April 1920

Better Eyesight

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

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REST

All methods of curing errors of refraction are simply different ways of obtaining rest.

Different persons do this in different ways. Some patients are able to rest their eyes simply by closing them, and complete cures have been obtained by this means, the closing of the eyes for a longer or shorter period being alternated with looking at the test card for a moment. In other cases patients have strained more when their eyes were shut than when they were open. Some can rest their eyes when all light is excluded from them by covering with the palms of the hands; others cannot, and have to be helped by other means before they can palm. Some become able at once to remember or imagine that the letters they wish to see are perfectly black, and with the accompanying relaxation their vision immediately becomes normal. Others become able to do this only after a considerable time. Shifting is a very simple method of relieving strain, and most patients soon become able to shift from one letter to another, or from one side of a letter to another in such away that these forms seem to move in a direction opposite to the movement of the eye. A few are unable to do this, but can do it with a mental picture of a letter, after which they become able to do it visually.

Patients who do not succeed with any particular method of obtaining rest for their eyes should abandon it and try something else. The cause of the failure is strain, and it does no good to go on straining.

HOW I HELPED OTHERS

By Victoria Coolidge

When I had become able to read without glasses, and my headaches had become less and less frequent, and less severe each time, I was so enthusiastic over my experience that I was anxious to help others. My brother was my first patient. He was so much interested in what had been done for me that he wanted to try it himself; but I never dreamed of being able to help him, because his eyes were almost as bad as my own had been, his glasses being: right eye convex 3.25 D.S.; left eye, convex 3.75 D.S. combined with 0.50 D.C., 180 degrees. However, I knew the treatment could do no harm, so I decided that I would try to show him as nearly as I could what Dr. Bates had done for me. Imagine my surprise, then, when I found that he, too, by holding the fine print six inches from his eyes and looking alternately at the top and bottom of the letters,. became able to read it just as I had become able to do so. He proved to be a model pupil as soon as he had demonstrated to his own satisfaction that he must leave off his glasses all the time if he wanted to make any appreciable progress. He has now done without them for about a year, and has made remarkable progress in that time, the secret of his success being a great desire to be cured, an intelligent grasp of the idea of central fixation, and perseverance in practicing central fixation at every possible opportunity.

The next person I was able to help was a friend who, while visiting me, happened to notice the Snellen test card hanging on the wall. She asked me what I was doing with it, and I explained, adding that she was very fortunate in having normal vision. "I thought I had," she said, "but I have had so many headaches that I consulted an eye specialist the other day and he gave me glasses." She was so displeased to think she had to wear them, and had found it so difficult to get used to seeing with them, that I asked her if she would like to try Dr. Bates' treatment without glasses. She said that she would jump at the chance. I told her to read the card every day at ten, fifteen, and twenty feet, and to palm whenever she had a headache. That was in August. On December 19 she telephoned that she had practiced reading the card every day, that she had had no trouble with headaches, and that she was reading 20/10 easily with the better eye, and fairly well with the other. Shortly after she began the treatment herself, she was able to improve the vision of a child nine years old from 20/50 to 20/20.

It has been many times pointed out in this magazine that children under twelve years of age who have never worn glasses are easily cured; and so for the past month I have been trying to see what I could do for such children, and for some who were older—including two who had worn glasses, one some time previously and the other up to the time I began to treat her. I have worked with six and they have all improved. One girl, fifteen, who had worn glasses a few years ago for imperfect sight in. one eye, but who had discarded them, improved in a half hour from 20/70 to 20/50, by alternating palming, or sometimes just closing her eyes, and then reading the Snellen test card. This improvement was permanent.

Another girl, sixteen, had worn glasses for a year, chiefly for headache, she said, although her vision in both eyes was but 20/200. As she could read without her glasses without much difficulty, she was only too glad to take them off, as most girls of that age are, but she was afraid of the headaches. I asked her to try it, and she has done so for about three weeks, during which time her vision improved to 20/70 and she had no headaches.

The following is the record of four little girls who have improved by reading the Snellen test card daily, and palming:

NameAgeVision Sept., 1919BPys. Rec. CardDec. 11Dec. 31

Catherine9R. 20/50L. 20/5020/4020/4020/40

Blanche6R. 4/5L. 4/50 6/40 6/40 6/30 6/30

Vinnie 9R. 20/5L. 20/4020/4020/30 absent

Sylvia8R. 20/40L. 20/4020/1520/1520/1020/10

Catherine's vision afterwards (January 22) improved to 20/20. The case of Sylvia was so interesting that it will be treated in more detail next month.

