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Better Eyesight

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

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THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF PAIN BY THE MIND

Anyone who has normal vision can demonstrate in a few moments that when the memory is perfect no pain is felt, and can produce pain by an attempt to keep the attention fixed on a point. To do this proceed as follows:

Look at a black letter, close the eyes and remember it. Look at the letter again and again close the eyes and remember it. Repeat until the memory is equal to the sight. Now press the nail of one finger against the tip of another. If the letter is remembered perfectly, no pain will be felt. With practice it may become possible to remember the letter with the eyes open.

Remember the letter imperfectly, with blurred edges and clouded openings, and again press the nail of one finger against the tip of another. In this case it will be found impossible to continue the pressure for more than a moment on account of the pain.

Try to remember one point of a letter continuously. It will be found impossible to do so, and if the effort is continued long enough pain will be produced.

Try to look continuously at one point of a letter or other object. If the effort is continued long enough, pain will be produced.

PAIN: ITS CAUSE AND CURE

By W. H. Bates, M. D.

Pain is supposed to be a beneficent provision on the part of Nature for advising us of injurious processes going on in the body, but, like many of Nature's arrangements, it is a very clumsy one. Many of our most serious diseases are quite painless in their early stage (the only time when the warning of pain would be of any use), while a physiological process like childbirth is accompanied by such severe pain that the pange of the woman in travail have become proverbial. Pain also occurs with no local cause whatever, being purely a creation of the mind, and it has, besides a very destructive effect upon the body, not infrequently causing death and more often handicapping the organism in its attempts to recover from the condition that caused it. Nature(s)s protective mechanism is, in fact, a two-edged sword striking both ways, and its control is one of the most serious problems that the medical profession has to deal with.

There has been much discussion as to the nature of pain, and the mode by which it is produced, one school holding that there are special nerves for its transmission and another that it is merely the expression of a certain grade of irritation. Whatever may be said in favor of either of these points of view, it can be demonstrated that pain occurs only when the mind is under a strain and is immediately relieved when the strain is relieved. This strain may be due to a local cause, or it may occur without any local cause whatever.

That pain can be produced voluntarily by the mind has long been known. When I was a student at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Dr. T. Gaillard Thomas used to tell us that pain could be produced in the little finger, or any other part of the body, simply by concentrating the mind upon it. Since then I have repeatedly demonstrated that pain can be produced by such a simple thing as imagining a letter or object imperfectly, or trying to look at a point for an appreciable length of time. I never knew these experiments to fail when patients could be induced to make them; but they are so uncomfortable that few are willing to do so. A physician under treatment for imperfect sight boasted that he had never had a headache or pain in his eyes in his life. I told him that I could easily show him how to produce such a pain, and that it would do him good to have one. After a week of talk he consented to make the experiment, and in a few minutes he had acquired a headache that was more interesting than pleasant. He did it by trying to look fixedly at a point. This effect was purely mental. It was not the physical strain of looking at a point that produced the pain, because there was no physical strain, the eye being incapable of looking at a point. It was the mental effort of trying to do what was impossible.

As pain can be produced by the mind without any local cause, so it can be prevented or relieved by the mind, no matter how great the local irritation may be. In other words pain is a mental interpretation of certain stimuli, and under certain circumstances such stimuli are not interpreted as pain. This, too, has long been known, there being cases on record in which individuals have possessed the power of preventing pain to an extraordinary extent. I may claim to have discovered, however, that everyone may become the possessor of this power.

It is only when the mind is in an abnormal condition that pain can be felt, or even imagined, and irritations of the nerves are followed by pain only when such irritations produce mental strain. If the mind is not disturbed by them, there is no pain, and therefore, by learning to avoid this disturbance pain can be prevented, or relieved.

As the mind is always at rest when the memory is perfect, the mental condition necessary for the prevention and relief of pain can be obtained by the use of the memory. One of the simplest things to remember is a small black spot or period, and under certain circumstances anyone may become able to remember such an object. This cannot be done, it is true, at the actual moment of suffering, but, fortunately, pain is never continuous. One can see, or hear, or smell, continuously; but one cannot feel pain continuously. There are always moments of freedom, and during these intermissions one can get control of the memory. In this way the pain of glaucoma, one of the most terrible conditions known to medical science, has been repeatedly relieved (see Better Eyesight, December 1920 [link]). Many cases of trigeminal neuralgia have been cured after various operations commonly resorted to for the relief of this condition had failed, and the pain of childbirth and of operations has been prevented.

