

WHY BE AFRAID?

The writer of this article, Sir Edward Villiers, served with the R.F.C. and R.A.F. in the European war, and in Afghanistan in 1919. He was a member of Bengal Legislative Council, 1924-26; president, European Association of India, 1931-32; vice-chairman, Union of Britain and India, 1933-35. He is in his 51st year, a director of New World Pictures, Limited, London, and was created a knight in 1936.

By SIR EDWARD VILLIERS

LONDON

EUROPE today, including Britain is a sick place. Many reasons are given for this sickness. Greed—envy—hatred—nationalism—economic laws—and goodness knows what else.

But true as these may be, they are but symptoms. And the first necessity in tackling a disease is to find out the root cause.

I am going to tell you what this root cause is, what has brought it about, and finally I am going to tell you what the cure is. Not, mark you, what the cure may be—but quite definitely what it is.

All of which seems a pretty tall undertaking. And I can hear you say, with every justification, "Who the deuce is this fellow, anyway?"

GRUDGE telling you, because it is such a waste of time. And I have so much to say—and so little space in which to say it.

Let this suffice. I have participated in two wars. I have been shot by terrorists. I have had four or five major flying accidents.

On two occasions I have faced what seemed certain death. I have spent 80 very unpleasant minutes alone in a room with a dangerous lunatic. As a married man I have been out of a job with less than £10 left in the bank.

I apologize for mentioning these vulgar and irrelevant details. I do so only to show you that as much as any and more than most I know something of what I am writing about—namely, fear.

For that is Europe's—including Britain's—disease today.

I DO not mean that we are all going about with ashen faces and quaking knees, afraid of a German or Italian invasion. Nor do I mean that, should war come, we have any real fears as to the ultimate outcome. That sort of fear is temporary, straightforward, and comparatively simple.

What I mean by fear is a much more insidious thing. I mean that which steals upon a man in the small hours of the morning; that which makes him wonder what life nowadays is all about, and whether it is worth while; which makes some of our women thank God they have no children.

By fear I mean that blind, bewildered lack of confidence and faith in anything or anybody. That state of purposeless drift which makes us all live our lives on the basis of "Let us eat, drink and be merry—for tomorrow we die."

SOME years ago in Paris I saw one of those Grand Guignol plays, the theme of which was a fire in a home for the blind.

When the alarm sounded there followed a ghastly sort of blind-man's buff. They crashed and staggered into the walls and into each other in a kind of blind, animal terror. I shall never forget the scene. They lost their heads, and with them every faculty which could have enabled them to reach safety.

Now I am not suggesting that Britain is in anything like this condition. But there is an unpleasant similarity between it and the present state of affairs in Europe.

EVEN here there is only one topic of conversation. Trade and business are slack; house agents cannot sell or let houses. As for the stock exchange, were it not so abject it would be ridiculous—as much for its jitter-booms as for its jitter-slumps.

And at the back of it all, and responsible for it all, is that feeling of insecurity, uncertainty and lack of confidence which, in a word, is fear.

Now this is all ridiculous—for there is only one thing to be afraid of in this world—and that is fear. The moment you admit fear, down go all your defences. I have proved this over and over again.

But I have also proved quite definitely that, properly tackled, fear can be banished.

I COULD give you many instances. Let one suffice.

Some years ago I returned to Calcutta one day to find that a great friend of mine had, a couple of days before, suddenly gone raving mad during a dinner party he was giving—had attacked his guests—had been finally overpowered and taken to the asylum.

The first time I went to see him he did not even recognize me. On subsequent visits he did, but was very hostile. He had got it into his head that I, among others, was responsible for his being shut up.

Some months later, after an early morning ride, I walked out of my bathroom into my dressing room to find him sitting on my sofa.

He jumped up and, after calling me a something, something—

wanted to know why the blazes he shouldn't smash me.

I have a horror of anyone not in possession of his mind—even of a drunken man. On this occasion I was frankly terrified—for the moment. I then conquered my fear—I will tell you how later—and after one hour and twenty minutes managed to calm him and get rid of him.

THE point of this story is that while my fear was present I could do nothing. The moment it went I could cope with the situation.

So much, then, for the disease. What of the cause? Put briefly, it is that the world has lost its foothold. And that foothold is—God.

For years now Europe has been wandering farther and farther away from that foothold—thinking it could do without God—except, perhaps, on Sundays.

I realize that to many this will sound like a lot of sanctimonious clap-trap; the sort of thing that makes the average Briton shut up like a clam.

But bear with me for a moment. After all, put at its worst you have already paid for your paper and your only risk is that of being made bored and uncomfortable.

And at best? Suppose I should succeed in suggesting to only a few of you a means of help. Isn't it worth the risk?

REMEMBER, I am not being sectarian; I am not at the moment even concerned with Christianity. Only with God.

Now, if there is a God—and I am presuming that most of you believe in one, though possibly rather vaguely—if there is a God, He must have the following attributes:

He must be all-powerful. He must be present everywhere—and not only in churches. He must be present all the time—and He must be all-good.

If this is so—and, I repeat, if there is a God, He must have these attributes—what it amounts to is this:

First, that we have with us at all times and in all places, no matter where we are or what we are doing, a Friend who wants to help us and whose powers of helping are limited by only one thing—our willingness to be helped.

Remember, this is no parsonical theory. If my premises are true, this Friendship business must be as actual a fact as a man's bank balance—or overdraft.

SECOND, there must obviously be a purpose for the world and a function for all it contains—man-kind included—both individually and collectively. To think of God as creating and evolving the world merely out of caprice is to rate Him lower than man. Which is obviously ridiculous.

If, then, we have a function to fulfil, obviously He is not going to withhold from us the means of fulfilling that function. And this holds good just as much about physical things, such as money and help and friendship and happiness, as it does of spiritual things.

This is subject to that one natural and inevitable qualification—namely, our willingness to take the gifts He offers. To force them upon us would be to take away from us His greatest gift—namely, free will.

And that is where we have gone astray. Individually, and, therefore, nationally, we have put this very real, wholly well-wishing and utterly powerful Friend out of our lives. Put at its lowest, it is just too idiotic for words.

WHAT we have to do is to do our best—availing ourselves at all times of the help which is always there—and then leave it to Him.

And when I say leave it, I mean leave it—leave it in complete confidence. Not in a hesitant, distrustful way—nagging and vexing Him and ourselves the whole time as to how it will be done—but just leave it.

If we can get back to doing this, there can be no room for fear.

It isn't a question of that rather unsatisfactory thing, blind faith. If there is a God it is ordinary, straightforward logic.

This is what I realized in the case, for example, of my lunatic friend. All I needed to do in this most difficult situation was to do my best—knowing that if I then left it to Him, all must be well. And I have proved this over and over again.

And that is what Britain has got to do now.

We have got individually to recapture our foothold. To regain as a living reality in our everyday lives our belief and trust in God. If we do this individually, we shall end up by doing it nationally.

THEN indeed shall we become invincible—because we shall be fearless.

"Trust in God," said Cromwell, "and keep your powder dry." Let us forge ahead with our rearmament—our national training—and our protective measures.

Let us keep our powder dry. But let us also trust in God.