

BEARD CULTURE.

TRIBULATIONS THROUGH WHICH THE BARE-FACED MAN DOES NOT PASS.

To the Editor of the New-York Times :

Shaving is incontestably the most confirmed of all masculine habits. It has given rise to an industry the followers of which, perceiving themselves to be numerous, have organized for the purpose of oppressing their fellow-men. In commercial language they are called barbers, although in justice to the founders of the human race it cannot be too often repeated that no barbarism of ancient America or of primitive Europe ever denuded his face of its natural covering.

Why civilization should demand, encourage, not to say countenance, this tedious and painful sacrifice, no social philosopher has yet explained. Why the upper lip should generally be spared, when the mustache is a plant of tardy, stubborn, and ungraceful growth, is another fashionable enigma. A man can learn after years of practice to shave his own cheeks and jaws, but it is an accomplishment that gives pleasure to no one, not even to himself. If the time thus employed should be devoted to music or literature, how proficient in the fine arts many a man would become, whose fifteen minutes of daily labor at scraping himself before a mirror are productive only of a smooth face and a rough voice. If he practiced, with the foil instead of with the razor for that period every morning, his health would not easily succumb to disease or to a chance encounter with burglars or footpads.

These reflections gave rise to my recent resolve to be shaved no more, come what might. Then I began to pass through the dark shadow of a peculiar experience, not less trying to the soul than those other inevitable crises of conscious existence, such as the first pair of long trousers, the first silk hat, the first request for a kiss from lips unseen in the twilight, the public ordeal of becoming a member of the church or of becoming a husband in one, the first evening party, and the first realization of encroaching old age. Of all these emotional trials I contend that the deliberate and persistent act of letting the beard grow in the only place where it will grow calls for the most exalted courage. Going to bed in the dark for the first time is comparatively easy.

My faith in the sincerity of human friendship became entirely shattered during that month of slow hirsute evolution. Memory falters in the effort to recall the senseless variations of the gibe, the sneer, the joke, the innuendo, and the taunt that smote my cringing spirit from every side. I was commonly suspected of poverty so extreme that the small protective tariff upon cutlery placed razors in the catalogue of, to me, unattainable luxuries. I was recommended to certain barbers who sold commutation tickets to regular customers. My sprouting chin was compared to the wire-pegged cylinder of a music box. Persons with a knowledge of criminal procedure confidently assured me that photography is not now the only means used to preserve the identity of law-breakers who have served their time; and when at last, after having kept a cheerful, though disfigured, countenance through all these assaults and batteries upon the dignity of manhood and the constitutional right of American citizenship; when I had, or rather my beard had, reached a degree of development; when contact with my lips was not painful to the sweetest face on earth, I suddenly discovered that it was red. Not of a tawny orange or a Lone-Jack-tobacco color, not of an Aztec auburn or a burnt-amber brown, but plainly and portentously red, like the light-house illumination on Norton's Point. I would have torn my newly-acquired hair in true Oriental rage, but it was not as yet long enough to serve that penitential purpose. Fearful thoughts of dyeing occurred to me. Dyeing of red hair is not so great a matter, since every one must die of something, but to live on and on feeling one's self to be on the same low plane of superstition with the white horse was too much. I was shaved.

In shaving I lost something besides my experimental beard. I lost that proudness of heart that had caused me to look down upon the barber. Now, as my occipital bone fits into the grooved top of my barber's operating chair, I look up at him. He looks down at me. He is the victor, yet no expression of triumph wrinkles his plastic face. My mouth, he assures me, betrays remarkable strength and yet amiability of character, and by concealing with a beard the visible evidence of those desirable traits I should be doing myself injustice. However undeserving barbers as a class may be, this one in particular is a man of candor and moral worth, and shall therefore profit by my custom.

E. N. B.

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