

## THE NEW FEAR

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ON a certain Monday in Whit-week the staircase of the Musée de Picardie at Amiens was crowded with peasants standing at gaze before the painting by Puvis de Chavannes called the *Ludus Pro Patria*. There in front of them, meandering through a vast table-land of woods and fields, flowed a slow, tree-mirroring river of Picardy. On the banks of it were the folks at holiday, the young men throwing darts, the women preparing the feast. Not far away, in the *Ave Picardie Nutrix*, was net-weaving and apple-gathering; spinning and sheep-herding; the building of a bridge and the crushing of the grain; women bathing and a woman nursing her child: an allegory, not only of the pleasant poplar-land, but of toil and rest, sowing and harvesting, age and death, a shadow-picture of the passing of the gods of the earth.

But the subjects of the paintings, those whose toil had been the inspiration of them, stood in absolute silence, expressing neither surprise nor wonder. Quietly they stood and quietly they went away. And what they thought nobody knew but themselves. Probably they had no distinct thought at all, but a vague sense of familiarity tempered by unreality. For what the peasants saw in front of them was the spirit of beauty distilled from toil. But toil produces warped muscles, stunted frames, pallid or heavy bodies, slow-moving minds. And these facts they vaguely knew, though they could not follow the mystic change by which the familiar processes of labor had been transmuted. They were, in fact, looking at one of the latest expressions of that older world of art which lived to distil beauty from the present and to suggest it from the past. They were not only facing a sublimation of actual sowing and harvesting, building and fishing, but all the glamour that dreamers in the past, from Theocritus downwards, have thrown over the primitive task of earth-culture. And to the peasants this trailing glory of romance was simply non-existent. They were not afraid, for they were blind, though possibly rather puzzled.

Equally blind, equally puzzled, are probably most of the people in the crowds that gather round the Post-Impressionist pictures in front of Matisse and Cézanne, of Picasso and the rest. Nor are they at all afraid; yet what they regard so gaily, is, after all, when reduced to its essentials, a recoil in the face of fear, of that new fear which is directed against the things we have ourselves made. Post-Impressionism in painting, like Impressionism in sculpture, is neither health nor disease, but a symptom of a new mental condition found not only in art but in political and social life as well.

The first thing the Post-Impressionist throws overboard is suggestion, romance, that in fact by which the work of Puvis de Chavannes and of all older artists was inspired. The art of yesterday lived but to awake echoes in richly stored minds: the art of to-day, whether in Rodin's *Last Appeal*, in Matisse's *Capucins* or in John Masefield's *Widow in the Bye Street*, is made to appeal to the savage, the child, the Martian, to minds that have no background of æsthetic ideals held in common. It is a rebound in the face of achievement that we witness, not only in Post-Impressionism, but in many tendencies of the popular will to-day.

For the truth is that we are overweighted, overawed, reduced to timidity of initiative as long as we turn our eyes backwards toward the supreme expressions of early art. In painting, poetry and sculpture there always loom before our memories the awful haunting shadows of Raphael, Michael Angelo, Homer, Æschylus and Phidias; of Italian and Spanish schools; of Dutch, Miltonic and Shakespearian incarnations of beauty. We petty men walk under the huge legs of these things done superlatively well and done for all time, as we count time on this planet. Who for instance ever tried to paint the mystery of woman without seeing the mocking smile of the Mona Lisa before his inner eye? The trumpet notes of the hymn to beauty have rung once and for all; we can only echo it in ever fainter and fainter tones. And that is but a sorrowful task.

There is nothing for it but to start again; to make for the leaping-off place once more, this time with an entirely different objective before us. And the leaping-off place is the child's, the

savage's, absorption in life, movement, color-play, in sensation devoid of memory, either bitter or sweet. We return to the primitive reindeer scratchings: we will create a new world, not paint once more for the millionth time an illusory picture of an old, a very well-known one. As music hangs by the side of the actual an orb of creative sound, so the Post-Impressionists would hang by it a visual orb of color, a vibrating microcosm of the universe; an orb of human making hanging by the divine orb. Whereby, indeed, by comparison we may, as a cynic would observe, learn the immensely superior workmanship of the divine artificer!

All this means a new objective: back once more at the starting point, moving by instinct, not intellect, the painter becomes aware that the zest of life, which is art's pre-occupation, is by no means always concerned with beauty. The life, the vitality of our emotions is often a matter of terror, pain, squalor, agony and effort. The old academic ideal of reducing every sensation to one of beauty is gone for ever. The vibration of life itself is the new ideal where once only the vibration of beauty was sought. So, turning at bay in face of the new fear, we have learnt a fresh courage. We find that, after all, we have much to say, much that burns to be said, though in these things that we wish to say, only to the eye of the mystic, such as old Rodin, would it seem true that "there is no ugliness." We work only by the senses now, seeking, savage-like, the rage and vitality of the vibrations that make no world of beauty as the Academy of Art would see it, but a world none the less. We go back to the leaping-off place, the new start, and there Homeric epic drives us from the gods to *The Man with the Hoe*; from *Lear* we fly to *Hindle Wakes*; from the majesty of movement in the *Winged Victory* to the straining muscles of Rodin's *Last Appeal*; from the sun-shot landscape of Turner to the leaden seas of Bogaevsky; from the Madonna to the fragment that passion tosses aside on the scrap-heap, Rodin's *Old Hag*. We are passing from the high adventure of loveliness to the no less lofty adventure of pain. We are dealing with the other side of the shield.

