

## Medical Matters.

### THE EYESIGHT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

An interesting pamphlet on the above subject by Dr. Edward Magennis, Examiner in Ophthalmology to the Apothecaries Hall of Ireland, intended for the use of parents and teachers, is of considerable interest also to School and District Nurses. Dr. Magennis describes the structure and functions of the eye, the reasons determining the colour, and the conditions which occasion short sight, squint, seeing-double, astigmatism, and fatigue of the eyes.

### DESKS IN SCHOOLS.

Dealing with the subject of desks in schools, he says: "The old-fashioned school desks should be discarded, and replaced by the modern single desks with back rests, in which the child can occupy a proper position with comfort. Snellen says that it is absolutely impossible that a tall and a short boy will both sit equally well on the same seat at the same desk. It is just as unlikely as that the same clothes would fit the same pupils. Yet, in many schools we find desks or seats the same size for all. Uncomfortable desks not only injure the eyes, but frequently cause permanent disfigurement, and curvature of the spine. Books and writing materials should not be laid flat on the table or desk, for in working from the top to the bottom of the page, that is from a comparatively distant object to a near object, the muscle of accommodation is brought too much into play, and the eyes get quickly fatigued. The proper slope for reading is 40 degs., for writing 20 degs. Statistics prove that many children entering school with healthy eyes have become short-sighted; and the proportionate number of pupils affected increases as we ascend in the classes and grades of the school. In Munich in a given year there were 2,327 children suffering from defective sight; 996 boys and 1,331 girls. A gradual increase in the figures was observed according to the distribution of the pupils into the several classes. Thus of every 1,000 boys in the first or elementary class 36 were short-sighted; in the second, 49; in the third, 70; in the fourth, 94; in the fifth, 108; in the sixth, 104; and in the seventh, or last, 108. In the case of the girls, the numbers went up from 37 to 119.

Cohn, of Breslau, points out that in village schools the percentage of *myopia* is very low, while in the town schools the number of short-sighted people constantly increases with the grade of the school from the lowest to the highest. Snellen says: "The increase of *myopia* is a question which has greatly occupied the attention of oculists. We have

sought for the cause of its development during the period of youth in the arrangement of schools. It has been said that the increase of *myopia* is a proof of the amount of mental development and school life in a nation. It would be nearer the truth to say that *myopia* is a proof of want of care in the construction of schools. As a principal fault we regard the bad posture of pupils. Oculists admit that the constant stooping forward of the head is the most effective factor in the increase of *myopia*. The question of the improvement of the posture of the scholars involves in the first place the question of seats." The pupil should be trained to keep his face at a distance of, at least, twelve inches from the desk, at which he is working, and to enforce this an apparatus called Kallman's face rest is used extensively on the Continent. It is screwed to the table, and the iron ring against which the face rests is covered with indiarubber.

### READING.

The school books at present in use, although an improvement on the older ones are, Dr. Magennis states, still far from satisfactory. For instance, let anyone take up a book on arithmetic, and in some pages, especially those devoted to fractions, he will find that to decipher the figures easily, a fairly powerful magnifying lens must be used. Why this should be tolerated is, to me, surprising. The letters and figures in school books should be clear and well defined. . . Children learning the piano being constrained to sit in an upright position, and at a certain distance from the instrument, are considerably distressed, and consequently injured by the bad printing of the music sheets, and it is vexatious to watch the screwing of the eyes, and the contortions of the bodies of the little musicians vainly endeavouring to decipher the indistinct signs and symbols placed before them.

### WRITING.

Dr. Magennis is of opinion that the use of the grey slates in schools should be prohibited. The contrast of white letters on a black surface, such as a blackboard, or black letters on a white surface, as is done with ink on copying books, is much better. He also advocates the substitution of vertical for oblique writing.

### OUTBREAK OF BERI-BERI.

An outbreak of beri-beri has occurred on board the Brazilian cruiser *Carroza*, which has arrived in the Tyne bringing men for the new battleship being built there for the Brazilian Government. It was found necessary for the Tyne Port Sanitary Authority to remove five men to the floating hospital suffering from the disease, and one of them, a young man of 22, has died.

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