PREFACE.

As in many other of these _Studies_, and perhaps more than in most, the task attempted in the present volume is mainly of a tentative and preliminary character. There is here little scope yet for the presentation of definite scientific results. However it may be in the physical universe, in the cosmos of science our knowledge must be nebulous before it constellates into definitely measurable shapes, and nothing is gained by attempting to anticipate the evolutionary process. Thus it is that here, for the most part, we have to content ourselves at present with the task of mapping out the field in broad and general outlines, bringing together the facts and considerations which indicate the direction in which more extended and precise results will in the future be probably found.

In his famous _Descent of Man_, wherein he first set forth the doctrine of sexual selection, Darwin injured an essentially sound
principle by introducing into it a psychological confusion whereby the physiological sensory stimuli through which sexual selection operates were regarded as equivalent to æsthetic preferences. This confusion misled many, and it is only within recent years (as has been set forth in the "Analysis of the Sexual Impulse" in the previous volume of these _Studies_) that the investigations and criticisms of numerous workers have placed the doctrine of sexual selection on a firm basis by eliminating its hazardous æsthetic element. Love springs up as a response to a number of stimuli to tumescence, the object that most adequately arouses tumescence being that which evokes love; the question of æsthetic beauty, although it develops on this basis, is not itself fundamental and need not even be consciously present at all. When we look at these phenomena in their broadest biological aspects, love is only to a limited extent a response to beauty; to a greater extent beauty is simply a name for the complexus of stimuli which most adequately arouses love. If we analyze these stimuli to tumescence as they proceed from a person of the opposite sex we find that they are all appeals which must come through the channels of four senses: touch, smell, hearing, and, above all, vision. When a man or a woman experiences sexual love for one particular person from among the multitude by which he or she is surrounded, this is due to the influences of a group of stimuli coming through the channels of one or more of these senses. There has been a sexual selection conditioned by sensory stimuli. This is
true even of the finer and more spiritual influences that proceed from one person to another, although, in order to grasp the phenomena adequately, it is best to insist on the more fundamental and less complex forms which they assume. In this sense sexual selection is no longer a hypothesis concerning the truth of which it is possible to dispute; it is a self-evident fact. The difficulty is not as to its existence, but as to the methods by which it may be most precisely measured. It is fundamentally a psychological process, and should be approached from the psychological side. This is the reason for dealing with it here. Obscure as the psychological aspects of sexual selection still remain, they are full of fascination, for they reveal to us the more intimate sides of human evolution, of the process whereby man is molded into the shapes we know.

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SEXUAL SELECTION IN MAN.

The External Sensory Stimuli Affecting Selection in Man--The Four Senses Involved.

Tumescence--the process by which the organism is brought into the physical and psychic state necessary to insure conjugation and detumescence--to some extent comes about through the spontaneous action of internal forces. To that extent it is analogous to the physical and psychic changes which accompany the gradual filling of the bladder and precede its evacuation. But even among animals who are by no means high in the zoölogical scale the process is more complicated than this. External stimuli act at every stage, arousing or heightening the process of tumescence, and in normal human beings it may be said that the process is never completed without the aid of such stimuli, for even in the auto-erotic sphere external stimuli are still active, either actually or in imagination.
The chief stimuli which influence tumescence and thus
direct sexual choice
come chiefly--indeed, exclusively--through the four
senses of touch,
smell, hearing, and sight. All the phenomena of sexual
selection, so far
as they are based externally, act through these four
senses.[1] The
reality of the influence thus exerted may be
demonstrated statistically
even in civilized man, and it has been shown that, as
regards, for
instance, eye-color, conjugal partners differ sensibly
from the unmarried
persons by whom they are surrounded. When, therefore, we
are exploring the
nature of the influence which stimuli, acting through the
sensory
channels, exert on the strength and direction of the
sexual impulse, we
are intimately concerned with the process by which the
actual form and
color, not alone of living things generally, but of our
own species, have
been shaped and are still being shaped. At the same
time, it is probable,
we are exploring the mystery which underlies all the
subtle appreciations,
all the emotional undertones, which are woven in the web
of the whole
world as it appeals to us through those sensory passages
by which alone it
can reach us. We are here approaching, therefore, a
fundamental subject of
unsurpassable importance, a subject which has not yet
been accurately
explored save at a few isolated points and one which it
is therefore
impossible to deal with fully and adequately. Yet it
cannot be passed
over, for it enters into the whole psychology of the
sexual instinct.

Of the four senses--touch, smell, hearing, and sight--
with which we are
here concerned, touch is the most primitive, and it may be said to be the most important, though it is usually the last to make its appeal felt. Smell, which occupies the chief place among many animals, is of comparatively less importance, though of considerable interest, in man; it is only less intimate and final than touch. Sight occupies an intermediate position, and on this account, and also on account of the very great part played by vision in life generally as well as in art, it is the most important of all the senses from the human sexual point of view. Hearing, from the same point of view, is the most remote of all the senses in its appeal to the sexual impulse, and on that account it is, when it intervenes, among the first to make its influence felt.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Taste must, I believe, be excluded, for if we abstract the parts of touch and smell, even in those abnormal sexual acts in which it may seem to be affected, taste could scarcely have any influence. Most of our "tasting," as Waller puts it, is done by the nose, which, in man, is in specially close relationship, posteriorly, with the mouth. There are at most four taste sensations--sweet, bitter, salt, and sour--if even all of these are simple tastes. What commonly pass for taste sensations, as shown by some experiments of G.T.W. Patrick (_Psychological Review_, 1898, p. 160), are the composite results of the mingling of sensations of smell, touch, temperature, sight, and taste.
TOUCH.