STORIES FROM THE CLINIC

3. Retinitis Pigmentosa

By Emily C. Lierman

I am not a physician, and I know very little about the disease of the eyes known as retinitis pigmentosa except how to relieve it. I have been told that in this condition spots of black pigment are deposited in the retina, that parts of the retina are destroyed, and that the nerve of sight is diseased. Eye books which describe the disease say that it usually begins in childhood, and progresses very slowly until it ends in complete blindness. The field of vision is contracted, and, because they cannot see objects on either side of them, patients frequently stumble against such objects. In most cases the vision is much worse at night than in the daytime. The books say further that no treatment is known which helps these cases. Nevertheless Dr. Bates reported, in the New York Medical Journal of February 3, 1917 [link], a case of retinitis pigmentosa which had been materially benefited through treatment by relaxation, and by the use of the same methods, I have been able to greatly improve the sight in several cases of the same kind.

My first case of retinitis pigmentosa was Pauline, a little girl of twelve who came to the clinic in October. 1917. At five feet from the card she could read only the seventy line, and her eyes vibrated continually from side to side, a condition known as nystagmus. She was very shy and extremely nervous, and appealed to me pathetically for glasses, so that she could see the blackboard, and the teacher would not think her stupid and make fun of her. I have noticed that eye patients often suffer from extreme nervousness; but this poor child had the worst case of nerves I ever saw, and the slightest agitation made her sight worse. If, in asking her to read a line on the test card, I raised my voice and spoke a little peremptorily, her face would flush, and she would say, "I cannot see anything now." But just as soon as I lowered my voice and took pains to speak gently, her sight cleared up.

I began her treatment by telling her to cover her eyes with the palms of her hands and remember the letters she had seen on the card. This improved her sight so much that before she left she was able to see all the fifty line at five feet, and—what thrilled me most of all—the dreadful movement of her eyes had stopped. She came quite steadily to the clinic, and every time she came I was able to improve her sight, so that at last she became able to read the writing on the blackboard at school.

Then I did not see her again for six months. When she came back she told me that she had been working in a laundry during the summer because she hated school. She had also been ill during the summer, and her mother had taken her to a hospital for treatment. While she was there an eye specialist had looked at her eyes, and this made her so nervous that they had started to vibrate from side to side. He said to her:

"You ought to have your eyes treated; they are very bad."

"I am having them treated at the Harlem. Hospital' Clinic," she answered. "I know how to stop that vibration."

Then she palmed for a while. and when she uncovered and opened her eyes the doctor looked at them again. "Why they seem all right now," he said. "You had better go to that doctor until you are cured. He can do more for you than I can."

'I was very much pleased to find that in spite of having stayed away so long, she had not forgotten what I had told her, and was able to stop her nystagmus. I tested her sight, and found that it was no worse than when I had last seen her. In fact, in some ways, it was better. She was not so nervous, and she said that her family and friends noticed that her eyes looked better. She herself was now very enthusiastic and anxious to have me help her. I told her to palm as usual, and left her to treat other patients. Five minutes later she read the thirty line at thirteen feet. I now told her to look first to the eight of the card and then to the left, and to note that it appeared to move in a direction opposite to the movement of her eyes; then to close her eyes and remember this movement. She did this, and when she opened her eyes she read two letters on the twenty line. At a later visit she read the whole of the . twenty line at thirteen feet.

The last patient I treated for this dreadful disease was an old man of seventy. He came to the clinic on January 14, 1920, and when I first saw him was standing with many others, waiting patiently for Dr. Bates to speak to him. Our work' him to be done very rapidly, because of the very short time we have to treat so many patients, and I very seldom have time to observe individuals as I would like' to do. But because of his unusual appearance, I at once singled this dear old man out from the crowd. Most men of his age who come to our clinic are unkempt, dirty and ragged—pitiable objects generally. But this man was well groomed. His clothes, though worn and old, were well brushed; his shoes were polished, his collar clean, his tie neatly adjusted. He had a great abundance of snow-white hair. neatly parted and brushed, and his skin ,was like a baby's, "pink and white."