Persons with perfect sight never have any difficulty in preventing pain by the aid of the memory. Persons whose sight is not normal have more difficulty, because imperfect sight is the result of mental strain, and it is sometimes very difficult to relieve this strain. With the help of a person who has normal sight and understands the use of the memory for this purpose, however, it can always be done.

RELIEF OF TIC DOULOUREUX

By Evelyn M. Thomson

I do not remember a time when I was able to see comfortably. At fifteen, following an attack of grippe, I began to have so much trouble with my eyes that I was taken out of school, and the late Dr. H. D. Noyes gave me my first glasses. From that time on I wore glasses constantly, with many changes ordered by many different specialists, until I came to Dr. Bates. Sometimes they helped me; but I never was able to do any near work without discomfort, and I could not play tennis because it hurt my eyes to follow the ball.

When I was eighteen a polyp in the right middle ear broke through the drum, and a great quantity of pus poured out. This was the beginning of a long series of treatment and operations, during which I suffered increasing pain on the right side of my head, and which left me with no bones in the middle ear and an opening in the drum. After the last operation I was ill for nine months, and for a much longer time there was weakness and loss of sensibility on the left side of the body.

In 1905 I had trouble with the antrum on the left side of the face, and in order to release the pus which had collected here, a wisdom tooth was extracted, the wound being kept open for three months. A second tooth was then extracted, and one by one all the teeth on the left side of the upper jaw were taken out. Then the dentist declined to extract any more, saying that it was only increasing the trouble, instead of relieving it.

From the beginning of this condition I had a continual pain in the left side of the face, and this developed into what is known as tic douloureux, a painful contraction of the facial muscles, which continued for fifteen years. Everything possible was resorted to for the relief of this trouble except drugs, which I refused to take, and nerve-cutting which I refused to submit to. Spinal treatment gave me more help than anything else.

From 1914 to 1918, in spite of the discomfort resulting from the use of my eyes at the near-point, I read aloud for many hours every day. At the end of this time my eyes seem to pieces completely. All winter I went every week to a specialist for treatment, but received no benefit. Then I went to another specialist. He gave me new glasses, but these seemed only to make the condition worse. I could not read without pain in my eyes and a contraction of the nerves and muscles on the left side of my face. At night the lid of the left eye became partially paralyzed, so that I had to force the eye open when I wakened and was afraid the time might come when I would not be able to keep it open. On the street the muscles on the left side of the face contracted all around the eye, across the bridge of the nose, and toward the temple. This I attributed to the increase of eyestrain by the wind and light.

On April 22 of last year I went to Dr. Bates in despair. My eyesight was getting worse from month to month, and the facial condition seemed also to be getting worse. In addition I suffered from noises in my left ear so loud and continuous that it seemed at times as if the top of my head would blow off.

Palming was the first thing Dr. Bates told me to do. At first I saw all sorts of lights. Then I saw grey, and at last I became sufficiently relaxed to see black. I found the use of the imagination and memory a great aid in palming. I visualized the out-of-doors and the things I had seen in my travels. This produced relaxation, and I forgot the pain and the noise in my ear. I also found it a help to be read to while palming. The universal swing relieved the tension which I had always experienced on the street.

For some months my eyes did not seem to respond to the treatment. The first intimation of gain was the natural opening of my left eye at night. Next my right eye, which had been very numb and blurred, began to have a feeling of life. Later I experienced an increase of pain in the center of both eyes. Strange to say this encouraged me; for the new pain was quite different from the dull ache I had had before, and made me feel that life was returning to my eyes.

One day, when the pulling of the facial muscles was very severe, Dr. Bates asked me to flash a little card which he held close to my nose. This was very unpleasant at first; but suddenly the muscles relaxed, the pain in my face and eyes ceased, and I saw things at the distance clearly. It was only a flash; but after that I seemed to understand better the goal toward which I was working. Since then I have often obtained relief in this way. These glimpses of paradise are what has sustained me through months of treatment which would otherwise have been unbearably monotonous.

