

The Facial Expressions of Man*

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The Aim and Nature of the Study of Physiognomy

All of the higher and nobler functions in which the mental life of man reveals itself, appear to be brought together in the countenance. The human countenance is the seat of the sense organs through which our minds secure the impressions that are indispensable to their development. Conversely all the activities of the mind find their expression in the countenance. The instruments of speech, which distinguish man from the animal, by which he reveals his thoughts and feelings to those about him, have their location in the face. Yet, even without spoken words, the activities of the soul find equivalent expressions in the play of the features, so infinitely varied and yet so easily intelligible. These expressions are common to all nations. When the human race was scattered, after the presumptuous building of the tower of Babel, we are told that no one people understood the language of another. From that time down to the present, the languages of peoples have remained foreign to each other. More and more have the signs and dialects of the several tongues been separated. Only one language has humanity preserved from that far away age—a language which is even now understood by all nations, which is taught in no school and is not found in any grammar, which the child understands as well as the man of learning—the silent language of the countenance. It often tells more than speech that is uttered with great emphasis. When, overcome with emotion, we can find no words, then the silent language of the face comes into its rights. How often a look into the face of another tells us more than any words could do. How eloquently the features of man speak of the joy and sorrow he has experienced. How the glance into the eye of a strong man can either cheer the unhappy or tell him that therein is only a heart of stone. Marie Stuart, when she looked Queen Elizabeth in the eye at their first meeting, exclaimed, "Oh! God, in those features dwells no heart," and she realized, even before the Queen had spoken that no pity was to be expected from her.

Talleyrand says, "Language (the word) is given to man in order to

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conceal his thoughts." The language of the eyes does not lie; even the devil betrays himself by his countenance. Mephisto is able to deceive the innocent Gretchen with words, but not with his glances. The sight of him paralyzes her with fear (ties up her insides) "For it stands written on his forehead that he cares not to love any man."

The guilty conscience forbids the criminal to look his fellow man in the eye and it is regarded as an unusual hardness if anyone can tell a lie to another or speak a disrespectful word "to his face." The well disposed child is not reproved by his mother with words but reads her warnings and wishes from her eyes. Mirza Schaffy says, "In the face of every man his story is written—his hating and loving are clearly set down. His inner nature here comes to light, yet not every one can read it, not every one understands."

There are two elements in facial expression—the play of expressions and the permanent features. The latter form the characteristics that are distinctive in the human race in general and the peculiarities in a particular race. The features are modified by the marks of sex and age and the peculiarities of special descent, according to race, people and family; and, finally, they bear the peculiar stamp of personality which enables us to discover and identify each individual from an indefinite number of people. This permanent expression of the face is termed Physiognomy, the characteristic signs of which are formed very gradually. All little children look alike, and it is very difficult for outsiders to distinguish one from the other; only by degrees is the characteristic stamp of personality expressed. The fortunes and the labor, not only of the body but still more of the mind, engrave the faces with brazen letters. A face in which these traces are wanting, tells us nothing; it is tiresome even though it may be beautiful. "It is the mind that builds the body," says Schiller, and that applies not only to the limbs, which are developed by vigorous use, but also to the face, which is remodelled by the activity of the mind. It is, therefore, the chief task of the portrait painter to discover the characteristic marks which the mind has impressed on the face and to emphasize them on the canvas.

Not only do we note that no face entirely resembles another, but we can even say that every face is constantly changing in the direction in which the life is active—whether the life is depressed or exalted—whether the mental attitude is passive or active—whether pleasant or disagreeable sensations are in control—whether attention is concentrated or diffused.

The study of the human features may be of an unconscious, intuitive kind—in fact many distinguished portrait painters have little theoretical knowledge of Physiognomy. The same may be said of many speakers who are eloquent in language, the grammar of which is strange to them. However, such a study is of the greatest importance to the beginner and may save him from many errors. He should be taught that the external features of a man express something of the inner life and that which is sometimes most apparent to the layman, may not really represent the most dominant trait of character. The artistic value of a portrait, in contrast to a photograph, is due to the fact that in it the essential details are emphasized and the indifferent ones minimized. An artistic production can give a deep impression only through simplification and strengthening of the characteristic lines further emphasized by the omission of the unessentials. Physiognomy will show the artist the way to do this and such knowledge is still more necessary in the making of caricatures where less importance is given to portrait resemblance and more to the exaggeration of special traits.

Physiognomy is of no less value to the artist of the stage than to the painter or sculptor. Well known actors have made this a careful study because the most striking way to impersonate an individual is not by the use of powder and paint on the face, but by acquiring his peculiar gestures and attitudes in various moods.

The study of facial expressions has a forensic value. A judge is involuntarily influenced by the demeanor of the accused and by the changes which are called forth in his expression by the testimony of witnesses. Physiognomy further serves for the identification and conviction of criminals. This branch has been especially worked out by Bertillon in Paris. His system consists in the establishment of the identity of persons by means of photographs, measurements of single organs and recording the forms of special facial and bodily parts.

