at night. We should sleep with a flashlight under the pillow, so that if it were necessary to get up during the night, a circle of light could be thrown on the floor before stepping out of bed, lest we disturb the nocturnal rambling of some unsuspecting cobra. I sat alone for some time after he left. During that period of concentration I was literally teaching my body how to behave, so that after that particular evening it would be extremely difficult for me to violate his expressed advice. My conditioning was so complete that, subsequently, my behavior was automatic.

This is precisely what the weak do everywhere. Through bitter experience they have learned how to exercise extreme care, how to behave so as to reduce the threat of immediate danger from their environment. Fear thus becomes a form of life assurance, making possible the continuation of physical existence with a minimum of active violence.

Children are taught how to behave in this same way. The children of the disinherited live a restricted childhood. From

their earliest moments they are conditioned so as to reduce their exposure to violence. In Felix Salten's *Bambi*, the old stag counsels Bambi, giving to him in great detail a pattern of behavior that will reduce his chance of being shot without an opportunity for escape. He teaches him to distinguish human scent, the kinds of exposure that may be deadly, what precise kind of behavior is relatively safe. The stag is unwilling to leave Bambi until he is sure that the young deer has made his body commit to memory ways of behaving that will protect and safeguard his life.

The threat of violence within a framework of well-nigh limitless power is a weapon by which the weak are held in check. Artificial limitations are placed upon them, restricting freedom of movement, of employment, and of participation in the common life. These limitations are given formal or informal expression in general or specific policies of separateness or segregation. These policies tend to freeze the social status of the insecure. The threat of violence may be implemented not only by constituted authority but also by anyone acting in behalf of the established order. Every member of the controllers' group is in a sense a special deputy, authorized by the mores to enforce the pattern. This fact tends to create fear, which works on behalf of the proscriptions and guarantees them. The anticipation of possible violence makes it very difficult for any escape from the pattern to be effective.

It is important to analyze the functioning of segregation that we may better understand the nature of the fear it engenders. It is obvious that segregation can be established only between two groups that are unequal in power and control.

Two groups that are relatively equal in power in a society may enter into a voluntary arrangement of separateness. Segregation can apply only to a relationship involving the weak and the strong. For it means that limitations are arbitrarily set up, which, in the course of time, tend to become fixed and to seem normal in governing the etiquette between the two groups. A peculiar characteristic of segregation is the ability of the stronger to shuttle back and forth between the prescribed areas with complete immunity and a kind of mutually tacit sanction; while the position of the weaker, on the other hand, is quite definitely fixed and frozen.

A very simple illustration is the operation of Jim Crow travel in trains in the southern part of the United States. On such a train the porter, when he is not in line of duty, may ride only in the Jim Crow coach—for the train porter is a Negro. But the members of the train crew who are not Negroes—the conductor, brakeman, baggageman—when they are not working, may ride either in the Jim Crow section or in any other section of the train. In the town in Florida in which I grew up as a boy it was a common occurrence for white persons to attend our church services and share in the worship. But it was quite impossible for any of us to do the same in the white churches of the community. All over the world, wherever ghettos are found, the same basic elements appear—a fact which dramatizes the position of weakness and gives the widest possible range to the policing effect of fear generated by the threat of violence.

Given segregation as a factor determining relations, the

resources of the environment are made into instruments to enforce the artificial position. Most of the accepted social behavior-patterns assume segregation to be normal—if normal, then correct; if correct, then moral; if moral, then religious. Religion is thus made a defender and guarantor of the presumptions. God, for all practical purposes, is imaged as an elderly, benign white man, seated on a white throne, with bright, white light emanating from his countenance. Angels are blonds and brunets suspended in the air around his throne to be his messengers and execute his purposes. Satan is viewed as being red with the glow of fire. But the imps, the messengers of the devil, are black. The phrase “black as an imp” is a stereotype.

The implications of such a view are simply fantastic in the intensity of their tragedy. Doomed on earth to a fixed and unremitting status of inferiority, of which segregation is symbolic, and at the same time cut off from the hope that the Creator intended it otherwise, those who are thus victimized are stripped of all social protection. It is vicious and thoroughly despicable to rationalize this position, the product of a fear that is as sordid as it is unscrupulous, into acceptance. Under such circumstances there is but a step from being despised to despising oneself.

