April 1925

Better Eyesight

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO THE PREVENTION AND CURE OF IMPERFECT SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES

April, 1925

Floating Specks

WHEN a patient stares or strains to see by looking at a light-colored surface he may see, or imagine he sees, floating black specks, strings of black thread or small light-colored globules resembling tears. The floating specks may be apparently a quarter of an inch or more in size and they may be of any shape.
The ability to see or imagine floating specks may occur in children or in adults of any age. Some children have been known to lie on their backs on the ground, look up at light colored clouds and amuse themselves for hours by watching what appeared to be floating specks.
Many nervous people have been made very unhappy, consciously or unconsciously imagining that they see these floating specks.
The cause of floating specks is an imperfect memory of perfect sight. Persons with normal vision who have never been conscious of floating specks can be taught how to imagine them by straining—to imagine letters, colors or other objects imperfectly.
Conversely, patients who are conscious of floating specks are unable to imagine them and perfect sight at the same time.
In the treatment of floating specks it is important to convince the patients thoroughly that they are only imagined and not seen. It helps very much to impress on the patient's mind that to see these floating specks requires a sufficient strain to lose a perfect imagination of all objects seen, remembered or imagined at all times and in all places.

Note—Floating specks, October, 1919, "Better Eyesight" [link]

Muscae volitantes (floating specks), pages 176 [link] and 236 [link], "Perfect Sight Without Glasses."

Quick Cures
By W. H. Bates, M.D.

