

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Descartes Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Rilke George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Melville Grimm Jerome Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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Five Lectures on Blindness

Kate M. Foley

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Kate M. Foley

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-5689-3

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VISION IN ADULTS AND CHILDREN



Miss Foley teaching a class of men at the Industrial Home for the Adult Blind, Oakland, California.

FOREWORD.

The following lectures were written primarily to be delivered at the summer sessions of the University of California, at Berkeley and at Los Angeles, in the summer of 1918. We are printing them, however, so that the information in them can be more widely distributed, since they are the outgrowth of almost a quarter of a century spent in work for the blind, and were written from the standpoint of a blind person, seeking to better the condition of the blind. They were addressed not to the blind, but to the seeing public, for the benefit that will accrue to the blind from a better understanding of their problems.

The successful work of Miss Foley as a student in the California School for the Blind, as a volunteer teacher, and in recent years as home teacher for the California State Library, makes these lectures particularly important and authoritative.

**Milton J. Ferguson,
State Librarian. [Pg 6]**

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BLINDNESS.

In view of the widespread interest now manifested in the blind and their problems—an interest deepened by reports from the warring countries—I feel that a knowledge of the psychology of blindness should prove of great help to those wishing to take part in the re-education of the war-blinded soldiers.

As early as 1773, Diderot wrote an essay on the psychology of blindness, and, as this essay was written at the very beginning of blind education, it is interesting to note that his ideas coincide with the most advanced deductions on the subject today. However, as these deductions are not very numerous, and as the available literature is very scant, I shall be obliged to draw largely from my own experience and that of other blind persons, in presenting the subject to you.

First, let us consider the subject from the point of view of one who has been blind from early infancy, whose fingers are his eyes, and whose mental vision enables him to see many things not revealed by physical sight. A blind man once said, when asked if he would not be glad to have his eyesight, "to improve the organs I have, would be as good as to give me that which is wanting in me." This sentence sums up the whole aim of blind education. Dr. Eichholtz, a noted educator of the blind, says: "Education of the blind absolutely fails in its object, in so far as it fails to develop the remaining faculties to compensate for the want of sight." "Touch and sight must be developed by means which practically in all respects are dissimilar. A blind man discerns the sensation from the real presence of an object at his fingers' end, only by the force or weakness of that very sensation." So, then, let us consider that, to the blind, fingers are eyes, and remember that they have ten instead of two. As I have been blind since early infancy, my own case offers an illustration in point, so I hope you will not misunderstand the predominance of the personal note in these observations.

Blindness does not lead to any refinement of the senses of touch, hearing or smell, but to a greater keenness in the interpretation of the information furnished by these senses. Diderot says, "the help which our senses reciprocally afford to each other, hinders their

improvement," and so the person in possession of all the senses regards the blind man as a marvel of intelligence and skill, just because, on losing his eyesight, his remaining senses come to the rescue, and he continues to live and move and have his being without the most precious of all physical senses. In the world of the blind child eyesight plays no part, and so the other senses are made to do double duty, and the extent to which these may be cultivated is limited only by the mentality of the child, its early training and environment.

I think hearing is the first sense to be cultivated, both in the infant and the adult suddenly deprived of eyesight. Through its ears, the child recognizes voices, detects different footfalls, is enabled to measure distance with a fair degree of accuracy, and can form a very clear idea as to the shape and dimensions of a room. All this information is conveyed to the normal child through the eyes. Dr. Illingworth, a noted educator of the blind in England, says: "Of course, there is no doubt that blindness tends to a higher and more perfect development of the sense of hearing, even in the uneducated, on the same principle [Pg 7] that Nature almost always comes to the aid of her children in providing protective agencies of one kind or another, even in the very lowest organisms, and, naturally, for those who are blind, the sense of hearing is the first to fall back upon for this purpose. Thus it becomes more highly developed, because there is more frequent call upon, and exercise of, that sense." Another writer has said, "but a distinction should be made between sensitiveness and an ability to use the sense, between native sensory capacity of the sense organ, and the acquired ability to use that capacity."