The fear that segregation inspires among the weak in turn breeds fear among the strong and the dominant. This fear insulates the conscience against a sense of wrongdoing in carrying out a policy of segregation. For it counsels that if there were no segregation, there would be no protection

against invasion of the home, the church, the school. This fear perpetuates the Jewish ghettos in Western civilization, the restrictive covenants in California and other states, the Chinatowns, the Little Tokyos, and the Street of the Untouchables in Hindu lands.<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish community has long been acquainted with segregation and the persecution growing out of it. Jews have been all the more easily trapped by it because of the deep historical conviction that they are a chosen people. This conviction and its underscoring in the unique ethical insights of the prophets have tended to make all those who were not a part of Israel feel in some sense as if they were spiritual outcasts. The conscious and unconscious reaction inspired by this sense of being on the outside is a fertile seedbed for anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a confession of a deep sense of inferiority and moral insecurity. It is the fear of the socially or politically strong in the presence of the threat of moral judgment implicit in the role of the Jewish community throughout human history. Jesus was intimately acquainted with this problem from the inside. Jesus knew all of this.

His days were nurtured in great hostilities  
 Focused upon his kind, the sons of Israel.  
 There was no moment in all his years  
 When he was free.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Recently untouchability was outlawed by the Indian state. A Hindu government did what years of British rule failed to do. Perhaps this is as it should be.

<sup>2</sup>From my privately published volume of poems, *The Greatest of These*, p. 3.

[It is instructive to inquire into the effects of fear on the disadvantaged.] Fear becomes acute, in the form of panic or rage, only at the moment when what has been threat becomes actual violence; but the mere anticipation of such an encounter is overwhelming simply because the odds are basically uneven. This fact is important to hold in mind. The disadvantaged man knows that in any conflict he must deal not only with the particular individual involved but also with the entire group, then or later. Even recourse to the arbitration of law tends to be avoided because of the fear that the interpretations of law will be biased on the side of the dominant group. The result is the dodging of all encounters. The effect is nothing short of disaster in the organism; for, studies show, fear actually causes chemical changes in the body, affecting the blood stream and the muscular reactions, preparing the body either for fight or for flight. If flight is resorted to, it merely serves as an incentive to one's opponent to track down and overpower. Furthermore, not to fight back at the moment of descending violence is to be a coward, and to be deeply and profoundly humiliated in one's own estimation and in that of one's friends and family. If he is a man, he stands in the presence of his woman as not a man. While it may be true that many have not had such experiences, yet each stands in candidacy for such an experience.

It is clear, then, that this fear, which served originally as a safety device, a kind of protective mechanism for the weak, finally becomes death for the self. The power that saves turns executioner. Within the walls of separateness death keeps

watch. There are some who defer this death by yielding all claim to personal significance beyond the little world in which they live. In the absence of all hope ambition dies, and the very self is weakened, corroded. There remains only the elemental will to live and to accept life on the terms that are available. There is a profound measure of resourcefulness in all life, a resourcefulness that is guaranteed by the underlying aliveness of life itself.

The crucial question, then, is this: Is there any help to be found in the religion of Jesus that can be of value here? It is utterly beside the point to examine here what the religion of Jesus suggests to those who would be helpful to the disinherited. That is ever in the nature of special pleading. No man wants to be the object of his fellow's pity. Obviously, if the strong put forth a great redemptive effort to change the social, political, and economic arrangements in which they seem to find their basic security, the whole picture would be altered. But this is apart from my thesis. Again the crucial question: Is there any help to be found for the disinherited in the religion of Jesus?

Did Jesus deal with this kind of fear? If so, how did he do it? It is not merely, What did he say? even though his words are the important clues available to us.

An analysis of the teaching of Jesus reveals that there is much that deals with the problems created by fear. After his temptation in the wilderness Jesus appeared in the synagogue and was asked to read the lesson. He chose to read from the prophet Isaiah the words which he declared as his fulfillment:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he hath anointed me . . .  
to preach deliverance to the captives,  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty them that are bruised,  
to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book. . . . And he began to say unto them,  
This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In the Song of Mary we find words which anticipate the same declaration of Jesus:

He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,  
and exalted them of low degree.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things;  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

The most specific statement which Jesus makes dealing with the crux of the problem is found in the tenth chapter of Matthew:

Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. . . .  
And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Again in Luke:

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

In the great expression of affirmation and faith found in the Sermon on the Mount there appears in clearest outline the basis of his positive answer to the awful fact of fear and its twin sons of thunder—anxiety and despair:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The core of the analysis of Jesus is that man is a child of God, the God of life that sustains all of nature and guarantees

all the intricacies of the life-process itself. Jesus suggests that it is quite unreasonable to assume that God, whose creative activity is expressed even in such details as the hairs of a man's head, would exclude from his concern the life, the vital spirit, of the man himself. (This idea—that God is mindful of the individual—is of tremendous import in dealing with fear as a disease.) In this world the socially disadvantaged man is constantly given a negative answer to the most important personal questions upon which mental health depends: "Who am I? What am I?"

