

Science Notes.

TOBACCO AND DEFECTIVE VISION.

IT may be considered a matter of common knowledge that excessive indulgence in tobacco smoking may be injurious to the eyesight. It appears very probable, however, that the widespread use of tobacco and the imperfect knowledge of ophthalmic surgeons have combined in the past to attribute more cases of defective vision to the practice of smoking than it should justly be held responsible for.

Dr. Maitland Ramsay, surgeon to the Glasgow Eye Infirmary, is of opinion that although the existence of amblyopia (*i.e.*, defective vision apart from any defect in the structure of the eye) due to the use of tobacco cannot be doubted, it is comparatively rare. One observer, from a record of cases extending over two years, attributes 7 per cent. to the abuse of tobacco and alcohol. Another observer having examined a total of 36,000 patients finds about 1 per cent. of his cases due to the same causes. It is worthy of note that in most cases of amblyopia, for which nicotine poisoning is partly responsible, the use of alcohol is also a predisposing cause. Moreover, it is not necessary that a man should indulge in alcohol or tobacco to any great extent to suffer in this way as a consequence, nor are excessive drinkers and smokers always afflicted. There are some people so constituted that even excessive indulgence in tobacco and strong drink has on them no appreciable effect, while there are others in whom, owing to some peculiar idiosyncrasy, even the most moderate use of either produces marked toxic disturbances.

Dr. Maitland Ramsay quotes at some length a case of tobacco amblyopia, pure and simple. The patient was a man of 59, foreman in a printing establishment. He complained of dimness of vision in both eyes, inability to recognise the faces of his friends until quite close to him, and increasing difficulty in reading small print. No spectacles could be obtained that gave him any assistance. The flames of gas lamps appeared to him blue, and he could detect no colour in people's faces. The faces of the passers-by in the street appeared to him like those of the dead.

This man had been a total abstainer from alcohol for fifteen or sixteen years, but had smoked about four ounces of "black twist" a week for forty years. He was advised to give up tobacco, but finding this impossible he reduced the quantity to two ounces a week and used a milder kind. Under this and other treatment his sight improved very greatly, and at the end of six months he resumed his work. He continued at work for about four years, when he gave up his situation on account of failing sight. His vision at this time varied very greatly—"Some days he could not see well, at other times he was able to read well enough." After the six months' treatment above referred to, he had gradually gone back to the use of tobacco in almost the same quantities as before, although the quality was not so strong.

If space permitted a great deal might be said from the physiological side, concerning the force of habit as exemplified in this case of a man who, apparently with a full knowledge of what he was doing, sacrificed his eyesight and his occupation to indulgence in a practice which is almost invariably, in its initial stages, offensive and nauseating.

Reflections

FROM A BOARD ROOM MIRROR.



DELIGHTFUL weather has been the order of the day during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to Sheffield, where one of the principal events has been the opening of the new wing of the Hospital and Dispensary.

At the Hospital the royal party were received by the Duke of Norfolk, who is President of the Institution, and were conducted over the new wing, the door of which was opened by the Duchess of York, who had been presented with a handsome gold key wherewith to unlock the portal.

The Duke of York expressed the pleasure it gave him to declare the Hospital open, and made the pleasing announcement that the Queen has signified her approval of the Hospital being henceforth known as the Royal Sheffield Hospital.

The Duchess of York, who was charmingly dressed in a light summery fashion which suited the warmth and sunshine of the day, was presented with a bouquet of pink and yellow roses. She received cheques from the ladies who had made a house to house collection on behalf of the "Women's Gift," and a number of ladies also presented donations for the Building Fund.

The Thirteenth Annual Demonstration and Church Parade of the Friendly Societies of the metropolis in aid of the funds of the North West London and University College Hospitals took place last Sunday afternoon. A large procession was formed in the Highgate Road, which wended its way to St. Mary's Church, Seymour Street, Euston, where a service was held and a sermon preached by the Rev. C. Mackeson. Collections on behalf of the Hospitals were made all along the line of route.

The advent of a cholera ship at Gravesend on Saturday last reminds us how necessary are the precautions which are never relaxed at our ports. The vessel hailed from the River Plate and had had one case terminating fatally twenty-four hours after the attack; four other cases of a suspicious character occurred, but these recovered. A thorough disinfection of the ship's clothing and bedding took place, and she was released from quarantine the same day owing to the fact that it was nearly two months since the fatal case occurred.

The Hon. W. F. D. Smith, M.P., accompanied by his wife, Lady Esther Smith, opened on Saturday last the Caxton wing of the Morley House Seaside Convalescent Home at St. Margaret's Bay. As the name implies the Caxton wing is to be devoted to those employed in newspaper offices and the various branches of the printing, book-binding and allied trades in London.

THE anniversary festival of the British Orphan Asylum took place on Friday night at the Whitehall Rooms, Hotel Métropole. The Right Rev. Bishop Barry, D.D., who occupied the chair, said the expenditure amounted to something like £8,000 a year. Not much more than £3,000 or £4,000 was received from investments and regular contributions, and for the rest the institution had to depend upon occasional appeals and legacies, and partly on the sympathy which was awakened by such gatherings as these. This being the case, he had no hesitation in commending the institution to the sympathy of the public generally. Mr. Algernon Gilliat responded in appropriate terms. During the evening subscriptions to the amount of £2,152 were announced.

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