QUICK cures are desirable. At the same time let me hasten to state that we must use the word "cure" with great care. It means a great deal more than most physicians realise. A patient's definition of a cure is more complete, more thorough, and more lasting than he realised or remembered at his first visit.
To promise any patient a cure is unwise from a scientific standpoint. In my work I tike particular pains to make the patient understand that I do not expect or guarantee a cure in any case. The most I say to them is "Yes, I have cured people much worse than you, but that in no guarantee that I can give you the eighteen benefit."
This seems to eliminate a certain amount of subconscious antagonism on the part of the patient, who may consciously say that he desires to be cured, but deep down in his heart feels unconsciously, "I don't believe you can do it with my help, and I am quite sure you can't do it if I oppose you."
Like the Irishman who said "he was willing to be convinced, but he would like to see the man who could do it."
Quick cures have their disadvantages. A patient feels that since his benefit came easily, now, with his good sight, he can go off at any time for likes and have a spree, in which he stares and strains and uses his eyes to his heart's content without any danger of a relapse. He forgets that all persons with normal vision can acquire imperfect sight at any time. The attending physician must be on his guard when referring to those patients who have been cured quickly, and not give the impression that it is an easy thing to do, because too often those patients who know about quick cure cases expect to be cured themselves in the same way as quickly and as permanently. If they are not, they are disappointed, and they have a way of expressing that disappointment which hurts. Personally I am very much upset every time a patient surprises me with a quick cure, because of the favorable criticism which may follow and which is seldom desired by the attending physician. If we could only practice quick cures in favorable cases and not have to struggle with the obstinate ones, things would get along perhaps better.
It is well to bear in mind that most quick cures happen when least expected and we do not always know what particular thing accomplished it.
One question is often asked: "What kind of cases are most quickly cured?" I do not believe that we have sufficient facts to answer this question at all intelligently, because mild cases of imperfect sight may require long periods of time—years—before recovery, or a permanent recovery, occurs. I have a number of patients whose amount of imperfect sight is very small, indeed, and yet after some years of more or less continuous treatment they are still not permanently relieved. In other cases a large amount of near-sightedness or far-sightedness without any special reason, practicing the same method of treatment, would obtain a permanent cure at one visit. I wish I knew why.
Quite a number of patients with imperfect sight for the distance, and also unable to read the newspaper at a near point, have been permanently cured after a half hour or more of palming. Other cases have practiced palming apparently just as faithfully without much if any relief after many months. It would be perhaps a good thing to know why palming was so very beneficial in some cases while in others the benefit was imperfect.
One patient 60 years of age with imperfect sight from cataract, whose vision was not improved at all by glasses, obtained normal vision without glasses at the first visit. The cataract and all the other troubles disappeared almost immediately after palming. It was interesting to learn that this patient had worn quite strong glasses for nearly fifty years. During this time even with his glasses he suffered pain, fatigue and other discomforts. He told me that all he wanted or that he would be satisfied with, was the cure of the cataract, so that possibly, with glasses, he could do his work. The very thought of it made his face brighten, but when after palming he obtained not only a cure of his imperfect sight but of every other symptom he could remember, he certainly was grateful and he showed it in his face.
Another patient said he was 106 years old. His vision for distance was poor and he was unable to read fine print with or without glasses. He had cataract in both eyes, so opaque that no red reflex could be seen in any part of the pupil with an ophthalmoscope. He was placed in a dark room and told to close his eyes and keep them closed. At the end of a half hour his vision was improved to 10/10 and he read diamond type at six inches without glasses. He was told to repeat this treatment frequently during the day in order to avoid a relapse. He came back at the end of a week with his vision still further improved. As he went out of the office without an attendant to guide him he stopped and spoke the only words I ever heard him say: "Doctor, you did me good." I wish I knew what I did or did not do. It would be a great satisfaction to me to find out how the patient by closing his eyes for a half hour improved his sight so much and so quickly. A large number of other patients have been told the same thing; the same words were used as were spoken to him, but the results were seldom repeated.
It is well to emphasize that under the most favorable conditions quick cures are exceedingly rare. They generally occur when least expected, but when they do occur the definition of the word "cure" includes a great many more benefits than the patients expect.
One of the quickest cures I ever had was in the case of a very ignorant man who was suffering from sympathetic ophthalmia. At school, he told me, he could never understand fractions, and yet I found that he had the most wonderful imagination in my experience. Although he could not tell the big "C" at ten feet, when I brought it up close to him he said that he could imagine it and could imagine it perfectly. Knowing that it was a big "C," he was able to imagine it perfectly at ten feet, and when I told him that the first letter on the line below was an "R," he became able almost immediately to imagine it so perfectly that he could imagine he saw a letter "B" on the same line, and a letter "E" the first letter on the line below. He kept insisting that he did not see any of these letters. He only imagined them.
When I pointed to the first letter on the bottom line he said it all looked black. When I told him that the first letter was an "E," at once he said he could imagine it perfectly, and much to my surprise after the perfect imagination of that letter "E," he became able to imagine in turn the other letters on the bottom line which he did not know. He kept insisting that he did not see these letters(o)that he only imagined them. But always when he imagined perfectly one letter on the Snellen test card, the whole card became clearer and perfectly distinct and he could see or distinguish neighboring letters which he did not know. His imagination improved his sight to normal. To walk around the room without running into the furniture and to see surrounding objects, all he had to do was to imagine one letter of the alphabet perfectly.
Many of my patients have been teachers in the various universities, have the highest intelligence and are authorities in their fields, yet whose imagination of mental pictures was very poor.

