

GOULD (G.M.)



THE ESTHETIC RELATIONS OF MEDICINE AND LIFE.¹

BY GEORGE M. GOULD, A.M., M.D., Philadelphia.

Every physician has doubtless often stumbled upon some surprising and interesting facts in reference to his patients in which the question of disease viewed simply cosmetically, or esthetically, had most serious and even tragical effects? The most astonishing instance that has come to my personal knowledge is that a certain large railroad will not allow its employees to wear spectacles. There is of course nothing in the printed or enacted rules of the company to this effect, and whether it is an unwritten law of which the chief officers are conscious, or whether it is the result of the superintendent's special prejudice, I am unable to say. The fact, however, is one that might be well-made the subject of official inquiry and legal enactment. In the case of the Army and Navy regulations the matter is somewhat different, because here the frequent impossibility of replacing the easily-broken lenses, their positive disadvantage in storm, wind, etc., makes the rule at least somewhat more sensible and justifiable. Probably, however, few know to what an extent the single item of errors of refraction is the sole reason for excluding otherwise sound men from the Army and Navy services. A careful examining surgeon assures me that perhaps

¹ Read before the American Academy of Medicine, at Denver, June 4, 1898.

one-half are refused on this ground alone. With proper spectacles probably 90 per cent. of these could be given perfect vision. But in the cases of the railway brakemen, engineers, firemen, signalmen, etc., the refusal to let them wear spectacles is not only diametrically against the company's interests but it is against the safety of the traveling public. It is impossible to say how many accidents chargeable to so-called color-blindness, and to many other causes, have been due to the much more dangerous failure to see clearly because of errors of refraction. On this railroad the myopes, astigmatics, and presbyopes know their positions are in danger if they put on glasses, and so they continue to forego their use; the foolish superintendent who knows nothing of glasses and of presbyopia except his silly belief that spectacles are a sign of old age leading to discharge of the servants, permits their vision (upon which the safety of his property and the lives of his travelers depends), to deteriorate until signals cannot be seen by them.

Another instance that has come to me is the pathetic struggle of a poor girl to hold her position as a waitress in a large restaurant. "If the boss sees me with spectacles on, he will at once lay me off," she said, and the non-wearing, as she has a hundred times proved, means an attack of violent sick-headache. We offered to call upon the "boss," and convince him of his error, but the attempt, she was sure, would result in her discharge,—as it had in many cases of which she knew.

Many mistresses of "christian" households will not permit their servants to wear glasses, however much they may be needed, and bespectacled nurses have found the prejudice active. Neither is it the man of the family who is the most opposed to bespectacled servants and nurses. Indeed I have usually found that it is the women themselves, who in this, as in some other matters, make the hardships and injustices against their own sex all the more poignant. In one similar case however, the male must bear the blame alone. Instead of preferring to be shaved by a man who can see accurately by the aid of glasses there are many long-eared fellows who increase the danger they run of being cut, by refusing to allow their barbers to wear spectacles. Their stupidity is of the same kind as that of the railway superintendents.

A little glimpse into an amusing condition of the public mind as to facts and appearances was given me by the confession of an artist, an excellent painter, who derived a not inconsiderable annual income by painting "black-and-blue" eyes so that the ecchymoses were entirely concealed,—the patients (clerks, etc.) thus avoiding loss of position or time, or at least escaping irritating guying by friends.

The presence of skin-diseases is one of the most frequent causes of much concealed trouble and loss of employment. Skill and character cannot compensate for disfiguring dermal evidences of disease in the face. The public will not consider that the patient is probably the double victim of parental sin and of popular prejudice. Whether the doctor calls it eczema, or by a much worse name, is all one. The employer may give the poor sufferer two weeks to get rid of it, but after that—! One of the most pathetic and tragic instances of suffering, and worse than mere suffering I have ever known was caused by an unconquerable affection of the skin of a part of the face of an otherwise lovely woman. It finally actually wrecked her life and happiness. If one great college-president does not succumb to a huge *naevus maternus*, a hundred less sturdy persons will be conquered by a mother's mark, bottle-nose, or pigmentary mole. Happily our art is progressively giving relief to many afflicted with such diseases. If it could discover some easier method of eradicating misplaced hair than by the slow electric method, thousands would be relieved of an annoyance that makes their lives full of chagrin.

Surgery is now able to transform much downright tragedy into happiness. A snip of a pair of scissors, or a bit of helpful advice as to muscular habits, etc., have made many miserable stutterers free-speakers. One of the most brilliant examples I have seen was that whereby a harelip patient was transformed from a melancholic, dirty, doless wretch, into an active, bright, and useful man. An artistic surgeon is able by plastic operations to do away with the deformities of faces that make tragedies of the lives of their owners. There are thousands of such sufferers to-day whose lives might be brightened and elevated. The surgeon has of course in nearly every operation to consider

the results of his work as regards the subsequent sightliness. Volumes might be written on the subject, and yet others on the beneficence of orthopedic surgery in restoring to normal looks as well as to useful work, the deformed, the ungainly, and the repulsive products of disease. Surely also prosthetic dentistry and surgery, have not been inspired solely or even chiefly by motives of utility. The ingenuity and money expended in these things is beyond calculation.

