

THE WOMAN'S SPHERE

CHARACTER BUILDING THROUGH THOUGHT

The Greatest Enemy of the Human Race

(By J. Lincoln Brooks.)

Thought's most deadly instrument for marring human lives is fear. It demoralizes character, destroys ambition, induces or causes disease, paralyzes happiness in self and others, and prevents achievement. It has not one redeeming quality. It is all evil. Physiologists now well know that it impoverishes the blood by interfering with assimilation, and cutting off nutrition. It lowers mental and physical vitality and weakens every element of success. It is fatal to the happiness of youth, and is the most terrible accompaniment of old age. Buoyancy flees before its terrifying glance, and cheerfulness cannot dwell in the same house with it.

"The most extensive of all the morbid mental conditions which reflect themselves so disastrously on the human system is the state of fear," says Dr. William H. Holcomb. "It has many degrees or graduations, from the state of extreme alarm, fright, or terror, down to the slightest shade of apprehension of impending evil. But all along the line is the same thing,—a paralyzing impression upon the centres of life which can produce, through the agency of the nervous system, a vast variety of morbid symptoms in every tissue of the body."

"Fear is like carbonic acid gas pumped into one's atmosphere," says Horace Fletcher; "it causes mental, moral, and spiritual asphyxiation, and sometimes death,—death to energy, death to tissue, and death to all growth."

Yet from our birth we live in the presence and under the dominion of this demon. A child is cautioned a thousand times a year to look out for this, and to look out for that; it may get poisoned, it may get bitten, it may get killed; something terrible may happen to it if it does not do so and so. Men and women cannot bear the sight of some harmless animal or insect, as children, they were told that it would hurt them. One of the cruellest things imaginable is to instill into a child's plastic mind the terrible image of fear, which, like the letters cut on a sapling, grows wider and deeper with age. The baleful shadows of such blasting and blighting pictures will hang over the whole life, and shut out the bright joy of sun and happiness.

An Australian writer says:—

"One of the worst misfortunes which can possibly happen to a growing child is to have a mother who is perpetually tormented by nervous fear. If she gives way to fear,—morbid, minute, and all-prevailing,—she will inevitably make the environment of her child one of increasing dread and timidity. The background of fear is the habit or instinct of anticipating the worst. The mother who never makes a move, or allows her children to make a move, without conjuring up a myriad of malign possibilities, embitters the cup of life with a slow poison.

"I know that thousands of boys and girls are to-day tremulous, weak, passive, and unalert on the physical side, simply because they were taught, in the knickerbocker stage, or earlier, to see the potency of danger in all they did or tried to do. A mother assumes a terrible responsibility when, from silly fear of possible injury, she forbids a child such physical abandon as will promote courage, endurance, self-reliance, and self-control."

Not content with instilling fear of possibly real things, many mothers and most nurses invent all sorts of bug-bears and bogies to frighten poor babies into obedience. They even attempt to induce sleep by telling

children, "If you don't go right to sleep, a great big bear will come and eat you up!" How much sleep would a grown man get in a situation where this was a real possibility? Fear of the dark would seldom exist if parents carefully showed children that nothing is different in the dark from what is in the light. Instead of so doing, they take pains to people the mysterious gloom with every sort of ogre and monster which human imagination has been able to conjure up. Some one has thus expressed in verse this cruel but too common sin against healthy-minded childhood:—

"He who checks a child with terror,
Stops its play and stills its song,
Not alone commits an error,
But a grievous moral wrong."

Mothers waste much energy in worrying about their children. Some of them cannot take a moment's comfort while their boys or girls are out of their sight. How many times, in imagination, have you seen your children tumble out of trees, and off sheds? How many times have you pictured them drowning when they went to sail or skate? How often have you had visions of your boy being brought home from the baseball or football grounds with broken limbs or scarred face? When none of these things happen, what had you to compensate for the hours of mental anguish, with consequent lowering of vitality and physical tone? Such useless imaginings of evil make many women old and haggard before their time.

With fearsome and anxious mothers surrounding children with an atmosphere of dread, and suggesting to them new and unthought-of objects of fear, it is not astonishing that the whole world seems burdened and bowed down under a fearful weight of fear and anxiety. Go into almost any gathering, no matter how gay and happy the crowds seems to be, and you will find, if you question any one of even the gayest, that the canker worm of fear gnaws at the heart in some form. The fear of accident, of sickness,—of the development of some terrible disease,—of poverty, of death, or of some great misfortune, still lingers during the greatest apparent gaiety.

Many men and women narrow their lives by worrying over what may happen to-morrow. The family cannot afford to have any little, legitimate pleasure, to travel, or to take the leading magazines or papers. They cannot afford to take much-needed vacations. They must economize on clothes, on food, even, and every form of culture or recreation costing money, simply because times may be hard next year. "There may be a financial panic," urges the pessimist. "Some of the children may be sick, the times may be bad, our crops may fail, or some business venture may not succeed. We can't tell what might happen, but we must prepare for the worst." The lives of hundreds of families are mutilated, sometimes utterly ruined, by this bugbear of misfortune just ahead.

TOOK CHANCES

"Willie," said the boy's mother, who was preparing to go out, "you mustn't eat that cake in the pantry while I'm gone. It will make you sick."

Three hours later when she returned, Willie said:—"You didn't know what you were talking about, mamma. That cake didn't make me sick a bit."

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