Stories from the Clinic
No. 61: Quick Cures
By Emily C. Lierman

PATIENTS who are cured quickly of imperfect sight are those who become able to improve their memory and their imagination quickly and without effort. A little girl named Madeline, aged ten years, came with her mother, who was very anxious to have her child cured without glasses. The mother had been notified by Madeline's school teacher that her little girl could not read correctly what was written on the blackboard from her seat, which was about ten feet away. She was one of the daintiest little girls I have ever seen. I can imagine her as one of the white fairies written about in our little magazine, which I believe a great many children enjoy. I feel sure that there are many mothers among our subscribers and that they realize the relaxation and rest which is given to the child-mind at the mother reads about the good fairies just before the sandman comes.
This is how Madeline was cured in one visit. She was placed ten feet from the test card and she read all the letters correctly down to the twenty line, 10/20, but the letters were not clear and black to her. She was told to palm for ten minutes or so. Then she read the card again, and this time the letters appeared clear and black. The mother was told to notice how she stared when trying to see one of the smaller letters of the fifteen line. I told Madeline she must blink her eyes all the time to prevent staring, which always lowered the vision. As she glanced at the letters each time she moved to the left and then to the right, not forgetting to blink her eyes, her vision improved to 10/10. She was placed in another room, fifteen feet from another card, which she had not seen, and without a stop she read all the letters of the card. Now, I wanted to find out if I could improve her vision further with the aid of her memory. I told her to close her eyes and palm and remember something she had seen without effort or strain. She answered: "I cannot think of anything just now, and the more I try the less am I able to do as you ask me." I asked her then to tell me what lesson she liked best at school. "Oh! I just love arithmetic," she said. I asked her if she would add up some figures for me while she was palming and she answered, "Yes." I started with easy figures at first, like nine, three and eight. She added as quickly as I announced the figures. Then I made the lesson more difficult, but she did not once make a mistake. All this time she was smiling and enjoying the whole thing. We kept this up for about fifteen minutes, and then while her eyes were still closed, I moved the test card as far away as I could place it, which was eighteen feet. Madeline was told to remove her hands from her eyes and stand and swing as she did before. She read every letter on the card correctly. Her vision had improved to 10/10 by the aid of her memory for figures.
Madeline was cured quickly, because she was able to remember figures perfectly. Her mental pictures of them were perfect. Her mind was relaxed, and by the aid of the swing and remembering to blink often, as the normal eye does, she had no more eyestrain.

A little boy, aged seven years, was brought to me not long ago. His nurse, who was extremely fond of him, did not want glasses put on the little fellow. He told me very emphatically that he just would not wear them. No one would dare put them on him, he said.
His little forehead was a mass of wrinkles as he tried to read even the largest letters of the test card at ten feet. I asked the nurse to sit where she could watch him at the start and then see the change that I was sure would come to his face after he was taught to read without effort or strain. With each eye separately he read 10/50. As he tried to read further he wriggled and twisted his little body around in the big arm-chair where I had placed him.
"Now," I said, "little man, just close your eyes and place your hands over them and shut out all the light. Sit still, if you like." "Oh," said he, "I like sitting still if I keep my eyes covered, but I don't like doing it too long." I said: "Alr right, keep them covered for a little while and I will read you a fairy story that tells something about the elephant, too."
That was all that was necessary. My patient sat perfectly still as I read the whole fairy tale. The nurse remarked that for a long while he had not been able to sit still for more than five minutes at one time.
After the fairy story was read, I told the little chap to stand, feet apart, with eyes still closed, and I guided him in moving his body from right to left until he became able to do it gently by himself. Then he was told to open his eyes and keep moving or swinging his body to the right and then to the left. He was directed to blink his eyes while doing this. He exclaimed, with great surprise: "My, the card and letters seem to be moving opposite." I said, That's right, my boy; now follow my finger as I point to the letters." He did, and to our surprise he read the whole card without a mistake, 10/10.
The wrinkles in his forehead were gone. I told the nurse to help him many times every day with the test card just as I did. She promised also to bring him back to me if he had any relapse. So far I have not heard from her. I do believe my little boy was cured in one visit.

