INCIDENCE OF CATARACT AT CERTAIN AGE PERIODS IN SOUTH INDIAN DISTRICTS

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I HAVE have been asked frequently in the last ten years, "why is cataract so common in India?" My inclination has always been to avoid an answer, and query the inference since I had nothing very definite to go upon, in spite of the fact that in my belief cataract was exceptionally common in this country. As a rule I asked in return, "is it certain that cataract is so very much more frequent in India than in Western countries or is it largely apparently so because of the few ophthalmologists in India and the enormous population with which they deal?"

I have recently obtained some information relating to incidence which is of sufficient ophthalmological interest to record. In 1935 while conducting an enquiry into the possible aetiological influence of infra-red solar radiation on cataract production in two different areas where exposure to infra-red radiation might be expected to differ considerably, the figures referred to were revealed. Since the enquiry was conducted under the auspices of the Indian Research Fund Association and with their assistance, the full detail of it must necessarily be published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*. Readers of the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* (who ordinarily would not see the above publication) may find this brief extract from the data instructive.

Of 2,000 outdoor workers between the ages of 40 and 60 examined in a dry and arid district (Bellary), one person in 5·1 had cataract. Of 2,000 outdoor workers examined in a more humid and fertile area (West coast) one person in 3·4 had cataract. These figures obtained by trained observers, include of course immature cataract, even when occurring on one side only. The sexes appeared to be affected to a like extent. The apparent age was frequently given rather than the actual age since numbers of the individuals had no accurate idea of the latter. The majority probably looked older than their actual years. The figures will probably prove surprising to many.