The second sense to be developed in the blind child is that of touch, and this development begins at a very early date, supplementing the sense of hearing. Long before the child is old enough to read, its fingers have become its eyes, and each of the ten fingers carries its quota of information to the active brain, the amount and quality of this information increasing with the mental development. In addition to the fingers, the nerves of the face and those of the feet contribute their share of information. The child learns to detect differences in climatic condition by the feel of the air on its face. I have often heard very young blind children exclaim, "It feels like rain! It

feels like a nice day! The air feels heavy! The wind feels soft! The wind is rough today!" The nerves of the feet contribute their share of helpful knowledge, calling attention to differences in the ground often unnoticed by the eye, telling whether the path is smooth or rough, grass-grown or rock-strewn. The auditory and pedal nerves are mutually helpful, the ear recording and classifying the sounds made by the feet, often guiding them aright by recalling certain peculiarities of sound—whether the ground is hollow, whether the sidewalk is of board or cement, and whether there is a depression here or a raised place there. I often wonder how deaf-blind people walk as well as they do, when they can not hear their footfalls. I find walking much more difficult when on a crowded thoroughfare, or when passing a planing mill or boiler factory.

The last of the trio of senses whose development compensates in large measure for the want of eyesight, is that of smell. Through this sense, the child comes very close to the heart of Nature. Of course, the ear is charmed by the song of birds, the hum of insects, the murmur of wind in the trees, or the sound of mighty waters. Through the finger-tips, he learns the shape and size of each flower and shrub and tree, traces the delicate pattern of ferns, notes wonderful rock formations, and finds the first blade of tender grass coaxed to the surface by the warmth of the Spring sunshine. But all this does not bring him the keen pleasure he experiences when he inhales the fragrance of the rose, the perfume of flowers with the dew still upon them, the smell of the freshly turned earth, the newly cut grass, or the blossom laden trees. In the case of Helen Keller, the olfactory nerves have been cultivated to a very high degree, and through this sense she is often able to recognize her friends. A little blind boy once told me that each member of his family had a distinct odor, by which he could tell things worn by them, or books they had handled. Laura Bridgeman is said to have selected the laundry of the pupils in her school by this unusual process. I frequently astonish my friends by telling them when I pass a drug store or hospital, a grocery, a confectioner's, or drygoods store, [Pg 8] a paint shop, a florist's stand, or a livery stable. I do not think the blind have a keener sense of taste than any other class of people, although this claim is often made, even by the blind themselves.

We have, then, the senses of hearing, touch and smell, each playing its part in the development of the blind child, and each playing it so well that the lack of eyesight is not keenly felt in early childhood. Not until it is old enough to understand the thoughtless remarks of well-meaning people, to catch the pitying tone, to feel the compassionate touch, does it realize that this lack of eyesight is to prove an almost insurmountable barrier to its future success.

I was in my sixth year before I understood the meaning of the word "blind." Up to that time, I had romped and played with other children, climbed trees, jumped ditches, accepting bumps and bruises as part of the game, and having no sense of fear, since some child always held my hand. In fact, in those days, all the children held each other's hands, and it was easier going, so. Is it not a pity that, in later life, we feel so self-reliant we are unwilling to admit that the way could often be made easier if we resorted to the childish game of holding hands, and moved forward together as we faced the more serious struggles of life. My first realization of the meaning of blindness came when, one day, after hearing some people call me "poor child," and expressing their sympathy to my mother, I asked if we were very poor, poorer than my playmates, and why I could not go to school. My mother explained that we were no poorer than the others, that the ladies did not mean it in that way, but were sorry that I could not see and did not think I could ever go to school. But my mother assured me that I was going to school, and that there I would learn to see with my fingers, better than the ladies did with their eyes. My childish mind was aroused then, and I asked every one what it meant to see, and soon realized that I did not know what "seeing" really was, at least, not in the sense the other children used the word. I was filled with wonder, since my world had hitherto seemed so complete—I heard things, or felt things, or smelled things, and was satisfied—and yet there was another medium of knowledge entirely unknown to me, and until then unnecessary. How eagerly I looked forward to the time when I should learn to see and my heart was filled with childish rapture on the day when I entered the school for the blind at Berkeley. My first question, on meeting the Superintendent, was, "are you going to teach me to see?" How well he performed this task, how wisely he guided my childish feet, how carefully he developed my

eager mind, stimulated my ambition, and renewed my faltering courage, I did not realize until I was called upon to face life, with its trials and opportunities. And here, where his work is so well known, I wish to pay my tribute of love and gratitude to Dr. Warring Wilkinson. He was my great-hearted, great-souled teacher, father and friend.