Hungry Fairies
By George M. Guild

ONCE upon a time a young man, a reporter, found himself in a Southern city without a cent of money. He desired to take passage on a steamboat for New York. As the time came for the boat to sail, and not having met anyone he knew, he finally plucked up sufficient courage to talk to the Captain about it. The Captain listened in sympathetic interest, being one of those jovial, happy kind of people who are often interested in somebody else besides themselves, interrupted the reporter and asked him: "What paper do you write for in New York? Do you suppose that you could write a story about our line of steamers which would be a good advertisement for our boats?"
The reporter being very anxious to get back in some way to his home town answered the Captain as best he could. The Captain then took out a ticket from his pocket, handed it to the reporter and told him that if he would promise to write a good advertisement of his boat which would encourage an increased number of people to travel by his line that he would be satisfied.
The reporter took the ticket and in his gratitude promised whatever the Captain desired. The reporter had the ticket which insured his passage home, but he did not know what he could do for food as he had no money to purchase it. The steamer left the dock and headed for New York. Lunch time came and, in order not to make himself conspicuous, he sought an unused part of the boat where there were no people who might ask embarrassing questions.
He cut down on a steamer chair, closed his eyes and tried to forget that he had a stomach and that he was hungry. As he sat there reeling, a fairy came dancing along the deck, came close up to him, patted him on the back and invited him to get up and dance with her. As there was no one around he accepted the fairy's invitation, and so they danced forward and back, sideways and round and round. And as they danced other fairies appeared and danced with him. He enjoyed the dance very much and was sorry when some of the passengers appeared and the fairies vanished.
After a while he began to feel hungry again, and at the same time he remembered how the fairies, when they danced side to side and other directions, swung their bodies as they danced. Being small fairies the swing was very short, and when he remembered the swing of the fairies he became able to remember the swing just as short. As he swung or imagined he was swinging the hunger left him and he smiled and was pleased. Some of the passengers asked him how he enjoyed his lunch. I am sorry to say that he lied about it and told them that he wasn't feeling very well and thought he would omit his lunch.
They imagined that he was more or less seasick, smiled and went away and left him. The afternoon passed and supper time arrived and again he sought an unoccupied part of the boat. Again he found a steamer chair and occupied it as previously, and while there the fairies again appeared and persuaded him to dance with them as he had done before.
The more he danced the better he felt, and as the dance went on and he practiced the swinging, side to side and other directions, he quite forgot his hunger, and when he did that the fairies smiled and encouraged him to keep on with the swing.
The next morning at breakfast time his hunger had become worse than it was the day before. Again the fairies appeared and told him that they were very hungry, that they were very anxious to be carried by the steamer to their home in New York. From there they expected to go to some of the parks and obtain some food—being fairies they did not need very much food. What they wanted was quality more than quantity. The reporter told them that, for him, he was willing to pass up the quality of the food provided he obtained sufficient quantity.
They all laughed at this and began to dance more rapidly than ever before, and in order to forget his hunger the reporter danced with them just as fast as he could.
And so the days passed for him quite rapidly. At times he found it difficult to explain why he missed so-many of his meals. The help of the fairies made it possible for him to forget his hunger at all times provided he remembered or imagined the swing of the hungry fairies.
In due time the steamer reached New York. When the gang plank connected the steamer with the dock, our reporter started to leave the vessel with the other passengers. When he came to the man who takes the tickets he handed out his ticket and started to walk away. But the ticket man stopped him and looked at the ticket in a puzzled way. He said to the reporter: "How is this? Your ticket gives you three meals a day on the boat and you haven't had a single meal punched. What's the matter. Wasn't the food good enough for you?"
The reporter answered: "Yes, but you see I am under a diet and did not have to take my meals regularly. You'll find it all right," and then ran down the gangplank and disappeared in the crowd with a feeling of something which he could not describe.
The memory of the hungry fairies, however, was a pleasant memory. He walked along practicing the swing until he met a friend who use to it that he got a good square meal. The reporter told his friend the story of the fairies and how they had helped him to endure the hunger and made his trip a pleasant one with their sympathy, kindness and the swing.
His friend laughed so long and so heartily that the reporter was quite annoyed. It amused his friend very much to hear that he carefully avoided the dining room, and was ravenously hungry for a whole week—with a paid-meal ticket in his pocket

Concentration and Relaxation
By Lawrence M. Stanton, M.D.