And wound round these primordial things are dreams, the

primitive dreams of a child's vision of creation. Here the Russian surpasses all his European compeers, as the Chinese landscape painter surpasses the European in the suggestion of bizarre creation, a mockery of the divine as seen by the pygmy. The Russian is nearer to the savage, perhaps, than is the Englishman or the Frenchman, nearer to the true start. The Russian is in fact the primitive dreamer, and where the other European schools get back to the bones of savage sensation, the Russian has no need to fuss about bones, for the very blood of the thing is in him. He is, in these childlike matters, no anatomist, but a living, breathing man. Matisse's *Danseuses*, for instance, are such shapes as prehistoric man might have created in nightmare, their trailing feet an ancestral memory of the slime beasts of the primitive ocean. The drawing is right enough. But Roerich's *Night*, his *Priests of Beyond*, are the haunting instincts of a child's night terrors; Roerich's blue lights the original primitive, mind-stuff of fear itself. And the *Rex* of Chourlianis, its mystic central fire, its casting down of golden crowns, its glassy sea, is but a split in the curtain of a child's creative awe. The Russian Post-Impressionist is at once a prophecy and an explanation.

As far as art is concerned, out of fear has come the possibility, at any rate, of new mastery; for illusion we have creation; for beauty, the infinite vibrations of many-colored life. And if these things are not yet, they are at least potentially involved in the new impetus which is everywhere seeking a vent.

In politics and science the way is not so clear. Yet in those regions fear rules even more unmistakably. For men change the fashion of their fears as they change the cut of their garments. Once it was the animals, the wind and the sea that we feared. Now we harness the winds and outwit the trickery of the sea with a steam kettle. Nor is any affinity dearer to us than that of the animals whose love we have conquered in the long ages during which we were breaking the horse to the plough, teaching the dog to know the look in a human eye, or inducing the cat to bow her head in the kindly worship of the hearth. Of these things we have no fear; nor of the simpler creatures yet untamed that yield to a Martini-Henry rifle.

It is not the anti-human things outside us that we dread

nowadays, neither beast, nor storm wind, nor electric current; it is the Frankenstein of our own manufacture, a being before whose infinite unknown possibilities we stand aghast. From the art of beauty which does so obsess us, we can escape to a new creative world; but where is the power that will save us from the machine that enslaves where it was meant to free? How shall we escape the awful possibilities of our evolving scientific powers, from aerial warfare, from the tyranny of the anti-toxin, from the hypnotic gift that reads even the mind of the atom, from telepathic and clairvoyant powers from which no secrets are hid, and finally from the potentialities of creation which would follow on any discovery of the secret of life? As it is, we are already afraid of the race that we may make. And the great expression of that fear is the presence in our midst of those croaking prophets of evil, the Eugenists, who cry not "Corpse, corpse," like the raven, but a far more awful note, which is "Babe, babe."

But even these premonitions pale before the portents of the social engine we have created, only half consciously. No politician is likely now to underestimate the importance of international labor. The strangest feature of that is the rapidity of its movement. A mushroom growth no older than the beginning of the nineteenth century, it possesses for man the terror he always associates, since primitive jungle days, with that which is sinuous and swift-moving, a creature snaky yet panther-like. Trade-Unionism, Socialism, Syndicalism; will they re-make civilization, either by Anarchy or by the slow incalculable processes of growth? With dread we wait the answer. But if labor will deal with the frontiers of nations, will not the monstrous regimen of awakening woman reorganize the very fabric of the social structure itself? For ultimately the economic independence of woman, now no more than a cloud like a man's hand in the sky of Feminism, will overshadow all other questions. And the real economic independence of woman will mean not only a new basis of industrialism, but a fresh setting on the loom of life of that out of which the race is built—the relationship between man, woman and child.

Truly, we are not only Fear-driven, we are Hag-ridden. And Art, Science, Labor and Woman, these make our Frankenstein.

## THE AGE OF CONSENT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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“**T**IS not good that children should know any wickedness,” says Shakespeare. The general sentiment of mankind seems to be that children should at least be protected against the worst results of the wickedness of adults, yet the history of the “Age of Consent” legislation is one of sacrifice of child life to the legal protection and to the greed and lust of grown men. If we accept the custom of many nations to call those “infants” who are under seven years, we shall find that such infants have long been protected against the worst form of violent abuse. Children, however, those between seven and fourteen years, have but tardily received legal protection against debauchment; and youth, or “young persons,” between the ages of fourteen and sixteen to eighteen, have only recently been held as proper subjects for legal guardianship against the exploitation of vice and crime.

The age of consent is that period below which no girl can legally consent to “carnal relations with the other sex.” The crimes of rape, seduction, abduction for immoral purposes, and “procuring” for houses of ill-fame, have direct relationship to this age of consent; and for the reason that men committing these crimes are liable to heavy penalties, ranging in the various States from three months’ imprisonment to a life term, and to fine from a few hundred to several thousands of dollars. It is therefore highly important for men and women engaged in any form of criminality connected with the debauchment of young girls to have the age of consent so low that the plea of voluntary assent by the child or young person to that debauchment may take the male offender out of the category of these criminal charges and place him in the company of mere misdemeanants, to be punished very lightly, if at all. Immoral men, engaged in voluntary dealing with immoral women who know what they are doing and choose that relationship, are practically exempt from all statutory penalties. Hence, the interest of bad men and women is to keep the age of consent low and thus to lessen