When I found myself in a place with children some of whom were, like myself, blind from infancy, and others whose eyesight had been lost through various accidents, and yet others who could see to go about, to tell the color of our ribbons, and advise us of the approach of a matron or teacher my wonder grew apace. This process of learning to see was varied and absorbing, but I soon found that it had its limitations, and that, after all, eyes were very useful possessions, and without them I could know nothing of color, could not picture the sky, or any [Pg 9] of the heavenly bodies; nor could I distinguish different people, unless I heard their voices or steps, though no two had faces alike. I found, too, that some children who could see colors, could not recognize faces, and I came to realize that vision, however slight, was greatly to be desired. I could distinguish light from darkness, and this enabled me to locate doors and windows; but color, with its varying shades, was then, and is now, a mystery profound. But in my desire to see, to be just like other children, I resolved to learn all I could about color, and so I memorized the list of colors, which ones harmonized, which were most pleasing to the eye, which were bright, which produced a sombre impression. Thus I soon learned to speak of color with a degree of intelligence, and to select my gowns with a view to pleasing the eyes of my friends. I soon learned to associate certain phrases with certain colors—for instance, blue as the sky, green as grass, yellow as gold, black as night, red as fire, and brown as a berry. I also learned that a color had a variety of shades, and that at times colors were changeable, it being difficult to distinguish blue from green at night. The sky, with its starred phenomena, was even harder to conceive, and I could not understand how clouds obscured the sun, or how old Sol could put the blackest clouds to rout.

My ears and fingers continued to flood my mind with knowledge, and the want of eyesight did not distress me. When I touched an object, or listened to a lesson, my mind stored it away

for future reference, and often now, when recalling some facts in history or geography, I can hear the voice of the teacher who read the particular passage.

I was eight years old when I first examined a horse, although I was familiar with the sound of its feet on the pavement, and knew whether it walked, trotted or galloped. The horse I examined had been driven a long distance, and so was very warm; when my hand was placed upon its mane, the hair was damp and clung to the back, and there was an odor of steaming flesh. A fly was tormenting the animal, and, as it tossed its head impatiently, I could hear the rattle of harness, and the sound of its restive foot upon the ground. These impressions have always remained with me. My knowledge of the horse was acquired through the senses of hearing, touch and smell. And so with the cow. I can hear its low "moo, moo," hear the milk dropping into the pail, feel the hard outer shell of the horns, and catch the odor that is ever present in the cow's domain. The cat and dog have their peculiarities, too—the mewling of the cat, and the sounds heard when it purrs while washing its face—the dog's quick bark, and the sound it makes when panting for breath, as it rests after a long chase. I know the animals have different colors, peculiar to them, but this knowledge has no place in my mental conception of them.

In judging people, the voice is my infallible guide. I am instantly attracted or repelled by a voice, and my estimate of character is rarely incorrect. By the voice I am able to form a very accurate idea as to height, weight and age, so here again I do not feel the lack of eyesight. The voice is an unfailing index to character, and the trained ear is quick to catch the slightest variation in tone, and can detect traits and moods hidden from the eye, because not registered upon the face. There is a strong voice, a brave voice, a voice full of hope and cheer; a tired voice, a crafty voice, a voice full of dull despair. And so here again I do not feel the lack of eyesight in noting differences in my [Pg 10] fellow men. I know that there are distinguishing marks, that heads are shaped differently, and that hair and eyes have different colors, corresponding to the various types, as blondes or brunettes. All this I know abstractly, but it is just one of the bits of information tucked away in memory's storehouse. I do not suppose many of you have ever heard a smile. I have. I hear a

smile almost before the lips can register it, and to me the sound is as musical as the laughter of a very young child. I think hearing a smile must be like seeing the light in the eyes, and so lack of eyesight is no deprivation in this connection.

All during my days at school, I went on acquiring knowledge, learning to see many things, scarcely realizing the handicap of blindness, because every help was given me, and I was surrounded by those whose condition was like my own. But when I went out into the world, I found that many seeing people, so called, had very little vision, although their eyesight was perfect. I found, too, that, although I knew many things, and was well equipped to earn my own living, my lack of eyesight was responsible for a corresponding lack of confidence upon the part of the public. This was a great disappointment, for I knew I could succeed, if only some one would give me the opportunity. After waiting twenty years, the State Library gave me the opportunity. This lack of confidence upon the part of the public is one of the most depressing features of adult blindness. Thus far, I have considered the subject from the point of view of one who has been blind from early infancy, but now I shall view it from the standpoint of one deprived of eyesight in adult life, who is taking his first step in the dark.

M. Diderot says: "The help which the senses reciprocally afford to each other hinders their improvement," and so the adult whose movements are no longer directed by his eyes, feels utterly helpless and bewildered, as one who finds himself on a strange road, very late at night, with no ray of light to guide him. As the blinded soldier is uppermost in our thought today, I am considering the mental condition of an adult suddenly deprived of eyesight, not that of the man whose blindness has come on gradually.

