

# Fear—Demon or Defender?

## In Crisis It May Help or Harm

(Continued from page one.)

places, for instance, which most people unaccustomed to altitudes feel. At certain crucial moments when a steady head and hand are vital, the uncontrollable dizziness of fear grips the novice mountain climber and greatly increases the danger of his falling.

However, a human being has more acquired traits than instinctive traits, and so most of his fears are either conditioned reflexes or neurotic complexes. A conditioned reflex is merely an acquired subconscious reaction to a stimulus, such as the jerking away of a hand from an approaching red hot poker. It differs from an instinct in that it was acquired by experience rather than having arisen spontaneously like the chicken's instinctive fear of strangers on its fourth day.

A neurotic complex is a condition of mental abnormality in which certain unreasoning, subconscious impulses strongly influence a person's conscious mind. When it takes the form of fear, the victim fully realizes he is afraid and thinks about it yet can't understand why he is afraid. One of the best known complexes is the inferiority complex, in which a person for some reason unknown to himself feels inferior to others—but this does not necessarily involve actual fear.

A fear of water is a fairly common neurotic complex generally caused by a person's having been frightened by being ducked in water as a small child. Although such a person feels terrified at the thought of having to swim, he can't remember his early ducking. If he could recall it clearly, he would probably get over his trouble.

• • •

The reason that human fears are more apt to be reflexes and complexes than instincts, whereas fear in primitive animals is largely instinctive, is that the human brain is made very differently from that of the lower animals. The diagram on page one shows how the human brain, unlike that of other animals, has a very greatly developed cerebrum. The cerebrum is the seat of conscious thought, decision, and memory. It consists of vast numbers of nerve cords coming from all over the body, and it is somehow affected as impulses pass through these nerve cords. This affection we know as memory, which is an essential part of any highly developed consciousness. But the cerebrum not only remembers things, it profits by experience. Being a sort of telephone exchange of incoming and outgoing nerve impulses, it can make or break connections between these nerve cords.

There is also a lower part of the brain called the thalamus, which an experimenter (appropriately named Mr. Head) dis-



"The instinctive and paralyzing dread of high places." This climber in Yellowstone park evidently has conquered that fear.

covered to be the essential center of the emotions, including fear. But there are various connecting channels between this small vestibule of the brain and the large cerebrum above it, which channels greatly complicate matters for the emotions. As the drawing suggests, impulses travel to and from certain thought regions of the cerebrum. If the object of fright is cats, for example, there will be channels of communication between the fear headquarters in the thalamus and the cerebral locality in which thoughts of cats occur. But the thought of cats will undoubtedly be closely associated with other thoughts, such as thoughts of

dark hallways or bloody scratches. These allied thoughts may soon, in turn, be as closely involved with the fear as the original thought.

Thus the fear emotion may be aroused in any number of roundabout ways, either by awareness of the original cause of fear (cats) as sensed through the outward organs of sense, or by merely thinking of it, or by thinking of some allied idea (as a dark hallway), or by outwardly sensing such an allied thing. Even if the victim of a fear succeeds in permanently repressing all thought of the thing feared, as is often the case, he will continue to be troubled by it. For, while he may isolate certain thoughts (as for example with the dotted area in the drawing), keeping them out of his consciousness, they are still in his brain and still influencing his fear headquarters in certain little understood ways. Also the many allied ideas are still free to arouse his fear and the fact that he may have forgotten the original and real cause of the fear makes it all the harder for him ever to get rid of it.

• • •

A good illustration of the trouble resulting from fear repression is revealed in the world war records of neurotic cases among British and French troops. In the early part of the war especially there was a marked preponderance of such cases among the British. This, according to Prof. William McDougall, eminent modern psychologist, resulted from the British tradition which taught all boys to believe that to feel or to express fear is cowardice; while the more realistic French tradition permitted French youths to be frank about their emotions. The poilu could joke about his fear, treating it as a natural weakness and taking pride in the fact that his courage could surmount such an obstacle. But the less fortunate Tommy had to repress all fear and in many cases he was so ashamed of seeming afraid that the fear of expressing fear became a great additional strain on his morale.

To make matters worse, after his natural and inevitable fear had been repressed from his conscious thoughts, it would linger in his subconsciousness secretly clamoring for expression. Often this expression came in the form of dreams—violent nightmares in which the poor soldier had to writhe in the throes of all the emotions he had been trying to evade. Sometimes it came in the form of a pronounced physical reaction against something mentally associated with the original cause of fear.

