

Hearing with Eyes

by RUSSELL OWEN

THE DEAF and the deafened are confused in the public mind, yet the whole world lies between them psychologically. A child born deaf has no realization of his deficiency. Impaired hearing dooms a person to slow retrogression into an unfamiliar world haunted by ashen memories of his favorite music, the voices of friends, and other sounds he once took for granted. Loss of hearing makes the sufferer appear stupid.

Small wonder that Edward B. Nitchie contemplated suicide in 1891 when he developed an irremediable impairment of hearing at fifteen. But he decided to live, and in the end his work opened the door of hope and opportunity for every person who suffers a loss of hearing.

After graduating from Amherst with highest honors — and an ear trumpet — he studied lip reading, a method which dates back to the seventh century and which was taught in this country as far back as the Civil War. Then he started his own lip-reading school, developing new methods of training teachers. Using the story approach and demonstrating with his face instead of complicated charts, Nitchie made the study so simple and interesting that it was within the grasp of the youngest child. He gave as much free instruction as he could, asking his wealthy pupils to contribute scholarships, and conceived an alumni association to endow more scholarships. In a year, this association had become a center of service to aid hard-of-hearing people in every way, without distinction of social levels, race, or religion.

Recently, the New York League for the Hard of Hearing, which evolved from that small beginning, celebrated its 25th year of service. In 1919, the League fathered the American Society for the Hard of Hearing, which now has organizations serving in all parts of this country and Canada and whose spreading influence will soon include South America and perhaps parts of Europe.

Only the two secretaries in the offices of the New York League have normal hearing. Yet you'll find no shouting, no cupped ears — not even a request to repeat something you have said. The women in charge are all proficient lip readers, and each carries her hearing aid, a compact instrument in an attractive case. The word *deaf* (as misapplied to the hard of hearing) is outlawed. "You wouldn't call a man blind because he has to wear glasses, would you?" asks Annetta W. Peck, executive secretary, the League's first president and manager of its destinies for 23 years.

LIP READING IN SCHOOL

THE HARD of hearing come to the League headquarters for advice or to learn lip reading, to select a hearing aid, to choose a vocation or get a job. Here they may find recreation and social life. Sometimes advice isn't needed, but fresh courage is. The ear is such a temperamental organ, being affected by the weather, health conditions, and even mental states, that a word of cheer may actually improve the hearing! Services are free, the League's activities being supported by less than 500 memberships, at \$10 a year, and donations.

More than ten years ago, the League tried to convince the New York Board of Education that there were 3,000,000 school children in this country headed for frustration unless their auditory loss could be minimized by training and the remnant of their hearing saved, when possible, by medical attention.

The Board was skeptical. If the League could prove its assertions. . . . The League set up its own clinics, worked out a national program, and proved so conclusively that hard-of-hearing children can hold their own in school work and social life, when given less than two hours of instruction in lip reading per week, that boards of education in 100 other cities began to offer such instruction.



New York still hesitated. But the League shrewdly pointed to the costs involved in *not* doing something about it. Hard-of-hearing pupils repeat terms two or three times as often as the normal. Each repetition cost the city \$150 on an average, and there were enough to cut a Grand Canyon in the public purse — \$63,215,000 in 1930, for instance. Half this could be saved, it was proved, by the negligible expense of hearing surveys and lip-reading teachers.

At last convinced, New York is now doing more for its hard-of-hearing school children than any other city. Starting in 1934, she has given group hearing tests to over 1,000,000 school children, discovering 80,000 whose hearing is below normal. Of these, 10,000 have been placed under the medical care of their own doctors, and 9,000 receive lip-reading instruction from 350 teachers trained by the League. Bills now before the New York legislature may make these reforms State-wide.

Tests for hearing are given by the audiometer, a device which conveys a voice pronouncing numbers, in gradually decreasing volume, from a phonograph record to a network of single earphones. Forty students at a time can take the tests, given separately for each ear, by writing or repeating orally as many numbers as they can hear. Those showing a loss of more than nine sound units, or decibels, are examined by ear specialists, who may recommend anything from a front-row seat in the classroom to surgical treatment or the study of lip reading. Without these tests, a child may be maladjusted without apparent reason, for he can be totally deaf in one ear without realizing that anything is wrong — while others unjustly think him dreamy or backward.

Teachers in lip-reading classes speak much of the time in an "exhibition" voice, which is no voice at all. They let their lips move naturally, as they would in ordinary speech, but neither exaggerate nor slow down the movements. They begin with simple words and drills, and gradually the ability to lip-read becomes subconscious.

The teacher will write *sing, wing, ring, say, way, ray, seed, weed, reed*, on the blackboard,

then *lip* the words in hodgepodge order, having the class repeat after her aloud. Or she may tell a simple story in lip movements, writing the new or difficult words on the blackboard. Then she silently asks questions about the story. The students always answer aloud.

The prize package is the kindergarten group in lip reading. In lip movements which mean no more to the uninitiated than would the chewing of gum, the teacher tells the babies to "Stand up," "Stretch both hands sideways," etc. They respond instantly. Eyes dart everywhere. The kiddies evidently catch the movement from the corners of their eyes, for, while they miss nothing, they never give the effect of staring.

WATCH YOUR EARS

LIP READING does not enable a hard-of-hearing person to understand every word. Fifty-five per cent of all conversational sounds are invisible, made in the back of the mouth or throat, as *keg*, and hence an element of mind reading is involved. But, when the eye is trained to aid the ear, it is possible to follow the thought. And, when lip reading is supplemented with a hearing aid, the handicapped person is as equipped to lead a normal life as the person with defective vision corrected by glasses.