My vision has improved slowly, but the progress has been a constant source of excitement to me. When I first saw the faces of my friends clearly I rejoiced, and I cannot describe the feeling of relief that came to me when the dishes on the table ceased to hurt me, as all near objects had previously done. The light and the color I now see are a revelation to me. I had been told that printer's ink was black, but until I went to Dr. Bates I never saw it so. Neither did I ever see anything like the white I see now. I have a delightful time reading the signs in the subway and enjoying their colors. Not only in color, but in form, things look different to me. Instead of being flat, as they once were, they seem to have a fourth dimension. Distant objects appear surprisingly near. Sitting in the balcony at a concert one afternoon, the orchestra seemed to be almost in my lap. In the dress circle at the opera I seemed to be almost on the stage. When I wore glasses the stage was always miles away. My vision is not normal yet; I cannot read print with comfort. But after such marvelous improvement I feel sure that this will soon come. As for the facial pain and contraction, they are practically cured. When the trouble returns, as it sometime does, I know how to relieve it.

I am very glad to have an opportunity to tell this story, and I wish I knew how to make it known to all who are suffering from the pain of defective eyesight, or of facial neuralgia, that these conditions can be cured by relaxation, and that the dreadful operations which are resorted to in the case of the neuralgia are unnecessary.

STORIES FROM THE CLINIC

12- The Relief of Pain

By Bessie T. Brown

In March, 1919, an Austrian woman, thirty-seven years of age, came to the clinic. She was suffering from myopia, with great pain in her eyes and head, and looked so sad that one could not imagine her smiling. At the age of two years she had become totally blind after a fever, and had remained so for a year and a half, during all of which time she suffered continual pain in her eyes. When her sight returned strong glasses were given to her, but they did not relieve her pain. Neither did the glasses given to her later by various physicians. Finally an optician, finding that the glasses he had given her did not help her, suggested that she should try Dr. Bates and our clinic.

At her first visit her pain was relieved by palming, and her vision improved from 5/70 to 5/40. She was so pleased that she smiled and kissed my hands. The pain had made her sick at her stomach most of the time, she said, so that she was often unable to retain her food, and on day was she ever free from it.

I told her to continue the palming at home, and to keep it up for an hour at a time whenever possible. For a while she got on very nicely. Her vision improved to 10/40, and whenever she felt the pain coming on she palmed, invariably obtaining relief.

Then came a day when I found her with tears in her eyes. She had had a sleepless night, she explained, and had suffered so intensely that her family were frightened. Her eyes felt as though sand was pouring out of them onto the pillow. I asked her if her eyes were still paining her, and she answered tearfully, "Yes".

I placed her comfortably on a stool, and while her eyes were covered I began to talk to her about her children. She soon forgot her pain in telling me what beautiful eyes her baby had, how thrilled the family had been when the first tooth appeared, and so on. When she uncovered her eyes the most remarkable change had come over her face. All traces of pain had disappeared, and she smiled.

One day after she had been coming to the clinic for a year or more she was arranging to send some money to Austria and trying to fill out the necessary papers. As she was about to write her mother's name everything before her became a blank, and she experienced an intense pain accompanied by a burning sensation in her eyes. She was so frightened that she wanted to cry, but suddenly she thought about the clinic and how her pain had been relieved by the palming. She covered her eyes with the palms of her hands for a little while, and then the pain became less and the questions on the blank began to clear up. When she tried to write, however, everything became a blank once more. Again she palmed, and this time her sister, who was with her, reminded her that she must pains for a longer time if she wanted to get results. She then palmed for fifteen minutes, her sister encouraging her as she did so. When she removed her hands from her eyes the print before her appeared perfectly distinct, she wrote the necessary answers without any difficulty, and had no more trouble with her eyes that day. She was extremely happy when she told me this. To think that she had been able to improve her sight and relieve her pain without assistance thrilled her.

When I last saw her, six months ago, her vision was 10/10 without glasses, and she had no pain.

BACKACHE CURED BY CENTRAL FIXATION

By Bessie T. Brown

The editor is much pleased to be able to publish Mrs. Brown's report of the simultaneous relief of her astigmatism and the backache from which she had suffered so long. It was from her he learned the value of central fixation in relieving pain in parts of the body other than the head and eyes, and he takes great pleasure in giving her credit for the discovery.