I KNOW of no writer who has so clarified the murky philosophy of concentration and relaxation as has Dr. Bates, and yet the final word has not been said, as he himself would undoubtedly avow.
Therefore, but with humblest intention, I offer a few thoughts upon the subject which is of the utmost importance to those who are striving for better eyesight.
To my patients I have forbidden the practice of concentration, saying that the very word suggests strain, or else I bid them modify the dictionary's definition. I have reasoned that if by concentration you mean, as Dr. Bates says, doing or seeing one thing better than anything else, you may speak of concentration; but if by concentration you mean, as the dictionary says, doing one thing continuously to the exclusion of all other things, then you must abandon the practice as an impossibility.
Concentration, however, cannot psychologically be ignored, and recent psychology, I believe, has given us a new interpretation which is worthy of our consideration.
Attention underlies concentration, as that word is commonly used, and Ribot's statement of attention is very enlightening. Ribot says "that the state of attention which seems continuous is in reality intermittent; the object of attention is merely a center, the point to which attention returns again and again, to wander from it as often on ever-widening circles. All parts of the object, and then the reflections inspired by these various parts hold our interest by turns. Even when the attention is fixed on the most trifling material object, it works in just the same fashion." This is entirely in accord with Dr. Bates' statement; it is central fixation.
There are, however, two aspects of concentration to be considered—voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary concentration is an effort and, as Dr. Bates has so clearly shown, cannot be maintained without fatigue. The highest grades of attention, to which this brief consideration is confined, are involuntary, and involuntary concentration can be defined as "a psychological equivalent of attention minus effort." In ordinary attention—that is, in voluntary concentration—our thought holds the object in focus, whereas in involuntary attention (which we shall consider synonymous with involuntary concentration) the object holds our thought without our volition, perhaps even against our will. "Spontaneous attention is rooted at the very center of our being," and things that hold the attention captive, as in fascination, fixed contemplation, the Hindu's meditation and reverie are instances of involuntary concentration, and involuntary concentration is as effortless as the rising sun—it just happens. Then, there are those cases of miraculous quick cures of imperfect sight by one or another of Dr. Bates' methods, where it was enough for the patient to see the better course in order to be able to follow it, the idea and its realization occurring simultaneously, without effort, without volition even. Contrast this with the attitude "No, I see the better course and approve it, but I follow the worse." Involuntary concentration is displayed in the case of the insect, related by Faber and quoted by Dr. Bates, which in captivity hung downcastd for ten months, its whole life's span, and in this position performed all its functions, even to mating and laying of eggs, apparently without the least fatigue. Still another instance is that of Napoleon, who could work for eighteen hours at a stretch on one piece of work without the least fatigue. Napoleon speaks of his various affairs arranged in his head "as in a wardrobe." He says: "When I wish to put any matter out of my mind, I close its drawer and open the drawer belonging to another. The contents of the drawers never get mixed and they never worry me or weary me. Do I want to sleep? I close all the drawers, and then I am asleep."
The question, then, may be asked whereisn does involuntary concentration differ from relaxation. If involuntary concentration and relaxation are not always one and the same thing, they often are psychological alternatives and the opponents we think them.
To regard all phases of relaxation as purely passive is as erroneous as it is to say that concentration of the kind under consideration is associated with effort. Relaxation of the passive kind usually ends in sleep or sleepiness, as experienced by many patients after palming. Relaxation combined with action, on the other hand, may also be absolutely free from effort and strain.
In any case it is the matter of effort and strain that concerns us most, rather than a question of concentration or relaxation. Victor Hugo speaks of "the calm and intense fixation of the eyes," and surely nowhere is intensity so impressive as in calmness. To be calm is not to be oblivious, and to be intense need not be to strain.
Another thought about relaxation is this: Obstacles to relaxation may prove sources of relaxation. An instance of which, is found in the noise that is keeping us awake when wishing to go to sleep. If we sufficiently relax, if we accept the disturbance and sleep in spite of it, not only is the obstacle overcome, but because overcome it in turn becomes rather pleasantly associated with going to sleep. When again we desire to sleep, we find the noise soothing rather than annoying, and really a source of relaxation instead of an obstacle to it. The following quotation from Jean Kenyon MacKenzie's "Minor Mercacles" well illustrates how obstacles may become ministering angels. She writes of the stillness of the African forest: "I remember that stillness. Many a time when I am in the subway I remember the ineffable stillness of the forest. I wonder to find myself where I am—so savagely circumstanced(lies pressed upon by alien bodies, so smitten by noise. Traveling like this, in white man's fashion, you are certainly safe from the snakes, and the leopards, and the cannibal tribes of that other world where you traveled in other fashions. Now that you are shut up so safely in the gem of Manhattan, your friends feel at ease about you(jstanely the sun shall not smite you by day nor the moon by night. And yet, perversely, in this perfection of safety you are intimidated. Suddenly passive after your desperate adventures with traffic, you feel the hidden things of memory rise and flood your heart; you dream. You remember other times of day than the manufactured sight of the subway and other ways of travel. And suddenly, in the indescribble silence that is the core of that incessant clamor, you hear a bugle calling in a forest-clearing that is half way around the world."*
Certainly a remarkable experience—what relaxation, what imagination !
Involuntary concentration without effort is equivalent to relaxation in action. If you can achieve such equilibrium; if you can perform your mental functions without strain as Fabre's little insect performed its physical; if you can, whatever your particular captivity, hang by your feet head downward without effort, then "be my friend and teach me to be thine."
Note: Some of the quotation* in this article end some of its material are from "The Power Within Us," Charles Baudouin.
* Italics mine.

