

# AS I REMEMBER "SKEFF"



■ HENRY W. HOFSTETTER, O.D., PH.D.

It was on a bright summer day in 1940, if I recall correctly, that I first saw Dr. Skeffington. He was walking briskly across the oval expanse of the Ohio State University campus. I was gazing out of a second floor window of the optometry quarters of Mendenhall Laboratory. He was, perhaps, almost a hundred yards away but very conspicuous in a gleaming white Palm Beach suit, white shoes and Panama hat. Someone in my presence identified him and reminded me that this was the Dr. A. M. Skeffington who was promoting the "21 points" that had been mentioned from time to time in our clinical courses.

He was undoubtedly heading toward the psychology building to meet with what may have been the first major gathering of a number of prominent visual scientists from a variety of academic disciplines. It was my understanding that the meeting was officially organized by Professor Samuel Renshaw, underwritten by the Optometric Extension Program, and silently hosted by Skeffington.

As a first-year graduate student in physiological optics, I was enlisted to operate the slide projector and to run occasional errands, thus enabling me to hear most of the presentations and debates. I recall that Dr. Skeffington, himself not being a research scientist, was perhaps the most avid listener in the group of about 25. He asked occasional questions that would point to applications for the clinical practice of optometry. It was apparent to me that he was

attempting to document the concepts of vision that reinforced his own belief that visual functions were more subject to learning than had been conventionally presumed. The time was at the peak of the "eyeball" versus "functional" controversy in optometry, a phase of the nature versus nurture debate.

If Skeffington was ever aware of my potential role in optometry he seemed oblivious of my presence. He may well have categorized me in the "eyeball" ranks by reason of my identification with the physics department, under which the optometry and physiological optics programs were then administered at Ohio State.

During my next eight years there, six as a faculty member, I attended several of his Columbus, Ohio, circuit lectures, especially to familiarize myself with the "21 point" nomenclature, procedure, and analysis. I was particularly aware that Skeffington had accomplished the indoctrination of a significant share of the practicing optometrists, including those serving on the state licensing boards that would be examining my students. If he had read any of my research reports published in this interim he could well have interpreted some of them as fundamentally, though not declaratively, challenging. Cordiality and friendly courtesy prevailed in our typically brief conversations and contacts.

When I went to the Los Angeles College of Optometry in 1948 to assume the deanship, I discovered that the clinical procedures being taught there were quite

exclusively those of Skeffington. I did not interfere. Instead, I personally offered an elective post-graduate course in Graphic Analysis of clinical data which eventually was taken over by another faculty member and converted into a correspondence course as well as a regular classroom topic.

Being in the Los Angeles area, I soon became more directly acquainted with several leading Optometric Extension Program staff personnel who resided there—Alexander, Barstow, Crow, Hendrickson, and Richardson, as well as Skeffington. In this circumstance I came to know Skeffington much better and, I believe, he came to know me more personally. Though we both recognized the almost incompatible roles we were playing in the evolvement of clinical optometric science we could be friends, and were.

When I came to Indiana University in 1952, I had at least one opportunity to arrange for my students in Bloomington to hear one of his presentations before he retired. On that occasion I also invited him to be my guest overnight in my home, an invitation he graciously declined for reasons beyond his control.

So it is that throughout my own career I was as familiar with the name, appearance, and leadership role of Dr. Skeffington, popularly known as "Skeff," as with any other optometric personality of our era. I now realize, however, that my personal knowledge of the man himself is very superficial. I was repeatedly aware that his and my efforts were often at cross purposes, but I nevertheless do believe that he played a significant role in advancing what had been traditionally an artisan vocation prior to the turn of the century into the full professional standing that it enjoys today.

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