ANNOTATION

Through a Glass, Darkly

A note on contact lenses in a recent issue of the Journal has prompted a colleague who recently visited America to send a newspaper cutting which reads as follows:

"Anthony Aiello, convicted killer, was captured yesterday afternoon in Brooklyn in an anticlimactic last chapter in the round up of nine prisoners who broke out of the Raymond Street jail three months ago... he came back two weeks ago... got the rest of his cash and spent one hundred dollars for a pair of contact lenses to replace the identifying glasses."

This seems to bring right up to date the long list of favours which the science of optics has bestowed upon the malefactor, garnished with those bright, hard little touches of commercial efficiency which seem so characteristic of the American criminal. As yet the English criminal has not got as far as this; but then neither has the English contact lens industry; it is doubtful whether he could have arranged an appointment in this country in three months. We go about these matters more deliberately.

Nevertheless our criminals have not altogether despised the benefits which science has to offer. It was the operation of the laws of geometrical optics which darkened the lantern in the sturdy grasp of the unwitting Bill Sykes, in that tidier, simpler pre-Einstein era when the rays of light, like the British Army of the day, could be relied upon to manoeuvre in thin straight lines.

Perhaps this American note is the writing on the wall; perhaps spectacle-making and spectacle-wearing have passed the peak and must fall into decay and disuse. It is not easy to visualise, however, an ophthalmic world bereft of those twin diseases of vitreophobia and vitreophilia—the dread of glasses and the morbid craving for them—which are commonplaces of the consulting room. Will contact lenses solve the problem of the boy who throws away his spectacles the day after he leaves school or the young female presbyope who considers the occasional use of reading lenses a fate worse than death? We doubt it. But even these disorders pale before the iron determination of the glasses addict. From the voluminous handbag, or in the most intractable cases, from the capacious reticule, come pair after pair of spectacles, with lenses of every conceivable shape and hue, agreeing only in dioptric power; they have been prescribed by opticians, by ophthalmic surgeons, by half the great names of Harley-Street, but all have been found wanting. Undeterred by the chastening power of experience, nothing will satisfy the craving but bigger and better lenses, of
greater 'magnifying power', combined of course with a corresponding reduction in the transmission of the well known baleful properties of light.

Not even contact lenses can solve this problem; 'not the labours of my hands, can fulfil thy law's demands'. There is perhaps hope for the refractionists yet, if only for the psychological comfort of their ministrations. It is difficult to see how contact lenses can meet the needs, the urgent imperative needs, of the young women (or the not so young women) who find the daylight too strong for them. Who is not familiar with the cold azure gaze of these maidens, entrenched behind the deepening tints of Crookes glass? With them the spectacle maker may take heart again; No contact lenses will fill their needs, for they are symbolic; no matter how carefully the conscious mind is dressing the shop window, with them the sub-conscious is already putting up the shutters.

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**FACULTY OF OPHTHALMOLOGISTS**

In an effort to meet the objections of some Members and Associates that the activities of the Faculty were insufficiently advertised, and were only susceptible to comment once a year on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting, the Council at their last meeting on July 11, decided that an account of the more important actions and decisions of the Council at meetings should be prepared by the Honorary Secretary and submitted for publication to the Medical Press. An account of the last meeting, held on July 11 from 2.15 p.m. till 5 p.m. is appended.

Owing to the removal of Mr. P. M. Wood from Scotland to Halifax a vacancy had occurred among the Full-time Associate Representatives on the Council. It was decided to fill this casual vacancy by asking the Full-time Associates in Region 6 to vote for a representative. Only three voting papers had been returned and only one of them bore a vote. It was therefore decided to leave this Region unrepresented.

The President reported that, as "the appointed day" for the beginning of the National Health Service had been postponed, he had agreed with the British Medical Association's suggestion that the appointment of the medical members on the Professional Committees to prepare lists of participants in the Supplementary Eye Service should be deferred until the reaction of the general body of ophthalmologists to the Interim Report of the Eye Services Committee had been obtained. This was agreed.