The Fear of Fear

WHEN a man has passed his fiftieth year, is unmarried, has no near and dear relatives or friends to whom he is especially attached, when his life, whether in business or in leisure, is methodical and unchanging, and when things that divert and give pleasure to others have become a burden—then let him beware of his own mind, for he knows not what trick it may be making ready to play upon him.

It is with souls as with animals—starvation and ill treatment will render even the most gentle of them unmanageable, eccentric and dangerous.

I am moved to set down these reflections by the peculiar fate that recently overtook Andrew Dawley—a man whom I had known for ten years or more with some degree of intimacy, but whom I hesitate to describe as a friend of mine, for the reason that I have once or twice heard him say—coolly and without bitterness—that he had no friends.

There were twenty years between our ages, an interval that would be likely to forbid close relations between two men who were without common tastes and interests. Propinquity gave us acquaintance, for I occupied at that time the room next but one to his, on the fourth floor, in the east wing of the Hotel MacMahon; but it was an acquaintance that was as slow of growth and almost as frigid as a glacier.

The first year, I think, we merely nodded when we met in the hall. During the second and third years we exchanged an occasional word. About that time, I remember, he captured a sneak thief on the stairway, overcame his fierce resistance, and held him until the police came, and I, hearing of it, went to his room to talk it over.

Then I left the hotel for a matter of five or six years, and on my return found Dawley the only one I knew in the place—still occupying the same room, and living the same unvarying life. And now, at rare intervals, we spent an evening together, usually on his invitation, and in his room. He seemed to be ill at ease elsewhere.

Up to the time that he explained to me his peculiar theory on the subject of fear, I had regarded him as a dull and commonplace character. Conversation with him was difficult, by reason of my apparent inability to discover a topic in which he was genuinely interested. There were interminable pauses, during which he drew slowly and regularly at his pipe, and stared into the fire.

Our discussion on the subject of fear began with my commenting on the fact that a light was burning in his room the night before at one o'clock, which I had noticed, coming in at that hour, after a dance.

"I keep a light in my room all night," said he; "I hate the dark."

Now, this had not been his custom when I was a neighbor of his some years before, and I commented upon the change.

"I suppose it is an evidence of the weight of years," said he; "but I am troubled of late with peculiar fancies and dreams. Sitting alone here in the evening, things somehow get on my nerves, and the thought of suddenly waking out of a sound sleep to find myself shut in by blackness is quite intolerable to me."

Now this sentiment was so utterly at variance with my conception of Andrew Dawley—a cold, practical man of business and of the world, as I knew him—that instead of dropping the subject, as I might have done with a more sensitive man, I pursued it somewhat farther.

"As a child," I remarked, "I had a great terror of the dark; but it ceased entirely when I was old enough to reason with myself."

"What was the course of your reasoning?" he asked.

"Well, I had become convinced that supernatural beings did not exist—such as ghosts and goblins and gnomes—and, on the other hand, I knew that in a well-protected house there was practically no danger from burglars or wild animals. So, having completely assured myself that there was nothing in the dark, any more than there was in the light, I ceased to be afraid of it."

"Good logic," said Dawley, with a smile. "I remember working out the same conclusion when I was about twelve years old. And it has held with me ever since, until recently I discovered a flaw in the reasoning. Oh, it doesn't apply to anyone else," he added hastily, "as I undertook to speak. "It is purely personal, and I hesitate to disturb your equanimity by describing it..

"Never fear," said I, with a laugh. "These sentiments are largely based on temperament, and I don't believe anything is likely to change my point of view."

"Our boyish logic," said he, after a pause, "disposed of everything that was objective—from the outside—whether real or supernatural; but it did not touch the subjective elements of the problem, of which the chief is fear itself. Now, I do not believe I am physically a coward—"

"I know you are not," I interrupted. "I remember your capture of that thief. He was armed, and resisted fiercely, but you hung on."

"Yes," he said, "a man finds out whether he is a coward or not by the time he reaches my age; and I have good reason to know that my courage is not deficient. And I have no superstitions—which disposes of ghosts and supernatural things. So there is nothing for me to fear. Here is where the reasoning faculty stops, and something else—you call it temperament, do you?—begins. I do suffer from fear—at times to the very edge of my self-control. What is it? Why is it? I believe that what I fear is fear itself."

I shook my head. "Thaat statement is meaningless to me," I said.