It is about six, or perhaps seven, years ago that I first consulted Dr. Bates concerning my eyes. I had been wearing glasses to correct astigmatism for five years. During those years of "correction" my eyes seldom gave me a comfortable day. I spared them in every way, using them as little as possible. My sight was not noticeably impaired, but I will cite a few of the many discomforts from which I suffered.

A smarting sensation in the eyes was nearly always present; also a general lassitude and a dull ache in the back. The last mentioned was never attributed to eyestrain, but to many other causes, and was treated accordingly by a physician; but without results. I was obliged to retire early every night in order to forget my pains in sleep, only to wake in the morning with eyes which felt as though a cinder from every chimney in New York City had dropped into them. This was because ser strain our eyes during our sleep as well as during waking hours. To watch a stage or moving picture performance was torture; and when driving, or riding on railroad trains, I would keep my eyes closed, only taking occasional peeps at the passing landscape. I could not endure the glare of the sunlight on the beach or pavements, and artificial lights on the streets, in the shops or theatres, were an abomination.

My first glasses were prescribed by an optometrist, and I received no relief while wearing them. Friends advised me to consult an eye specialist of high standing in New York. I did so. He said after examination that he was not surprised that I had received no benefit from the glasses which I was wearing, and proceeded to fit me with what he considered to be the correct lenses. I was supremely happy for a few days, in the anticipation of enjoying perfect comfort as soon as I should become accustomed to the new lenses.

But alas! my happiness was short-lived. The glasses prescribed by the eminent physician gave no more satisfaction than those from the optometrist.

I returned to see the doctor after a few weeks, and complained that his glasses had not helped me. He made another examination and said that he could make a slight change in the lenses, but it would not be worthwhile to do so. He also said that my eyes were not working together properly, but this condition would improve with my general health. However my health did not improve under his treatment; I felt that I was doomed to a life of suffering, and tried to become reconciled to my fate.

Hope was revived a few months later when I heard of Dr. Bates and his cure of eyestrain without glasses. Dr. Bates took possession of my glasses upon my first visit to him, and I have not worn them since.

He told me to do, or attempt to do, the most amazing things. Looking at the sun was one treatment. I protested, saying that even the reflected sunlight was intolerable; but Dr. Bates insisted, and I found that I could look at a point near the sun with one eye, covering the other with my hand, then alternating. After practicing this for several days, I was able to look directly at the sun with both eyes wide open. The glare of sunlight on the ground ceased to worry me and became as delightful as the pale moonlight. When the sun failed to shine, or was not convenient, I practiced looking at a large incandescent electric light, and very soon the artificial lights troubled me no more than the stars which twinkle in the heavens at night; and this reminds me that Dr. Bates told me that the apparent twinkle of the stars is only in the eye of the beholder.

After a few weeks of treatment I forgot to spare my eyes, as had been my habit for years. I could read or sew until midnight if I wished, and began to go out evenings and enjoy life like a normal human being. As I write tonight, the clock is striking eleven; and my eyes are feeling fine and dandy, although I have been using them constantly all day sewing and embroidering.

My animation and efficiency have greatly increased. Friends have remarked that I am a new woman, and continue to congratulate me upon my youthful appearance. An acquaintance of mine whom I had not met since I stopped wearing glasses failed to recognize me a few days ago at the house of a mutual friend. "Why," she exclaimed, "the Mrs. Brown whom I used to know was an extremely pale and worn-looking creature." Through relaxation the expression of eyes and face have become greatly changed.

I had been under treatment with Dr. Bates about three months when suddenly one day I noticed that my old and constant companion the backache was no longer with me, and it has never returned.

At the present time when I feel the strain coming into my eyes I rest them by palming and remembering or recalling different familiar objects—the colors of my frocks, recalled one at a time, or the forms and shapes of pieces of china which are in constant use in my home, or the color of the eyes of members of the family. It seems marvelous to be able to go about in the shops for a good part of the day and then keep my eyes open and enjoy to the fullest extent a performance or social affair in the evening. Also what a delight to ride through the country and feast my eyes with comfort upon the beauty of the passing landscape!

Previous Issue
THEWTHEWTHEPdFist Issue
THEWTHEWTHEWd To Cameron Page