The first sensation when thus plunged into total darkness is that of unreality, and, just as the light of day dispels the gloom of night, so the sufferer clings to the hope that any minute he may open his eyes, and find things as they were before the darkness settled down, with all its weird shadows, to fill his soul with dread. The continued darkness causes a feeling of depression and repression, very hard to combat, and so the sufferer is in need of "first aid"—in need of a friendly hand and a cheery voice to help him through these trying

days. Of this period, M. Brieux, Director of Re-education of the Blinded Soldiers in Paris, says: "The blind are, for the time being, put back into the helpless condition of children. They have to be sustained and given a new education for life. They have to begin many things all over again. Spiritually, they have lost their bearings, and are drifting about in restless anguish. Physically, their whole organism has been shaken by the wound they have received, and must have time after such a violent shock to recover its equilibrium. Their power of judgment has often been temporarily destroyed. They are weak in body and uncertain in mind. This double weakness lays on those who surround them a double duty. Much will have been done when their material welfare [Pg 11] has been assured, but the responsibility will not have been discharged unless they have also attained to tranquility of soul and a sense of their own dignity. One must have confidence, in order to give them confidence. Most of us have no idea what powers to meet new demands are inherent in our organs. We have within us capacities unknown even to ourselves, inactive, so long as they are not necessary, awake and efficient, as soon as there is need of them. They are reserves which most of the time we never call on. They are a hoard which we do not touch. Our resources and our power of life are greater than we imagine. The sudden loss of sight gives, after a time, something like the lash of a whip to the whole organism. All the other senses are roused to greater sharpness. When the blind soldier fully realizes this, he will perhaps arrive at a state in which I have seen some men blind from birth, the state of being proud of being blind. Why should they not be proud, when they feel that they are as capable of accomplishing certain things, of practicing certain trades as other men? If, with their lessened powers, lacking the power that we consider of supreme importance, they can do things as well as we, are they not, therefore, cleverer than we? Instead of talking to them of resignation, incite them to revolt at the limitations of their condition. Inspire them to conquer circumstances. Insist that they can. Picture life to them, its beauty and its power, and tell them that it is good."

In administering to the needs of this readjustment period, the volunteer should be an optimist, and should exercise common sense in guiding the adult over the first lap of the unfamiliar road. I have

advised the volunteers who are now in France, and those preparing to go there, to take writing boards, games, bright, pithy stories, and a lot of nonsense verse. I have told these Red Cross workers that they themselves must know how to laugh, must be able to rise above the horrors about them, for they are there to serve heroes, not cowards, heroes who will laugh with a sob in their throats; heroes who, after a short respite, will reach for a new sword with which to resume the battle of life. God grant we may have the new swords ready for them—swords of hope, swords of confidence, swords from which all the old prejudice and misconception have been removed—swords of occupation and independence!

Of this readjustment period, Clarence Hawkes, the well-known blind naturalist who lost his eyesight at the age of fifteen, says: "the loss of eyesight seems, for a time, to upset the perfect working of the nervous system. The nerves have to adjust themselves to new conditions, and rearrange the channels of communication. On first losing one's eyesight, one is impressed with the fact that all noises sound much too loud, and it takes several months for sounds to get toned down to their normal volume, and one never quite overcomes the tendency to jump at sudden sharp noises."

As to the blind child the senses of touch, hearing and smell prove efficient carriers of knowledge, so these senses come to the rescue of the blind adult, and compensate, in large measure, for the loss of eyesight. Training does not increase the sensitiveness of a sense organ. It merely puts this capacity to better use. So the blind adult does not suddenly come into possession of wonderful powers, but, in time, his "acquired sense perception" enables him to do many things hitherto considered impossible of accomplishment. But to the casual observer, anything [Pg 12] done without eyesight is considered little short of marvelous. The adult soon learns to recognize voices and footsteps, to measure distance with a fair degree of accuracy, and, in many cases, to go about alone, with only the friendly cane for company. Many of the blind have what is defined as a "sense of obstacles," and it is sometimes called a sixth sense. Dr. Illingworth defines this sense as "an exceedingly subtle kind of instinct that enables a blind individual to detect the presence or proximity of a person or object under circumstances of absolute silence, and very often to know the nature of the object." Dr. Illingworth

believes that this remarkable power is of electric origin and latent in everybody. This power seems to have its seat in the nerves of the face, and is possessed by the blind adult as well as the blind child. This sense of obstacles, this "touch at a distance," enables a person to tell when he is passing tall buildings, fences, trees, and many other obstructions. Mr. Hawkes says: "The sixth sense, if such it be, probably depends upon three conditions — sound, the compression of the air, and whether the face be free to use its sensitive feelers. This subject is still in its infancy, and time may reveal many interesting facts concerning it; but for our purpose it is enough that the blind have a sense of obstacles, and let us regard it as another proof that we are wonderfully made and divinely led."

