

A STUDY OF FEARS.

One of the most interesting of the fifty-four child-study topics investigated by the psychological laboratory of Clark University is a study of fears.

The fear-instinct is the most deeply seated of all our psychic inheritances. And being so it is the most constant factor to which appeal may be made both for good and for bad. The influence of fear is so great that often it paralyzes both mind and body, and, indeed, even when its effect is milder, it may be said to color all our motives and condition all our actions.

"There is no one without fear, and those few who so emphatically disclaim all fear, and the psychologists who tabulate the percentages of fearless people, are thinking of shock or panic, or acute fright, or special physical dread, etc., but not of the subtler forms, like fear of God, of dishonor, failure of their highest purposes for themselves or others.

"Not only does everyone fear, but all should fear. The pedagogic problem is not to eliminate fear, but to gauge it to the power of proper reaction. Fears that paralyze some brains are a good tonic for others. In some form and degree all need it always.

The difficulty is to adjust to the vast range of individualities and the very different stages of development. A true curriculum of fears would by no means omit all lower and more drastic forms, but would be always intent upon substituting its higher and wider ranged spurs for its more degraded and primary ones, up to reverence and worship of the sublime and awe-inspiring. Here fear must be reduced, there abated, here made more tenuous, there more crass. We fear God better because we have feared thunder. Without the fear apparatus in us what a wealth of motive would be lost!"—Quoted from "A Study of Fears," Dr. Hall's monogram on the subject of this lecture. Other quotations will be made from the same work, where the lecturer's views will be made clearer thereby.]

The facts from which this lecture is drawn, were collected from an extensive range of individual cases. A two-page circular or questionnaire was widely distributed among teachers and students, with a request that answers thereto be collected and sent to the Clark university for collation. Twelve thousand answers have been received, each giving on an average about one-dozen fears with concomitant circumstances.

[That the reader may get some idea of the questions asked, I quote here two paragraphs from this syllabus:

1. "Fears of celestial phenomena, e.g., of winds, storms, thunder and lightning, heavenly bodies, meteors, sky-falling, cloud, mists, fog and cloud-forms; end of the world and attendant phenomena; night and darkness, eclipse; moon-breaking, that the sun may not rise; peculiar sky colors, northern lights, excessive heat and cold loss of orientation and points of compass.

3. "Living things, self-moving things generally; big eyes, mouth, teeth, dogs, cats, snakes, pigs, rats and mice, spiders, bugs and beetles, toads, etc.; sight of blood, robbers and burglars, strangers, society and bashfulness; fear of being laughed at, talked of, or of being ridiculous; shyness of opposite sex; fear of fighting; cowardice, poltroonery, suspiciousness.

7. "In each case state order and age of fear; how long they lasted, how intense they were, what acts they prompted, and educational good or bad effects; was sleep affected? State

specific symptoms—starting, paleness or sweat, urinations, rigidity, cramps, horripilations and creepy crawling feelings, nausea, weakness, fainting, flight, causes, treatment and cures."

When collected the answers to this syllabus covered nearly 4,000 manuscript pages. The classifying of this diverse material required unusual patience and painstaking tabulation, and it could never have been done by one person. A rough classification of 6,456 fears, with reference to the object feared, gave the following general results:

Fear of celestial phenomena, i. e., thunder and lightning, cyclones, comets, eclipses, etc., 996 cases, with 603 of them for thunder and lightning; of darkness, ghosts, dream fears, solitude, 799 cases, with 432 for darkness alone; of animals, 1,486 cases, with 483 of them for reptiles; of fire, water and drowning, 627 cases; of strange persons, robbers, etc., 586 cases, and of death and disease, 540 cases.

From which it would seem that fear of animals predominates; then follow fear of natural forces, then of darkness, ghosts, etc., followed by fire, water etc., with death and disease, the smallest in the list.

Classified according to sex, girls showed vastly more fears than boys. Out of 1,106, well described fears of 500 boys, and 1,765, well defined fears of 500 girls, following comparative examples are selected from 23 varieties of fears:

	Girls.	Boys.
Of thunder and lightning ..	230	155
Of persons ..	190	129
Of reptiles ..	180	123
Of darkness ..	171	130
Of death ..	102	74
Of rats and mice ..	75	13
Of ghosts ..	72	44
Of water ..	53	62
Of blood ..	44	14
Shyness ..	8	9
Fairies ..	7	0
Total ..	1,132	753

From which it would seem that there is ground for the proverbial timidity of the feminine sex, though not so much as is ordinarily supposed.