On a more theoretical basis Lombroso sought to make use of Physiognomy for the identification of criminals. He tried to demonstrate that a criminal is really a sick man and that signs of his mental ailments, or inferiority, are shown in the formation of his head and face. Such indications put the crime in a milder light and call forth the conclusion that, "To know everything is to forgive everything."

The observation of the facial expression is of the greatest importance to the doctor. The change in the features is sometimes the first symptom

of a crisis and a more fresh and vigorous look is often the first sign of recuperation. The presence of a serious inner disturbance or the approach of a fatal sickness is sometimes first noted with concern by the doctor, through the suddenly depressed facial expression.

Physiognomy has an especially important bearing on the cure of the insane. A hereditary burden often shows itself in definite signs on the face or in the skull formation—signs of so-called degeneration. Lacking any other bodily indication, a slight change of expression on one side of the face or a slight difference in the pupils of the eyes, may show the beginning of an incurable disease. The peculiar look of a sick person may show that he has fallen into an auditory or visual hallucination which he tries to hide from observers.

Physiognomy gives the physiologist a means of more profound knowledge of people. It is a clue by which he gathers knowledge of the inner man by means of the external features and thus he discovers how the environment affects the mind of the person and how that affect is reflected back to the face.

Of the different methods of procedure used in the research of Physiognomy, the simplest and the one more or less unconsciously used by all people, is the observation of the facial expression of men whose character we recognize from their deeds. The same purpose is served by intentionally producing, by artificial means, a certain expression and investigating the impression a given change of countenance makes on the observer. Under this heading comes the stimulation, by an electric current, of certain facial muscles in order to produce a definite expression—a method followed by Duchenne.

A method used especially by actors and artists is the voluntary distortion of the face before a mirror, in order to evoke definite expressions which are then fixed in photographs or drawings. Such pictures give proof of great skill on the part of the actor but they are lacking in deeper truth and are not all equally successful. The effort to photograph a person who is, in reality, in the particular mood desired, meets with great difficulty for when such a subject is found, the realization that he is being made an object of study diverts his attention and the expression changes.

The mentally diseased are sometimes so entirely withdrawn from their surroundings that they do not notice the photographic apparatus. Because of this the author and others have repeatedly been successful in fixing their mood images on the photographic plate.

Sometimes we can also succeed in photographing children, for they are easily brought into a desired mood. "Little causes, great effects," holds true with them. Their facial expressions are still genuine and sharply marked, in contrast to those of the adult, in whom the play of countenance is often determined and limited by habit and custom. Hence the author has tried to produce, in a child, the most varied expressions of mood and catch them with the camera. This method often requires great expenditure of time, since the child must, under no circumstances, realize which facial expression is to be photographed or when. Many of the illustrations of this book are taken from more than a hundred which the author was able to make of an eleven year old friend, who proved to be especially adapted for this purpose. In this child the various expressions appear with extreme clearness. As a matter of course, such photographs should not undergo retouching. It is further important to eliminate disturbing details, such as the arrangement of the hair, dress, etc., and to limit the pictures as far as possible, to one person, in order to show that the same face can be changed by various moods. The first question to consider is whether there is a connection between the expression of the face and the processes of the soul, according to natural law, or whether the play of countenance is not determined by custom or education. If the latter is the case, then the whole study of facial expressions can claim only a relatively slight interest. However, Darwin has conclusively demonstrated that many movements have an inner value, or, at least, have it in an earlier stage of the development of the individual or the species. He not only succeeded in pointing out many connections between the movements of men and of animals, but also by extensive investigation, showed that the simple mimical movements of all nations agree essentially with each other. On the other hand, gesturing and similar movements differ and, hence, seem to be more dependent upon external or conventional circumstances.

A further aid to this study of Physiognomy and Mimicry is found in the investigation of the development of the single individual. Here the comparison should establish to what sense-stimuli the individual, in a given state of development, is susceptible; how he responds to such stimuli; and in what fashion the activities of the soul are externally manifested in that stage. Thus it can be determined how far the "play of countenance" is connected in the development of special organs, especially the sense organs.

Therefore, we find some support for an etiological investigation in these exceptional cases where certain organs have failed to develop. For example, the play of countenance may be the result of deficiencies in sight, hearing or in the brain itself.

When you refer to the old books of Physiognomy you will look in vain for any exact methods of investigation. You will find a great deal of humbug and swindle. Your investigation leads through a long series of wandering paths, of extravagant fancies of chiromatics, astrology, phrenology and the rest. But in the last decade you find the authors are beginning to get down to the solid ground of reality and are starting exact observations. By such research one is made to realize how little is now known and how truly the science of Physiognomy is still in swaddling clothes.