One soldier who had repressed his extreme dread of being bayoneted in the stomach, suddenly developed the idiosyncrasy of collapsing in a semi-faint at the sight of a certain kind of wrist watch. He had no idea of the cause of his peculiar malady and was much worried and ashamed of it until investigation and close questioning disclosed that his original fear came from once seeing a dead

soldier with a bayonet pierce his stomach. And on the soldier's wrist was a watch. Although the patient had eliminated from his conscious mind the thought of the bayoneting, the closely allied thought of the wrist watch had meanwhile developed direct channels of contact with the fear headquarters in his thalamus, with the result that the watch had become just as potent a tinder to his fear emotions as the bayoneting ever was—and more difficult to circumvent.

A curious thing about fear is the fact that the human body protects itself against the extreme agony of the emotion by a sort of mental anesthesia. The case of Major Redside is a good example. While in Bengal this British hunter one day stumbled on a rock and dropped his cartridge belt as he was crossing a stream. It was a serious slip, because he was in the heart of a region infested with tigers. Worse still, shortly after he had thrown away his wet ammunition he discovered that he was being stalked by a large tigress.

With no bullets in his rifle he was naturally very frightened and started back toward the stream pale of face and sweating profusely. But before he had gone twenty paces, the emboldened tigress charged out of a thicket, seized him, and dragged him about a quarter of a mile away to where her three cubs were. There, however, she did not kill him. Instead she played "cat and mouse" with

him for an hour or more—that evidently being the natural way for feline mothers to train their young.

The amazing thing about Maj. Redside's nightmarish experience though, was the fact (as he remembered afterwards) that he lost all fear after he was once in the clutches of the great beast. By the time his companions arrived on the scene and rescued him he had crept away from the tigress more than a dozen times, only to be



All fear is not instinctive. Sometimes it is the result of horrifying experience. Valerie Hobson's dread in this motion picture scene results from her previous treatment as a prisoner.

Fear repressed often finds expression in horrifying nightmares. Boris Karloff portrays a soldier maddened by unseen dangers.

dragged back each time while the cubs looked on and playfully tried to copy mamma. By his own account, however, he had felt "comparatively calm compared with half an hour in a dentist's chair," and could recall every detail clearly. He remembered the sunshine and the terrific mental effort of trying to crawl away, as well as a full realization of the extreme danger he was in. Yet he had "no fear, no dread," and remained fully conscious the whole time, being miraculously rescued before he had received any very serious wounds.

• • •

To return to fear complexes, one kind which is common enough to deserve mention is a repressed fear of things associated with sex, and which is most frequently found in young girls who have at an early age been made to feel that sex is dangerous, disgusting, and a totally dreadful subject. If this influence is not counteracted, the growing girl is apt to try to repress thoughts of sex, which later may result in an opposition in her adolescent mind between the forces of desire and the fear of consequences, between desire and conscience or, more broadly, between "egoism" and "idealism." At best the girl is almost certain to misinterpret normal happenings that conflict with her accepted taboo and which, therefore, may in turn induce further complex-

and all manner of unreasoning anxieties.

A young married woman living in the tropics experienced an extreme and uncontrollable fear of storms. Taken in hand by a psychiatrist, it was discovered that her sex instinct was strong and that she had had various experiences relating to sex in her early teens all of which tended to make her regard sex as something violent, mysterious, cruel, and terrible. One man whom she had led on too far threatened to strangle her, she said.

After she had at last successfully repressed her sex fear, the fear attached itself to a phenomenon that had very similar attributes to her mind. For, as the patient herself later said, "Sudden violent gusts of emotion, and the sudden onslaught of a tropical storm—they seem so much alike, bursting suddenly, sweeping all before them and leaving an exhausted wreck behind."

It was only after the woman had been made to understand the full symbolic significance of the storm as a substitute fear for the fear she had repressed that her trouble completely vanished. Which fact reaffirms the marvelous truth that virtually any kind of fear can be conquered by looking it straight in the eye and letting "familiarity breed contempt."

NEXT WEEK: The Conquering of Fear.

## Red Mass—A Colorful Ceremony



(Acme photo.)

Roman Catholic judges kneel at red mass in Westminster cathedral at opening of Michaelmas law sittings in London.

MARKING the end of the summer holiday and the opening of the Michaelmas law sittings, Catholic judges of England's higher courts will assemble Tuesday in Westminster cathedral for the annual red mass.

Attired in their wigs and robes, the jurists will kneel together as they have

for years past. (This picture was taken at last year's service.) Following mass they will join other judges in the law courts and march in solemn procession through the central hall.

The red mass is so called because of the red vestments worn by the celebrant, or priest. These vestments are used in

masses of the Holy Ghost, usually celebrated at the opening of courts, legislative assemblies, and schools.

Westminster cathedral is not to be confused with Westminster abbey, site of the recent coronation ceremonies. The cathedral is a Roman Catholic church located near the abbey.



A fear of water is a fairly common neurotic complex generally caused by a frightening experience, such as being ducked when a child or having nearly drowned. Fear is etched on the face of this woman being rescued after her collapse at the finish of an aquatic race. (Associated Press photo.)