"Is it?" he asked, almost wistfully; "can't you imagine being in terror of a great fright that may overtake you some time, even though you are unable to anticipate a reasonable excuse therefor. Let me give it to you in more concrete form. A year or two ago I had a dream of a peculiarly vivid and impressive character. It was of my sudden awakening here in bed, in this room, to behold a man leaning over me. He was in strange, uncouth dress—not of the modern day, I should judge—and he was surrounded by, and seemed to give out, a fierce red light. He shouted some words to me—I don't know what they were; only, at the sound of them, such a mighty and overwhelming terror came upon me that I lay paralyzed as to motion and thought. Then I awoke, really awoke this time, and I found my body wet with perspiration, and my heart beating so fiercely and with such great pain that I feared some blood vessel must give way."

At this point I interrupted him, for his voice was trembling with excitement.

"You say you are not superstitions," I said. "Then you surely are not going to allow yourself to be affected by a dream? An overloaded stomach is always likely to disturb the heart. Its rapid movement causes a sensation exactly similar to fright, and the wandering brain conjures up a scare situation to fit it. Did you never dream out an elaborate series of events, culminating in a pistol shot, and then awaken to find that a window sash had dropped, and you had pieced out the dream backwards, as it were?"

"How do you account for my having this same dream, without an iota of change, half a dozen times since that first experience?" asked Dawley.

"It results," I answered, with the easy confidence one shows in disposing of the problems of others, "from the profound impression the first dream made on your mind and memory."

He smiled, and looked at me with half-closed eyes. Then he relighted his pipe, which had gone out, and I remember that the hand holding the match trembled a good deal.

By this time the subject had become distasteful to me, revealing a mental weakness or eccentricity in Dawley that was not pleasant to contemplate. So I turned the conversation into other channels.

Only on one other occasion did we speak again of this fear and the dream, and then, as before, it was brought up by a careless question.

Entering his room one night, I noticed a powerful bolt that had been newly fastened on the inside of his door, and I asked if the lock had been broken.

It was a natural inquiry, and there seemed to be no cause for the tremble in his voice and the peculiar light in his eyes as he replied to me:

"A lock can be picked. I wished to satisfy myself that it was impossible for a human being to enter this room while I sleep."

I glanced up at the transom. It was held shut by a heavy iron bar. Then I looked out of the window. It faced the court between the wings of the building, with a sheer drop of nearly forty feet.

"Utterly impossible," said I.

Then I noticed for the first time a certain waxiness in the texture of the skin over his forehead, and a sunken depth to his eyes.

"Has the dream reappeared?" I asked.

"Frequently."

"The trouble with you, Dawley," I mused aloud, "is that you are too much alone."

"I have no friends," he said, in a calm, dispassionate tone, such as one might use in speaking of some trivial matter of business.

"You should make them," I said, with emphasis.

"I am over the Divide," he answered. "My course of life will not change very readily, I fear."

Then he deliberately and pointedly changed the topic, and I did not recur to it again at any time. As I say, he was twenty years my senior, and we had little in common. I had many friends and many interests, and Dawley and his oddities formed an unimportant episode.

But it was only a week after this conversation that the terrible event took place, which every newspaper reader in the city will remember.

It was at two in the morning that I awoke suddenly from a profound slumber, with the consciousness that some one had run past my door, screaming.

I sprang out of bed, and as I did so heard the crash of breaking glass in the court below, and saw a brilliant red gleam through the blinds at the window. I looked out; the kitchen and dining-room in the rear of the hotel had already burst into flame, and a great volume of smoke poured out of the lower windows of the east wing.

My own room was on the second floor, in the center of the building, and I saw that there was plenty of time for me to escape, and to help others in that vicinity. I jumped into a bathrobe and slippers, and, rolling my clothes into a bundle under my arm, ran out into the hall.

I hammered at each door that I passed, and yelled in a frenzy of excitement and horror. The place was rapidly filling with smoke, and the light grew brighter. Presently I noticed that my clothes were gone. I had dropped them while helping a woman who seemed to be unable to walk through pure terror. The man who had first roused me had gone up to the fourth floor, and the people were pouring down the stairways, in their night robes, or wrapped in blankets, some carrying children—of which, thank heaven, there were few in the house—others bird cages, and some dragging trunks, bang, bang! over the steps.

I had several good friends in the hotel, and now that the alarm seemed to be generally given, I ran to their assistance; but I did not think of Dawley, nor did I at any time attempt to get over into the east wing of the building. It was on that side that the flames were fiercest, and the elevator shaft and stairway between that wing and the main building were roaring like a furnace. Suddenly the halls began to fill with firemen in long coats and helmets, some with axes and others dragging up hose.

There seemed to be nothing more for me to do, so I ran down the main stairway and out into the street, where a great crowd was assembled. I noticed that their faces were turned toward the east wing, and, as I instinctively glanced in that direction, I remembered Dawley and the man of his fearsome dream.

The man was on his way—a huge bulk of a fireman, running up the long ladder that had been hoisted from the wagon and now rested against the wall, just below the window of Dawley's room.