Dr. Bates asked me to treat him with the usual remark, "See what you can do for this man," and I placed him four feet from the card, asking him to read what he could.

"I'm afraid I can't see so well, ma'am," he said; "my eyes bother me a good deal."

"I'm going to show you how to rest your eyes so that they won't bother you," I answered.

The best he could do at this distance was to read the fifty line. I told him to palm, and in less than five minutes he saw a number of letters on the forty line. The next time he came I put him nine feet from the card. and at this distance he read all the letters on the thirty line. He was so happy and excited over this that I became.excited too. I Forgot that I had other patients waiting for me and encouraged him to talk, a thing which I am seldom able to do with the patients. I was glad afterward that I did.so, for he had a wonderful story to tell.

"Do you know, ma'am," he said, "for two nights I palmed and rested my eyes for a long time before I went to bed—and what do you think?—I slept all the night through without waking up once. Now I think that's great, ma'am, because for years I have had insomnia. I would sleep only a little while; then I would get up and smoke my pipe to pass the time."

At a later visit I put him twelve feet from the card, and at this distance also he was able to read the thirty line. When I told him what he had done he was again greatly pleased and excited.

"You know I'm so much better," he said, "that I didn't even notice that I was further away than usual. Thank you, ma'am. God bless you, ma'am."

During the practice, when he failed to see a letter I was pointing to, I said:

"Close your eyes and tell me the color of your grandchild's eyes."

"Blue. ma'am." he said.

"Keep your eyes covered, keep remembering the color of baby's eyes."

He did this, and after a few minutes his sight cleared up and he saw the letter. After we had finished the practice I again encouraged him to talk, and he told me more about his insomnia.

"Do you know, ma'am," he said, "after I had had two night's sleep without waking up I didn't dare tell any of my family about it, for fear that it wouldn't last and I would only disappoint them. So I waited. Now, do you know, ma'am, it is just two weeks that I have slept the night through without waking up once,, and so I told my wife about it. She is so happy, ma'am, I just can't tell you, for it has been many years since I was able to do that."

I wish I could have a picture of his face when he is telling of the improvement in his eyesight and general health. It would be a picture of gentleness, love, kindness and gratitude.

Recently he looked up into my face and said: "I am seeing you better now, ma'am. You look younger."

In two months his vision improved from 10/200 to 10/30. As he made but eight visits in this time, I feel that this record is remarkable. I also feel that the statements in the books about the impossibility of doing anything for patients with retinitis pigmentosa are in need of modification.

PERFECT SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES

By Evelyn Cushing Campbell

Editor's Note.—The author of the following article is engaged in literary work which compels her to use her eyes constantly for reading and writing. When first seen she was wearing the following glasses: right eyes, convex 1.50 D.S.; left eye, convex 1.25 D.C.

One of several problems which long disturbed my mind, both consciously and subconsciously, was whether the distressing condition of my eyes was caused by bodily ailments, or my general state of ever-present weariness was due to trouble with the eyes. Without glasses, my eyes felt blurred and strained; after wearing them for a time, the immediate relief was succeeded by increased weariness and a desire to throw them far away. Often I thought, "How happy would I be if I never again had to put on my glasses!"

My problem has now been solved. The haunting specter of anxiety which stalked ever at my side has vanished, and I have entered upon a state of beatific bliss and satisfaction with life in general. I have acquired perfect vision without glasses, and at the same time a relaxed state of once over-strained nerves which gives me a glimpse of what heaven may hold in store for world-weary mortals.

A visit to Dr. Bates wrought this seeming miracle, so far beyond any hope or expectations in which I had ever dared to indulge that I now confess, as an article of faith, that hereafter I shall always believe that everything is possible.

The first treatment occupied not more than half an hour, but in that brief time I passed from inability to read type of medium size, except at arm's length, to reading type less than half the size and at a proximity to the eye which formerly had made the letters absolutely, illegible.

My recollections of the entire. treatment are by no mean consecutive nor complete, but the results were more than conclusive that the basic principle must be sound.

After some preliminary tests with charts, Dr. Bates informed me that there was nothing wrong with my eyes. This in itself was a tremendous relief, as it immediately suggested the possibility of benefit by means other than the wearing of nerve-racking eyeglasses.