The first question has to do with a basic self-estimate, a profound sense of belonging, of counting. If a man feels that he does not belong in the way in which it is perfectly normal for other people to belong, then he develops a deep sense of insecurity. When this happens to a person, it provides the basic material for what the psychologist calls an inferiority complex. It is quite possible for a man to have no sense of personal inferiority as such, but at the same time to be dogged by a sense of social inferiority. The awareness of being a child of God tends to stabilize the ego and results in a new courage, fearlessness, and power. I have seen it happen again and again.

When I was a youngster, this was drilled into me by my grandmother. The idea was given to her by a certain slave minister who, on occasion, held secret religious meetings with his fellow slaves. How everything in me quivered with the pulsing tremor of raw energy when, in her recital, she would come to the triumphant climax of the minister: "You—you are not niggers. You—you are not slaves. You are God's children."

This established for them the ground of personal dignity, so that a profound sense of personal worth could absorb the fear reaction. This alone is not enough, but without it, nothing else is of value. The first task is to get the self immunized against the most radical results of the *threat* of violence. When this is accomplished, relaxation takes the place of the churning fear. The individual now feels that he counts, that he belongs. He senses the confirmation of his roots, and even death becomes a little thing.

All leaders of men have recognized the significance of this need for a sense of belonging among those who feel themselves disadvantaged. Several years ago I was talking with a young German woman who had escaped from the Nazis; first to Holland, then France, England, and finally to America. She described for me the powerful magnet that Hitler was to German youth. The youth had lost their sense of belonging. They did not count; there was no center of hope for their marginal egos. According to my friend, Hitler told them: "No one loves you—I love you; no one will give you work—I will give you work; no one wants you—I want you." And when they saw the sunlight in his eyes, they dropped their tools and followed him. He stabilized the ego of the German youth, and put it within their power to overcome their sense of inferiority. It is true that in the hands of a man like Hitler, power is exploited and turned to ends which make for havoc and misery; but this should not cause us to ignore the basic soundness of the theory upon which he operated.

A man's conviction that he is God's child automatically tends to shift the basis of his relationship with all his fellows.

He recognizes at once that to fear a man, whatever may be that man's power over him, is a basic denial of the integrity of his very life. It lifts that mere man to a place of pre-eminence that belongs to God and to God alone. He who fears is literally delivered to destruction. To the child of God, a scale of values becomes available by which men are measured and their true significance determined. Even the threat of violence, with the possibility of death that it carries, is recognized for what it is—merely the threat of violence with a death potential. Such a man recognizes that death cannot possibly be the worst thing in the world. There are some things that are worse than death. To deny one's own integrity of personality in the presence of the human challenge is one of those things. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do," says Jesus.

One of the practical results following this new orientation is the ability to make an objective, detached appraisal of other people, particularly one's antagonists. Such an appraisal protects one from inaccurate and exaggerated estimations of another person's significance. In a conversation with me Lincoln Steffens once said that he was sure he could rear a child who was a member of a minority group or who was a habitué of a ghetto so as to immunize him against the corroding effects of such limitations.

He said: "I would teach him that he must never call another man 'great'; but that he must always qualify the term with the limiting phrase 'as to,' of the Greek language. A man is never great in general, but he may be great as to something in particular.



"Let me give you an illustration. Once I was the house guest in Berlin of one of the world's greatest scientists. During the first few days of my sojourn, I was completely disorganized. I was nervous, tended to be inarticulate, generally confused, and ill at ease. I had either to get a hold on myself or bring my visit abruptly to an end. One morning while shaving it occurred to me that despite my profound limitations of knowledge in physics and mathematics, I knew infinitely more about politics than did my host. At breakfast I found my tongue and my dignity, and the basis of equality between us was at once restored. My host was a great man *as to* his particular field of natural science, while I was competent in the field of contemporary politics and affairs. This awareness gave me my perspective."

The illustration anticipates the second basic question that must be answered by the disinherited: "What am I?" This question has to do, not with a sense of innate belonging, but rather with personal achievement and ability. All of the inner conflicts and frustrations growing out of limitations of opportunity become dramatically focused here. Even though a man is convinced of his infinite worth as a child of God, this may not in itself give him the opportunity for self-realization and fulfillment that his spirit demands. Even though he may no longer feel himself threatened by violence, the fact remains that for him doors often are closed. There are vocational opportunities that are denied him. It is obvious that the individual must reckon with the external facts of his environment, especially those that constrict his freedom.

There is something more to be said about the inner equipment growing out of the great affirmation of Jesus that a man is a *child* of God. If a man's ego has been stabilized, resulting in a sure grounding of his sense of personal worth and dignity, then he is in a position to appraise his own intrinsic powers, gifts, talents, and abilities. He no longer views his equipment through the darkened lenses of those who are largely responsible for his social predicament. He can think of himself with some measure of detachment from the shackles of his immediate world. If he equips himself in terms of training in this mood, his real ability is brought into play. The fact that he is denied opportunity will not necessarily deter him. He will postpone defeat until defeat itself closes in upon him. The interesting fact is that defeat may not close in upon him. Curious indeed is the notion that plays hide-and-seek with human life: "I may be an exception." A large measure of illusion and self-deception is implicit in this notion, but again and again it has come to the rescue of desperate people forced to take desperate chances.