An artificial eye has been described as a thing everybody else can see through except the patient. And yet one who has not investigated the subject has no adequate conception of the capital and skill required in this great industry.

You all know Pascal's famous remark about Cleopatra's nose, and the history of the world. Many people's noses have been so short that they had none at all, two zeros representing the condition. I have known but one instance in which the loss of the nose did not result in isolating and bestializing the unfortunate being. In one of the suburbs of Philadelphia, there is a woman, wholly hairless and noseless, and yet this hideous creature—believe it who can,—has been thrice married. I am told that, quite naturally enough, she is at present a widow. Whether "grass," or "sod," my informant did not say. The Italians have competitive contests in nasal beauty, and a dozen or two types of admired noses are distinctly classified, and prizes given accordingly to the proud owners. But the noseless man is worthy of profound pity in any land. My friend the late Dr. Parker, of St. Louis, once rescued one such from living death by dissecting away the nail and fleshy parts of two distal phalanges of the man's little finger, and binding it fast in the opened flaps of the skin of the boneless nose until it had united; he then completed the rhinoplasty by amputating the finger and drawing the skin over this natural-artificial "ridge-pole," giving the face a normal appearance. A patient of mine was changed from despair and ruin by an artificial nose, constructed by my friend Dr. Gaskill. We are gathering the literature of the subject for future publication. There have been quite a number of cases. The chief difficulty is to fasten the nose without irritating the nasal passages or the skin. In our case we had the bridge of

heavy spectacle frames riveted through the artificial nose, and thus secured the gutta-percha substitute by the "hold" of the temple-pieces behind the ears. It was prevented from slipping downward toward the mouth by two bent prongs extending into the post-nasal cavities. I shall never forget the man's gratitude, and his transformation from abject hopelessness to that of a bright and useful worker. Before this he could not get employment and was an object of charity.

Even artificial ears have been devised that remedied a disfigurement which the growing and combing of hair hardly helped. Very few persons are conscious or ashamed of over-long ears, especially if they are well-furred, but no ear at all is a calamity.

I hear of semiprofessional people whose specialty is massaging the wrinkles from the faces of those whose years are passing too swiftly.

Did you know that the word *wig*, through several transformations, comes from the Latin *pilus*? A book might be written (perhaps has been written) concerning the influence of the wig, and of baldness, in the world's history. I am reminded of the long-past efforts of us schoolboys to develop a moustache by means of applications of grape-vine juice when I find how valuable is hair to the seven Sutherland sisters synchronously exhibiting their wealth of woman's strength in half-a-dozen cities. Doubtless their reward, *i. e.*, their *pile*, is far greater than that of the schoolboy! The nostrum-lists of infallible hair-restorers attests the popular belief that atrophied hair-bulbs may be again stimulated to functional activity. The myth of the search for the golden fleece is eternally young, and its priests are ever at hand,—likewise the fleeced!

In no part or specialty of the physician's work does he come into so direct and constant contact with esthetic and unesthetic prejudice as in ophthalmology. The conscientious oculist is tormented by it every hour of his life. It becomes at times positively disgusting and maddening. His work is to stop neurones, headache, anemia, and reflexes of a hundred kinds, all of which are the great destroyers of health and of beauty. Eye-strain is the most potent of all causes of "crowsfeet," and of

pinched and suffering faces, and yet every second woman prefers the homeliness and the evidences of years not yet arrived, to what she considers the hideousness of glasses,—at least of spectacles,—and eye-glasses are often as helpless and as harmful as no lenses at all. I know one woman whose little remnant of mind is discarded because of her silly pride. Rather than wear glasses, she has given up all reading, writing, sewing, music, all occupation whatever, except calling, and gossiping, and theater-going. I know another who has turned her home into a hysteric's hospital for part of the year, and for the rest of it she trundles her poor husband to watering places, and impoverishes him in paying doctor-bills. I have known women to hide from consciousness the fact that the cause of their relapses of "nervous prostration" was the eye-strain they would not allow to be cured. Periodically they take the "rest-cure," get a little relief until they return to the bedevilment of their husbands and to preparing a new breakdown by laziness, by bad "bossing" of servants thereby made worse, by reading trash, etc.

In these and a hundred other ways the physician is the accomplice or the enemy of what is a false or a true estheticism. If he is true to his calling he is at the same time true to the spirit of the esthetic ideal. The oculist has a sad fight against vanity and fashion,—the hypocritic travesties of the genuinely beautiful.

Back to the building of the most primitive organisms out of the inorganic we may trace the Divine Artist, never forgetful of His art however hard-pressed by the exigencies of utility and necessity. Whatever lives betrays the trace of lost beauty or the promise of its coming glory. Every once-living relic of the dust-bin shows traces and memories of the Artist-Creator. As physicians and surgeons we are coworkers with the great Artist, ever seeking to fuse into identity the converging ideals of health and loveliness. Disease is the death of beauty; without health the esthetic ideal cannot be realized, and as teachers of hygiene and health, we are never to forget that fashion and vanity must not turn us from the sterner ideal. If these false ideals are powerless we shall at last find that over the face of health will break that grateful smile of divine symbolism men call the Beautiful.