But was it possible that he still slept through all this uproar and the glare of the flame, and the odor of burning wood? Surely, he must be asleep, else he would have appeared at the window. Then it suddenly flashed into my mind what was the meaning of the white skin and sunken eyes—a narcotic! Without doubt, he was still sleeping.

The fireman made his way through the heat to the top of the ladder, and swung into the open window. Streams of water played upon the flames beneath him, to protect his retreat. Two other men ran up the ladder, and had just reached the top, when he returned to the window, carrying a human figure wrapped in a blanket. The others assisted him, and they made their way slowly down the ladder again.

"Overcome by the smoke," said a man standing near me. But I noticed that no smoke came out of the open window.

I ran forward to a pile of mattresses and bed clothes that had been carried out from the hotel, and arranged a place for him to be laid. The call for a doctor flew along the line of spectators, and presently one came running. I asked the fireman what had happened.

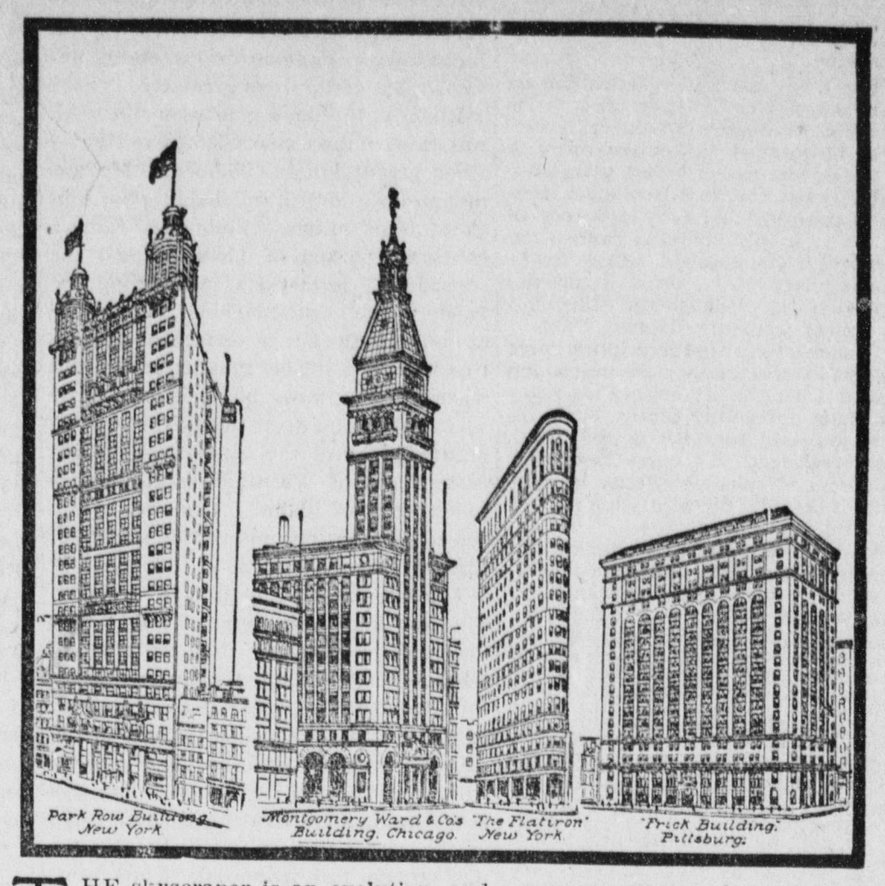
"He was sound asleep when I entered the room through the window," he said. "I had to shake him hard to wake him up. He just stared at me a moment, and said, 'Ah! You have come,' and then his face turned kind of black, and his jaw dropped, and he went into a dead faint."

"How is it?" I asked the doctor, as he rose from stooping over the prostrate figure.

"Heart action ceased entirely," he replied. "Man is stone dead from mere terror."—San Francisco Argonaut.

When a man makes a very long prayer in church, somehow his hearers get the impression that when he scolds in the privacy of his family he keeps a long time at it.

UNIQUE FEATURES IN SKYSCRAPERS.



THE skyscraper is an evolution, and a very recent one, from the comparatively modest structures of an earlier period. It is only fifteen years since the first of the type was planned, and it originated in Chicago, which city claims the Tacoma Building, completed in 1889, as the first American skyscraper. In all our large cities, where foot front values are enormous and constantly enhancing, the "Chicago construction" idea, or the modern bridge built skyscraper, with its skeleton of steel and outer covering of stone, brick and glass (and which is riveted together so firmly that the Cyclops might roll it down hill like a bird cage, if they chose, without injury to its structural parts, at once leaped into favor. Other cities, notably New York, seized upon the idea, expanded and elaborated it, and then began a race as to which should build the tallest structures, the tendency ever upward and with "excelsior" as the motto.