I.
The Primitive Character of the Skin--Its Qualities--
Touch the Earliest
Source of Sensory Pleasure--The Characteristics of
Touch--As the Alpha and
Omega of Affection--The Sexual Organs a Special
Adaptation of
Touch--Sexual Attraction as Originated by Touch--Sexual
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Touch--The Sexual Associations of Acne.

We are accustomed to regard the skin as mainly owing its
existence to the
need for the protection of the delicate vessels, nerves,
viscera, and
muscles underneath. Undoubtedly it performs, and by its
tough and elastic
texture is well fitted to perform, this extremely
important service. But
the skin is not merely a method of protection against
the external world;
it is also a method of bringing us into sensitive
contact with the
external world. It is thus, as the organ of touch, the
seat of the most
widely diffused sense we possess, and, moreover, the
sense which is the
most ancient and fundamental of all--the mother of the
other senses.

It is scarcely necessary to insist that the primitive
nature of the
sensory function of the skin with the derivative nature
of the other
senses, is a well ascertained and demonstrable fact. The
lower we descend
in the animal scale, the more varied we find the
functions of the skin to
be, and if in the higher animals much of the complexity has disappeared, that is only because the specialization of the various skin regions into distinct organs has rendered this complexity unnecessary. Even yet, however, in man himself the skin still retains, in a more or less latent condition, much of its varied and primary power, and the analysis of pathological and even normal phenomena serves to bring these old powers into clear light.

Woods Hutchinson (_Studies in Human and Comparative Pathology_, 1901, Chapters VII and VIII) has admirably set forth the immense importance of the skin, as in the first place "a tissue which is silk to the touch, the most exquisitely beautiful surface in the universe to the eye, and yet a wall of adamant against hostile attack. Impervious alike, by virtue of its wonderful responsive vitality, to moisture and drought, cold and heat, electrical changes, hostile bacteria, the most virulent of poisons and the deadliest of gases, it is one of the real Wonders of the World. More beautiful than velvet, softer and more pliable than silk, more impervious than rubber, and more durable under exposure than steel, well-nigh as resistant to electric currents as glass, it is one of the toughest and most dangerproof substances in the three kingdoms of nature" (although, as this author adds, we "hardly dare permit it to see the sunlight or breathe the open air"). But it is more than this. It is, as Woods
Hutchinson expresses it, the creator of the entire body; its embryonic infoldings form the alimentary canal, the brain, the spinal cord, while every sense is but a specialization of its general organic activity. It is furthermore a kind of "skin-heart," promoting the circulation by its own energy; it is the great heat-regulating organ of the body; it is an excretory organ only second to the kidneys, which descend from it, and finally it still remains the seat of touch.

It may be added that the extreme beauty of the skin as a surface is very clearly brought out by the inadequacy of the comparisons commonly used in order to express its beauty. Snow, marble, alabaster, ivory, milk, cream, silk, velvet, and all the other conventional similes furnish surfaces which from any point of view are incomparably inferior to the skin itself. (Cf. Stratz, _Die Schönheit des Weiblichen Körpers_, Chapter XII.)

With reference to the extraordinary vitality of the skin, emphasized by Woods Hutchinson, it may be added that, when experimenting on the skin with the electric current, Waller found that healthy skin showed signs of life ten days or more after excision. It has been found also that fragments of skin which have been preserved in sterile fluid for even as long as nine months may still be successfully transplanted on to
the body.

(_British Medical Journal_, July 19, 1902.)

Everything indicates, remark Stanley Hall and Donaldson ("Motor Sensations in the Skin," _Mind_, 1885), that the skin is "not only the primeval and most reliable source of our knowledge of the external world or the archæological field of psychology," but a field in which work may shed light on some of the most fundamental problems of psychic action. Groos (_Spiele der Menschen_, pp. 8-16) also deals with the primitive character of touch sensations.

Touch sensations are without doubt the first of all the sensory impressions to prove pleasurable. We should, indeed, expect this from the fact that the skin reflexes have already appeared before birth, while a pleasurable sensitiveness of the lips is doubtless a factor in the child's response to the contact of the maternal nipple. Very early memories of sensory pleasure seem to be frequently, perhaps most frequently, tactile in character, though this fact is often disguised in recollection, owing to tactile impression being vague and diffused; there is thus in Elizabeth Potwin's "Study of Early Memories" (_Psychological Review_, November, 1901) no separate group of tactile memories, and the more elaborate investigation by Colegrove ("Individual Memories," _American Journal of Psychology_, January, 1899) yields no
decisive results under this head. See, however, Stanley Hall's valuable study, "Some Aspects of the Early Sense of Self," _American Journal of Psychology_, April, 1898. Külpe has a discussion of the psychology of cutaneous sensations (_Outlines of Psychology_ [English translation], pp. 87 et seq.)

Harriet Martineau, at the beginning of her _Autobiography_, referring to the vivid character of tactile sensations in early childhood, remarks, concerning an early memory of touching a velvet button, that "the rapture of the sensation was really monstrous." And a lady tells me that one of her earliest memories at the age of 3 is of the exquisite sensation of the casual contact of a cool stone with the vulva in the act of urinating. Such sensations, of course, cannot be termed specifically sexual, though they help to furnish the tactile basis on which the specifically sexual sensations develop.

The elementary sensitiveness of the skin is shown by the fact that moderate excitation suffices to raise the temperature, while Heidenhain and others have shown that in animals cutaneous stimuli modify the sensibility of the brain cortex, slight stimulus increasing excitability and strong stimulus diminishing it. Féré has shown that the slight stimulus to the skin furnished by placing a piece of metal on the arm or elsewhere suffices to
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