"Close your eyes and rest them," I was told.

The closing was at once accomplished, but the resting process proved to be more elusive. Almost at once the eyelids began to twitch so constantly that only with great difficulty was I able to keep the eyes closed at all. Upon opening them, the letters on the test card were very much blurred, and suggestive of little dancing figures.

Instructions followed to close the eyes again and, first, to remember the white of exactly then the black of coal. When the eyes were reopened from the blackness, they felt distinctly rested and it was possible to read lines upon the card which previously had been very unclear.

"Now close your eyes and remember an agreeable color—the green of trees, of grass, the color of flowers."

This I did, seeing the green leaves of oak trees with sunlight upon them, the blue of a river glimmering beyond; brighter green of grass on a hillside; yellow flowers with fine-fringed petals upon which had alighted a butterfly of deeper yellow; reddish-yellow tiger-lilies; pink roses, red roses, yellow roses; blue sky with cumulus cloud masses.

Upon opening my eyes, the first line of printing on a card which had been much blurred at a distance of, say nine inches,, could now be read with ease. The card was then brought three inches nearer, with the result that the printing once more became indistinct.

Directions now followed to close the eyes and again remember a color. After some hesitation, I brought to my mind yellow, but the eyes did not feel rested, as on the former occasion. This I thought might be due to the effort to concentrate upon an object of that.color -a curtain of yellow hanging in my apartment. My comment to this effect met the response that I must not make any effort, that all effort was bad for the eyes.

Another instruction was to close the eyes, covering them with the cupped palms, fingers crossed lightly upon the brow, with no pressure upon the eye itself, and to remember black. This is called "palming." The blackness at first was filled with swirling, grayish, elongated globules, and the eyelids twitched. No other color was visible, and these swirling particles gradually became less apparent.

"Now remember a black point, or period, and imagine it swinging like a pendulum."

My first attempt was a failure, but I finally succeeded and, to my amazement, found upon opening the eyes that I was able to read diamond type on a small card held at a distance of six inches from the eyes. This really surpassed everything else, for formerly the person who held anything before my eyes at this close range had inflicted positive suffering upon me, and was usually greeted with an expression of ill-suppressed irritation, for the attempt to focus the eyes at this point produced at once a feeling of nausea.

A peep into the mirror showed my eyes much clearer and less filled with weariness than I had been accustomed to see them after hours of sleep. Completely convinced of the uselessness of wearing aids to eyes that did not aid but only irritated, I went home to consign the hated glasses to the darkest and deepest corner of my "Rotary Bay" trunk. They have lain there undisturbed for over a year. I have never since that day felt the need of them, and my eyes have performed without fatigue tasks which would have been quite beyond them in the days when I depended on eye-crutches. One day recently, when I had to finish a piece of work in a limited time, I worked at my typewriter from nine in the morning until four the following morning, only stopping for meals, and my eyes were just as fresh when I finished as when I began.

"BETTER EVESIGHT" APPRECIATED

The testimony of the following letter to the value of the experiences of patients recently published in this magazine is very interesting. The statements about the effect of central fixation upon the desire for sleep.are also significant, and the facts have been duplicated in many other cases.

I am keenly interested in this medium through which .your discoveries and the experiences of your patients are made known to the public. My eyesight is improving steadily, and I find that I am grasping and applying the principles set forth in your magazine more intelligently every day.

I have improved physically and mentally since I started the exercises. Ever since I can remember, I have had the greatest difficulty in coaxing myself from a very heavy sleep in the morning into which I seem to fall after a night of constant dreaming. As a result, I feel heavy with fatigue and positively stupid mentally. One doctor whom I consulted said that these nocturnal disturbances were due to indigestion, or a bad conscience! I told him I guessed it was both!

As soon as I awaken in the morning now, I start my exercises and after palming, flashing and swinging, I feel as if a fog had lifted and as if I were suddenly released from a weight that had held me down. I start the day with a clear mind and a buoyant energy that enables me to accomplish twice as much as I used to. This has been a very interesting experience to me, and a very curious one. I suppose some mental scientists would say that I Forget my fatigue because I focus my attention and interest on something ehe, which may be true to a certain extent, but not wholly, because it does not explain the sudden clear vision and physical freedom of which I immediately become conscious.

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