Without any intended disparagement of other cities, it may be safely asserted that New York now possesses more and larger skyscrapers than any other city in the world. A decade or so ago Chicago was in the lead, but now it is the great metropolis of the Empire State, with its structures of steel towering skyward by the score.

The tallest office buildings in the world are to be found in New York City. It was thought the limit had been reached in the Park Row or Syndicate Building, which, though nominally 382 feet in height, is 447 feet from the street to the tops of the flagstaffs on its twin towers and 501 from the base of its foundations. It is called the tallest office building in the world, its cupolas being 100 feet higher than the dome of the capitol at Washington and almost as high as the apex of the great pyramid. And yet this great structure, with its 950 rooms and accommodations for nearly 4,000 occupants, stands upon a foundation of sand. Its total estimated weight of 20,000 tons is supported upon a forest of 12,000 piles driven into the sand by the blows of a twenty ton driver. It cost $2,400,000 and is said to be a paying investment—in fact, there is hardly a skyscraper in New York, Chicago or any any other city where realties are vastly valuable that is not returning a good rate of interest from its rentals. If it is not, then there is something the matter, the experts say, with its management.

One of the most unique of skyscrapers, almost abnormal in its peculiarities, is the so-called flatiron structure at the intersection of Broadway, 5th avenue and 23d street, New York. Viewed from the front it appears like the bow of an immense ship, being just wide enough at its edge for a narrow window, yet it is twenty-one stories high, rising 285 feet above the street, and each floor of this stone and steel structure contains 8,600 square feet of space. It cost $1,500,000. One of Chicago's latest and finest structures is Montgomery Ward & Co.'s building. It contains twenty-one stories and measures 390 feet to the top of the weather vane.

One of the most sumptuously fitted of office buildings is said to be the Frick skyscraper in Pittsburg, recently erected, which is twenty-two stories, covers an entire block, has a floor area of 500,000 square feet and cost, with the land it stands on, $4,250,000.

The erection of a five hundred foot skyscraper presents no greater difficulties to be overcome than that of a two hundred footer, for the structure itself, considered geometrically, is a cumulative growth to which the genius of years has steadily contributed. The building of skyscrapers is now an exact science, and doubtless a structure could be planned by our architects that could be extended upward as far as desired. It has required a rapid readjustment of the point of view to keep up with the growth of skyscrapers, and the really unique features have become, like the articles enumerated by the auctioneer, "too numerous to mention."

LIVED TO A REMARKABLE AGE.

"Grandma" Mills Was the Oldest Woman in Canada.

Mrs. James Mills, of Woodham, Ont., who died a few days ago at the age of 115 years, was the oldest woman in Canada, if not in the world. "Grandma" Mills, as she was called, whose maiden name was Mary Ann Coulter, was born in the town of Pettig, County of Fermanagh, Ireland, October 18, 1787, when George III. was King. She lived under the rule of five British sovereigns, George III., George IV., William IV., Victoria and Edward VII. Until three or four years ago she could readily recall and fluently relate stirring incidents of the early part of the nineteenth century, but of late, though her memory was clear and unimpaired, it was difficult to converse with her, owing to her deafness. Up to a few weeks ago she was bright and active, and through her last illness she retained consciousness until within a few hours of her death.

"GRANDMA" MILLS, WHO DIED AGED 115.

Mrs. Mills and her family emigrated to Canada in 1857 and settled in the virgin forests of Osborne Township, Huron County, on the concessions of the Canada Land Company. Mr. Mills died two years after landing in Canada, succumbing to the hardships of pioneer life in the backwoods. Of their family of nine children, four sons and five daughters, five are still living—one in New Zealand, and four in Canada. The second son, James, of St. Thomas, is 76 years of age. All her other children are well on in years. Mrs. Mills has descendants to the sixth generation. Three or four years ago she went to St. Mary's Ont., to have her photograph taken, and surprised her friends by walking unassisted with a light, brisk step up a long flight of stairs leading to the photograph gallery. She was proud of her old age and was always pleased to receive visitors, of whom she had many, as she was known far and wide.

All through her life Mrs. Mills had been a devout Methodist, and while living with her sons in St. Thomas walked to church every Sunday that the weather was favorable. Mrs. Mills never partook of tobacco, snuff or stimulants of any kind, and in her active days toiled at many things from which women of the present generation shrink.

Long Evenings.

"Yes, we carry an evening suit," said the Arctic explorer.

"But isn't it a lot of trouble changing so often in those cold climates?" protested the friend.

"We don't change often. You know the evenings are six months long up there."

A man is seldom as smart or as foolish as his wife thinks he is.