



# The Home

## Fear in the Child

HE element of fear enters very largely into the child's world. Its influence is strongest and most deeply felt after the first two or three years of life, when fancy is acting most vigorously without the guiding rule of reason or experience. Consciousness at this age is widening, and into its field enter many circumstances that are inexplicable to the child.

Once he is able to picture things and events for himself, the recall of any fearful experience is enough to arouse the child's dread. Dark places are an especial object of terror. There are very few children who do not, for a considerable time, suffer tortures in the dark, often without the knowledge of their parents. The child will find all sorts of excuses for getting his nurse or elders to come into the room and strike a light. And when the parents prove unsympathetic or critical, he is condemned to endure his tortures in silence, with head hidden beneath the coverlets.

Frequently adults are injudicious in the manner in which they converse with their children. The fearful threats and wild fantastic tales which they so often hear from their elders are taken by the little ones as realities. As a result, the child's fancy is filled with a riotous confusion of terrifying images which continually haunt him and supply a fertile source for difficulties in the future. Because of the freedom and unchecked use of his imagination, and his ignorance of the laws of nature, the child may be made to live almost constantly in an atmosphere of fear.

To compel children to endure terrors is decidedly cruel, and utterly useless as a corrective. Unreasonable fears cannot, as a rule, be dissipated by an appeal to reason; here one can only trust to quieting assurances, time, and experience, and the growth of courage and self-control, to effect a cure. A child of two years was severely frightened by a thunder-storm. At his first cry, his father hastened to him, and talked to him assuringly, comparing the brilliant flashes to the lighting of

matches. He remained with the child for a time, admiring the beauty of the tempest. The child never afterward showed any dread of a storm. This may indicate one successful way of dispelling exaggerated fears.

It is highly important, therefore, that the child be protected against unreasonable fears whose effects are essentially distressing and paralyzing. The use of fearful threats may restrain him from certain actions, but such resources in the training of the child do not encourage a free and healthy development of his faculties. If parents must employ this method of educating, then the fears which they sow in the minds of their offspring should be legitimate; that is, they should be fears of such things as really exist and are a source of danger to the welfare of the child; not of things that have no actuality whatever. When the child is suffering from some unfounded dread, it is a wise policy on the part of the parents to overcome it as quickly as possible, by showing the child that it has no foundation in real life. On the other hand, it will effect no good to discourage the child where danger actually exists, and where a dread is, therefore, justified.

The results of recent studies have shown that many fears of the adult age are rooted in some childish or youthful fear or fright which the parents never took the trouble to correct, or which, for some reason or other, was never removed. Psychoanalysis well indicates the manner in which earlier and forgotten or repressed experiences of a fearful nature, affect adult consciousness, and produce many of the unwarranted dreads that are so prevalent in nervous and mentally-unbalanced persons. Such a negative form of training as instilling unjust motives of fear in the child to compel him to do or omit certain things should be wholly discountenanced. This is a point to be emphasized for the benefit of those educators who have the care of the child's tender and most impressionable years.