There are probably 17,000,000 American adults who are deafened to a degree, for hearing loses its keen clarity with age, even when there is no pathological cause. But there are some things which anyone can do to prevent injury to the ear. Children should never be pulled by the ears or slapped on them. If there is hard wax in your ears, it does not pay to poke at them yourself; savage attacks on these delicately adjusted organs with hairpins and paper clips would make any self-respecting physician shudder. When you blow your nose, keep both nostrils open and do not blow violently; you may blow infection into the ear. When swimming, if your ears are sensitive, wear earplugs and a rubber helmet. If you have a cold, watch the effect on your ears. And remember that, the sooner you discover that there is something wrong with your hearing, the greater chance there is that the condition may be overcome.

Many inconspicuous electric aids, each with its special use, have replaced the old-fashioned ear trumpets and tubes. Some of these instru-

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ments work directly on the bone behind the ear — which is one of the most sensitive hearing areas, for hearing is not entirely by means of the ear itself.

Those which stand on desks, and are plugged into the wall like radios may cost from \$250 to \$350. The little electric sets which are carried in the hand or tucked under a suit or dress may cost from \$100 to \$150. The merely vibratory devices, without electric power, useful in some cases, cost only \$7.50. It is important that appliances be bought from companies which service them.

Selecting the best aid would be hopeless were it not for the League's exhibit where one may sample the various devices on the market. This is the only place a person may obtain unbiased help and advice, since the League has all varieties to demonstrate but none to sell.

Hearing aids are often loaned for particular occasions, and the income from a fund donated by the League's president, Leo Stein, is used to distribute eight or ten aids a month, usually where they will effect rehabilitation by enabling a person to get or hold a job.

EMPLOYMENT FOR THE DEAF

CHILDREN come to the League for advice on a vocation, men and women with readjustment problems and seeking work. Edith Katz, in charge of vocational guidance for the League, does not have a list of occupations suitable for the deafened. She only discusses them, insisting that her clients bring suggestions for observation, reading, and study of their own abilities. She has to discourage ambitions which involve contact with the public, also vocations suitable today under a slight handicap but useless tomorrow under an increased hearing loss, since an auditory impairment may get worse. Many girls want to be nurses, teachers, or beauty operators — inadvisable pursuits for those with poor ears. But there are always exceptions, and the employment counselor must be an adept judge of character and ability to recognize them. One young man was encouraged to learn hairdressing, and made good.

There are trades in which the hard-of-hearing worker has an advantage, notably where concentration in the midst of noise is important — proofreading, research, typing, bookkeep-

ing, auditing, tabulating and statistical work, for example. Some of the League's clients are better off vocationally than they would be without their impairment.



Miss Katz sees prospective employers personally, as she has to sell not only services but the conviction that those services are not inferior. Her card sums up the case for the hard-of-hearing employee this way:

He appreciates your efforts in training him, therefore he sticks to the job. He cannot waste time in idle chatter, therefore he accomplishes more. He is accustomed to monotony and isolation, therefore makes an excellent routine worker. He must substitute eyes for ears, therefore he has highly developed powers of observation.

At one company, she was told that it could not use any deaf people. The new employment manager had the surprise of her life when informed that a girl she admitted to be one of her best workers had been placed there by the League. Miss Katz then played her trump card — her own hearing impairment. Her unobtrusive use of a hearing aid and knowledge of lip reading demonstrate that the hard of hearing do not have to be given written or shouted instructions. The usual reaction is, "If the worker can understand as well as you do, send him around."

The New York League has not yet finished with pioneering. It is now studying, in its own clinics, adjustment problems, helping mothers to save their hard-of-hearing children the unhappiness that the handicap so frequently causes. New laws compel parents and doctors in New York to report hearing defects of children under six and provide for annual audiometer check-ups in schools.

The home situation, the staff admits, is still fearful. Few parents will take preventative measures, such as having ears examined after diseases and seeing an otologist *always* about a running ear or earache. They won't do the little considerate things, such as seeing that brothers and sisters don't ridicule difficulty of hearing. They don't try to solve the beau problem for the girl or overcome the boy's sense of inferiority with girls.

All they do is yell!

Next month: "We Who Have a Rendezvous with Death"

RACE PREJUDICE

from the Scientist's Angle



as told by **FRANZ BOAS**

IN LARGE American cities, negroes must live in quarters as sharply defined as were the ghettos of olden times. On the Pacific coast, Asiatics are regarded as aliens so undesirable that their immigration to this country is restricted by law. There are country hotels, apartment houses, and clubs that exclude Jews. To the great mass of Americans, Mexicans are "greasers," Frenchmen "frogs," Italians "wops." Yet ours is a democracy which asserted at the outset that it recognized no social or political inequalities.

We in America are particularly given to racial injustice and for the very reason that this country was long a haven for those who yearned to breathe a freer political air or to make the most of freer economic opportunity. Germans, Swedes, Russians, Finns, Levantines, groups of widely different descent and tradition, flock hither. They look down on one another, as close neighbors have always done from time

immemorial, and they are looked down on in turn by the long established "native" population.

Even when the Declaration of Independence was signed there was race prejudice, and this because there were negro slaves. In that day, slavery was justified on the supposed obvious superiority of whites over blacks and on supposed mental and social differences that were innate and unchangeable. Outside of Germany, few anthropologists or sociologists would defend such arguments today. In George Washington's time, there was no adequate scientific basis for the discussion of race. Now it is recognized that the problem presented is social rather than biological. Both the heredity and the reaction to a given environment of each member of a class or group must be studied. Yet the same old question is put in the same old way. We ask: What are the characteristics that differentiate Jews from Anglo-Saxons,