In a surprisingly short time, the blind adult becomes accustomed to the new conditions, the various organs perform their new functions, and he finds life in sightless land to be, in many respects, very like life in that world of light and color, now only a memory. But a very living memory — enabling him to recall the faces of his friends, the glow of sunset, or the rosy light of dawn with the eye of the mind whose vision is keener, clearer than mere physical sight. This ability to call up mental pictures is yet another of the compensations, and these pictures never fade, but come, when familiar scenes or objects are suggested. The adult is deeply interested in form and color, and likes to have them minutely described. This fact is not well understood by sighted friends, and so the blind are often deprived of details which would give them keenest pleasure, because friends fear to recall painful memories. In this connection, and by way of conclusion, I shall give a poem written by one of our pupils, who lost his eyes when a drummer boy in the Civil War. This man learned to read raised type after being blind fifty-three years. His poem follows:

A BLIND MAN'S SOLILOQUY.

What, then, is blindness? This and nothing more:
The window blinds are closed, the outer door
Close shut and bolted, and the curtains drawn.
No more comes light of stars nor morning's dawn,
Nor one lone ray from day's meridian light.
And men pass by and say "within is night!"

Not so; for Memory's lamp, with steady blaze,
Shines on the hallowed scenes of other days,
While Fancy's torch, prophetic, flashing through
The vistas of the future, brings to view
Scenes passing strange, but scenes that yet shall be,
Which I can see, but which he can not see
Whose dazzled orbs find nothing hid away
Beyond the brilliant margin of today. [Pg 13]

To me the radiant world forever gleams
With the rich halo of my boyish dreams;
The faces I have loved no wrinkles know;
My dear ones' eyes ne'er lose their cherished glow;
The hair of gold ne'er turns to silver hair;
The young are young, the fair are always fair.

With reason strengthened, feelings more intense,
The senses, multiples of former sense,
Vicarious servants for dead sight become.
I see the city in the city's hum;
I catch its subtle undertone of trade;
I hear of fortunes lost and fortunes made,
In sounds to him a mystery profound
Who, seeing, knows not vision muffles sound.
Distinct to him must sound become, to whom
Life walks in darkness—call it not in gloom.
'Tis only an exchange of good for good,
A new plant growing where the old one stood,
Old blessings taken, and new blessings given;
Sweet compensation, thou wert born in heaven!

There is not silence unto him whose soul
In darkness sits and listens. Like a scroll
On which the secrets of the world are traced,
Blindness is but a sea-shell kindly placed
Beside the ear, and in its varying tone,
Who will, may make life's secret all his own.
And thus misfortunes bless, for blindness brings
A power to pierce the depths of hidden things,

To walk where reason and fair fancy lead,
To read the riddle of men's thoughts, to read
The soul's arcana in each subtler tone,
And make man's joys and sorrows all my own.

Nor can I sit repining at my lot
As bitter or unjust, or curse the shot
Which tore away my sight. The world is kind
And gentle to her sons. Though I am blind,
Smooth paths of enterprise have always stood
Open for me, and, doing what I could,
With hand or brain, with simple earnestness,
Have gathered what was due me of success.

O you, who sit in darkness, moaning o'er
Your dead and vanished vision, mourn no more!
Keep in the current. Be you brave and strong!
The busy world is singing—join the song,
And you shall find, if you no duty shirk,
Who will may prosper, if he do but work.

And as a last thought, permit me to quote the concluding words of Clarence Hawkes' wonderful book, "Hitting the Dark Trail": "If night has overtaken me at noonday, yet have I found beauty in night. The sun at noontide showed me the world and all its wonder but the night has shown me the universe, the countless stars and illimitable spaces, the vastness and the wonder of all life. The perfect day only showed me man's world, but the night showed me God's Universe." [Pg 14]

THE BLIND CHILD AND ITS DEVELOPMENT.

As a foreword to this lecture, I shall quote from a paper entitled "Blind Children And How To Care For Them," written by Dr. F. Park Lewis, an eminent oculist of New York City, and a man who has devoted much time and thought to the blind and their needs.