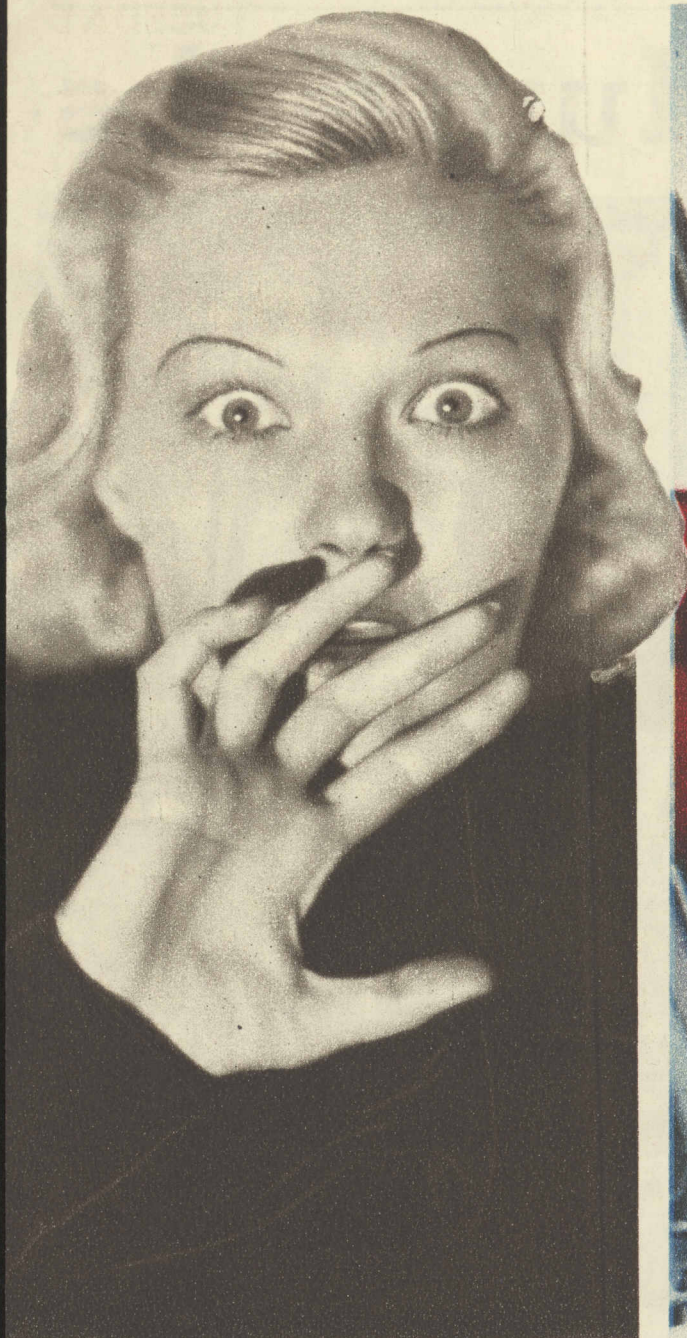


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THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER



"Is fear a demon that paralyzes its victims?"

WHAT IS FEAR?

By GUY MURCHIE JR.

WHAT IS FEAR?
What is the nature of this most powerful emotion that can act so unpredictably? Why are certain men, who cheerfully looked death in the face during the World war, afraid to sleep in the same room with a harmless house cat? How can one get rid of the fear of being near the edge when standing at the top of a high precipice or on the roof of a ten-story building?

Is fear something that grips one with unreasoning horror such as that expressed in the face of the girl pictured on this page? Is it a demon that paralyzes its victims, bringing on a cold sweat and the shaking of knees for no useful purpose?

Or is fear a driving force lent by nature in emergencies to enable men better to face disaster? In the famous scene of the sinking of the S. S. Vestris reproduced on this page the almost calm faces of the men seem to hide completely the emotional struggle that must be going on within them. Did fear in this case endow these men with reserves of strength to help them combat forces of nature that threatened to overwhelm them?

To begin at the beginning, fear is an emotion, and, like other emotions, it is experienced in conjunction with certain bodily symptoms, notably a quickening of heart action, breathlessness, goose flesh, paleness, and visceral secretions of the adrenal glands which tend to strengthen the muscles and increase the body's efficiency generally. These symptoms are so closely involved with the emotion of fear, as are very similar symptoms involved with other emotions, that William James, the father of modern psychology, believed that they actually were the immediate cause of the emotion. To his mind, to see a bear, turn pale, and be afraid is a more accurate description of what happens than to see a bear, be afraid, and turn pale.

Most later psychologists disagree with James' theory, but it is a question not easily answered, and today's psychologists and specialists in neurotic disorders still differ on elementary points. The study of fear is not made easy by the fact that there are many and complex kinds of fear, some of them closely allied to or combined with fear's sister emotion, anxiety.

First of all, fear is an instinct. By careful experiments with animals it has been definitely shown that the instinct appears spontaneously in the individual at a certain stage of its growth not long after birth. Newborn chickens, for instance, were found to have no fear and would blindly follow any moving object or sound. Normally the moving object would be a hen and the sound a cluck, but



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" . . . Or is fear a driving force lent by nature in emergencies to enable men better to face disaster?" Above: The sinking of the S. S. Vestris.

if the hen were removed and a man with a whistle took her place the chicks just as easily learned to follow him and answer the call of the whistle.

Certain chicks that were kept hooded and isolated from moving objects and sounds remained fearless for about three days, during which time a few that were set loose showed the same instincts as newborn chicks. But those that were set loose on the fourth day all showed a strongly developed fear of both moving objects and sounds, even including their own mother. Overnight they had acquired this new and powerful instinct. Of course, normally the new feeling of fear would be aroused by all sights and sounds except those of the mother hen (to whom the chicks would have had three days in which to become accustomed). Thus the fear instinct would be a protection to the chick, causing it to shun everything but the one thing which experience had taught it to trust.

But all fear instincts do not seem to be as beneficial as this one. There is the instinctive and paralyzing dread of high (Continued on page four.)