Announcements

THE WORK IN ENGLAND

Capt. C. S. Price, of London, England, has been the guest of Dr. Bates for several weeks. Dr. Bates wishes to announce that he finds Captain Price thoroughly capable of curing imperfect sight by his methods.

League Announcement

THE next meeting of the Better Eyesight League will be held at 383 Madison Avenue, on the evening of Tuesday, April 7th, at eight o'clock. The meeting will be of unusual interest to teachers and parents—in fact, to all who are interested in maintaining a high degree of visual acuity among children and adults. The speaker of the evening will be Percival S. Spinz, D.D.S., who is the attending oral surgeon of the Hospital for Joint Diseases and chief of the Dental and Oral Surgical Department in the dispensary connected with the hospital. Dr. Spinz will discuss "Eye Disturbances Due to Focal Infection in Teeth and Gums."
The members of the League will welcome information about this important subject, especially when presented by a League member. Dr. Spinz discarded his glasses a year and a half ago; he is now able to read the photographic diamond type of the small Bible.
A cordial invitation to attend this meeting is hereby extended to friends of League members.

Visiuection Contra-Indicated
By W. H. Bates, M.D.

MANY facts in physiological optics have been demonstrated by me, by experiements upon animals, all of which were dead. It is not possible to operate on live animals or on live fish, under anesthesia, and obtain reliable or constant results. The consciousness of the animal must first be destroyed by death. After an animal or a fish has been killed, the contractility of the muscles continues at the ordinary temperature for several hours. The results cannot be demonstrated at all accurately or constantly when the heart is beating and respiration is continuing.

Questions and Answers

Question—Are floating specks serious? Sometimes they just flood my eyes like clouds of dust and greatly frighten me.
Answer—Floating specks are not serious. They are always imagined and never seen.
Question—(a) My eyes are swollen and disfigured in the morning. (b) Although I have eight and nine hours' sleep, it does not rest me.
Answer—(a) The swelling of your eyes or eyelids in the morning is due to eyestrain when you are asleep. Read chapter in my book on this subject.
(b) You may be restless and sleep very poorly and strain your eyes terribly, although apparently you may be asleep for a long time.
Question—I have improved my sight by palming, but when I read for any length of time the pain returns.
Answer—When you read and your eyes pain you, it means that you are straining your eyes. More frequent palming may help you more continuously.
Question—Explain which "swing" is beneficial, and whether one moves the whole head or only the eyes.
Answer—All swings when done properly are beneficial. When done improperly they are not beneficial. It is necessary for some people to move their head in order to move their eyes and obtain a perfect swing.
Question—Is there a possibility of palming wrong? I can obtain some benefit, but fame I feel strained.
Answer—Palming may be done properly or it may be done wrong. Read the chapter on palming in my book.

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