

PSYCHOLOGY

Wolf-Child Stories Are Doubted by Psychologist

Evidence Entirely Hearsay; Idiots Display Many of Same Behavior Characteristics, It Is Pointed Out

STORIES of children suckled and brought up by wolves and other wild animals were dismissed as unfounded by Dr. Wayne Dennis, of the University of Virginia, speaking before the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology.

Kamala and Amala, Indian "wolf children" whose nurture by wolves is accepted by some prominent American scientists are included by Dr. Dennis among those for whom there is "no good evidence."

What evidence there is for these tales of wild children is entirely hearsay, Dr. Dennis declared.

"The fact that the persons who have published accounts of children reared by animals have been persons of unquestioned integrity should not be permitted to prejudice the cases," he said. "All were writing what they had heard from others. The scientist's information in this case was no better than the hunter's or peasant's or soldier's information."

Of the 14 reports of wolf-children, 12 have come from India, where the myth of a child reared by animals is very widespread, Dr. Dennis explained. Kipling employed this idea in his story of Mowgli, and he may well have found the story in India.

"Since the idea of wolf-children is current in India," he said, "if a mute, who could give no account of his past, were found in India at the present time, it is easy to guess the direction of speculation concerning his origin. . . . India possesses a large number of unfortunates to whom such a myth could be fitted."

Suggesting that idiocy would explain the condition of Kamala as described, just as well as the theory that she was nurtured by wolves, Dr. Dennis compared facts related about wild children with what is known of idiots.

Kamala, after painstaking teaching until she was 16, could speak only 50 words. Low-grade defectives are also deficient in language.

Wild children, if not entirely mute, make animal sounds. The utterances of mute idiots "mostly consist of inarticulated grunts, screeches and discordant yells."

Wild children are untidy. So are mentally defective children.

Wild children eat things civilized man considers disgusting. Idiots will eat and drink anything which comes within their reach.

Wild children frequently are said to be insensitive to heat and cold. The lower grades of the mentally deficient are also observed to lack temperature sense.

Wild children show little or no attachment to human beings. This has been observed also in an institution for the feebleminded.

Wild children cannot walk upright. Neither can many idiots.

The argument that Kamala and other wild children must have been intelligent in order to shift for themselves in the wild is answered by Dr. Dennis.

"In practically no case do we know how long the individual really shifted for himself," he said. "If he were taken some distance from home and released, or if he were driven from home, or if he wandered sufficiently far from home so that he was lost, he need not have supported himself for more than a day or a few days before being found."

"His muteness, his stupidity, would make it impossible for him to account for his past."

Dr. Dennis assured the psychologists that he was not trying to prove that children have not lived with animals. He is merely skeptical.

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CHEMISTRY

Award for Discovery Of Pantothenic Acid

DR. R. J. WILLIAMS, of the University of Texas, is the 1941 recipient of the Mead Johnson and Company \$1,000 vitamin B complex award, it was announced at the meeting of the American Institute of Nutrition in Chicago. The award was made for Dr. Williams' "outstanding work in the discovery, isolation and identification of pantothenic acid."

Science News Letter, April 26, 1941



TESTS FOR DEFENSE

These scientists at the National Bureau of Standards are measuring the tautness of doped airplane fabric which has been stretched across the standard frames to make comparative tests.