The number of fears that haunt children varies with age. ["Thus 36 boys below 4 years return 1.76 fears each, while 74 girls of the same age average 4.89 fears each. All these boys record 2.94, and all these girls 4.62 fears each. The fears of the boys increase from 7 to 15, and then decline, while those of the girls increase more steadily from 4 to 18.

"Taking the sexes together, the following classes of fears show decline with advancing years: Meteors, clouds, blood, end of world, being kidnapped, fairies, loss of orientation, shyness of strangers; while the following increase: Thunder and lightning, reptiles, robbers, self-consciousness, machinery.

"Increase during pubescent years with subsequent decline, appears in wind, darkness, water, domestic animals, insects, ghosts, death and disease. While many special fears decline and others increase with age, many infantile fears remain through life, and scores of our reporters say that there has been no change in their fears."

Aristotle's conception of education was that of learning to fear what one ought to fear; and, of course, ceasing to fear what one ought not to fear. This might certainly be taken as an admirable description of true courage. And it may be said that the race is steadily readjusting its fears according to the new light thrown upon them by the advancement of science; but it is a slow process, for fear is ingrained in us: it is the lingering inheritance of all past ages. Instincts which it

took thousands of years to engraft, will not out of our natures merely because the intellect is convinced that they are baseless.

Take, for instance, the repugnance felt toward a harmless worm or caterpillar, crawling over the person; or the frantic fears caused by the presence of a poor little mouse—and we have instances of the persistence of fear instinct, in spite of the reassurance of knowledge.

The same fact is illustrated by what we eat or refuse to eat. The scientist may assure us that the grass hopper is as delicate and delicious a morsel as the shrimp, but as yet he is practically believed only by the Ute Indian (who has known it for ages).

However, if this same shrimp, with the oyster, the crab, the lobster and other formidable-looking edibles could conquer our instincts, knowledge may yet bridge our repugnance to the grass-hopper, the frog, and scores of other delectable animal and vegetable products that now go to waste.

The question of giving scientific names to fears confronted the committee making these investigations. The Greek word phobia stands for fear, and the process would be one of adding the appropriate prefix; thus, hydrophobia, or fear of water, astrophobia, or fear of the heavenly bodies, claustrophobia, or fear of suffocation, pyrophobia, or fear of fire, doraphobia, or fear of fur, and odontophobia, or fear of teeth. But it seemed hardly worth while to add these words to the language, especially in view of the fact that we were enabled to classify 298 distinct varieties, some of which would tax our ingenuity for Greek equivalents.

It is a remarkable fact that most men fear what is quite harmless, such as small animals, insects, ghosts, the number 13, etc., and are strangely at ease in the presence of great danger. An instance of the latter is the matter of fact way in which people treat consumption, one of the most deadly contagious diseases known to medicine. People who advertise their climate to attract consumptives into their midst, ought, in order to be quite consistent, to have no fears of diphtheria, smallpox, or yellow fever.

The fear of losing one's orientation is most distressing to many people. One girl wrote that she sweats, feels faint and nauseated if she cannot instantly locate every door and window on waking at night. Another can never have furniture moved in her bedroom because the feeling of being turned round gives her a terrible panic. Another studied one year in Berlin, but was never happy there, because east would seem west, and the sun went the wrong way. Most human beings feel ill at ease at loss of orientation, and with many it amounts to positive pain.

The fear of closeness or suffocation is no less agonizing to very many people. "I have always had the horrors," writes one boy, "if a blanket got over my head, or I was shut in a dark closet." Hotels are aware how many people cannot bear to sleep in a room with closed doors. Some of our correspondents suffer intensely from fear of being buried alive. One, though in good health, had this fear so acute that she wrote out directions to have a bell-roped tied to her hand when she should be put into the grave. Another wanted a tube extending out of his coffin so that he could breathe and speak. A lady of 27 cannot hear or even read such words as suffocation, strangling, hanging, etc., without nervous symptoms. Another gets into a panic if her finger swells so as to make her ring tight.

Impatience of restraint is a more widely diffused form of