The psychological effect on the individual of the conviction that he is a child of God gives a note of integrity to whatever he does. It provides character in the sense of sure knowledge and effective performance. After all, this is what we mean by character when applied to ability in action. When a man is sick and calls a doctor, what he wants most to know about the doctor is not the make of his automobile, or whether he obeys traffic signals, or what church he attends, or how many children he has, or if he is married. What is most crucial

about the doctor, so far as the sick man is concerned, is, Can he practice medicine?

Now, what we are discussing has profound bearing upon the kind of assurance and guidance that should be given to children who seem destined to develop a sense of defeat and frustration. The doom of the children is the greatest tragedy of the disinherited. They are robbed of much of the careless rapture and spontaneous joy of merely being alive. Through their environment they are plunged into the midst of overwhelming pressures for which there can be no possible preparation. So many tender, joyous things in them are nipped and killed without their even knowing the true nature of their loss. The normal for them is the abnormal. Youth is a time of soaring hopes, when dreams are given first wings and, as reconnoitering birds, explore unknown landscapes. Again and again a man full of years is merely the corroboration of the dreams of his youth. The sense of fancy growing out of the sense of fact—which makes all healthy personalities and gives a touch of romance and glory to all of life—first appears as the unrestrained imaginings of youth.

But the child of the disinherited is likely to live a heavy life. A ceiling is placed on his dreaming by the counsel of despair coming from his elders, whom experience has taught to expect little and to hope for less. If, on the other hand, the elders understand in their own experiences and lives the tremendous insight of Jesus, it is possible for them to share their enthusiasm with their children. This is the qualitative overtone springing from the depths of religious insight, and it is contagious. It will put into the hands of the

child the key for unlocking the door of his hopes. It must never be forgotten that human beings can be conditioned in favor of the positive as well as the negative. A great and central assurance will cause parents to condition their children to high endeavor and great aspiring, and these in turn will put the child out of the immediate, clawing reaches of the tense or the sustained negations of his environment. I have seen it happen. In communities that were completely barren, with no apparent growing edge, without any point to provide light for the disadvantaged, I have seen children grow up without fear, with quiet dignity and such high purpose that the mark which they set for themselves has even been transcended.

The charge that such thinking is merely rationalizing cannot be made with easy or accepted grace by the man of basic advantage. It ill behooves the man who is not forced to live in a ghetto to tell those who must how to transcend its limitations. The awareness that a man is a child of the God of religion, who is at one and the same time the God of life, creates a profound faith in life that nothing can destroy.

Nothing less than a great daring in the face of overwhelming odds can achieve the inner security in which fear cannot possibly survive. It is true that a man cannot be serene unless he possesses something about which to be serene. Here we reach the high-water mark of prophetic religion, and it is of the essence of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course God cares for the grass of the field, which lives a day and is no more, or the sparrow that falls unnoticed by the wayside. He also holds the stars in their appointed places, leaves his mark in every living thing. And he cares for me! To be assured of

this becomes the answer to the threat of violence—yea, to violence itself. To the degree to which a man knows *this*, he is unconquerable from within and without.

When I was a very small boy, Halley's comet visited our solar system. For a long time I did not see the giant in the sky because I was not permitted to remain up after sundown. My chums had seen it and had told me perfectly amazing things about it. Also I had heard of what were called "comet pills." The theory was that if the pills were taken according to directions, then when the tail of the comet struck the earth one would not be consumed. One night I was awakened by my mother, who told me to dress quickly and come with her out into the backyard to see the comet. I shall never forget it if I live forever. My mother stood with me, her hand resting on my shoulder, while I, in utter, speechless awe, beheld the great spectacle with its fan of light spreading across the heavens. The silence was like that of absolute motion. Finally, after what seemed to me an interminable time interval, I found my speech. With bated breath I said, "What will happen to us if that comet falls out of the sky?"

My mother's silence was so long that I looked from the comet to her face, and there I beheld something in her countenance that I had seen only once before, when I came into her room and found her in prayer. When she spoke, she said, "Nothing will happen to us, Howard; God will take care of us."

O simplehearted mother of mine, in one glorious moment you put your heart on the ultimate affirmation of the human spirit! Many things have I seen since that night. Times

without number I have learned that life is hard, as hard as crucible steel; but as the years have unfolded, the majestic power of my mother's glowing words has come back again and again, beating out its rhythmic chant in my own spirit. Here are the faith and the awareness that overcome fear and transform it into the power to strive, to achieve, and not to yield.