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ANNOTATION

Miners’ Nystagmus

There have recently been many communications published on the subject of miners’ nystagmus. Dr. Freeland Fergus, whose practical experience of the disease entitles his opinion to considerable respect, states his views at some length in the British Medical Journal, June 18, 1927 (an abstract of the paper will be found on page 525 of this number). He rejects the findings of the Nystagmus Committee respecting the defective light theory or at least regards them as not proven. He points out that the introduction of electric light has not always been followed by any improvement in the nystagmus statistics, and even in some cases nystagmus seems to have increased. He says: “No doubt we may be told that it is because the best type of electric lamp has not yet been procured and the coal owners may be called upon to face further great expense on that head. I think that before any such demand is made of them, there should be a much more thorough investigation into the cause of the disease, which investigation would include a well organized collective investigation throughout the entire coal fields of the United Kingdom. Such a research ought unquestionably to be in the hands of persons competent to deal with vital statistics and with public health.” We trust he does not desire another Commission. Professor Haldane and Mr. Lister Llewellyn reply to this criticism of the work for which they were largely responsible in a very temperate letter (Brit. Med. Jl., July 2, 1927). They point out that the evidence that the essential cause of the disease
is defective lighting is quite overwhelming. They say: "All that we can do is to clear up a misunderstanding which seems to have misled Dr. Freeland Fergus and others. That is that the electric hand-lamps at present in use give a good illumination. In actual fact this illumination is extremely defective, and not much better than that of the older form of oil safety-lamps. The better existing oil safety-lamps give more light than the ordinary electric safety-lamps." They point out that as a result of investigations by Professor Wheeler and Mr. D. W. Woodhead new forms of oil safety-lamps are now available which give from four to twelve times as much light as ordinary electric hand-lamps. The electric cap-lamp, on account of its being much nearer to the surface to be illuminated is much more efficient. Where the conditions as in America make their use quite easy nystagmus is unknown. The letter concludes: "But where hand electric-lamps are used the light is too far away to give satisfactory illumination and nystagmus is common. The list of cases quoted by Dr. Freeland Fergus serves only to illustrate this fact, and in reality supports strongly the conclusions of the committee, which are based, not on vague suppositions, but on definite photometric measurements. Dr. Fergus and others ask for a new medical committee on miners' nystagmus. We venture to think that if the report of the late committee is read carefully it will be seen that the proposed new committee is not needed."

In a previous annotation on the report of the committee (Brit. Jl. of Ophthalm., Vol. VIII, p. 63) we concluded as follows: "Thus there would seem to be a disease, miners' nystagmus, the nature of which we, as ophthalmic surgeons, can appreciate, accurately measure, and record; there is another disease, miners' psycho-neurosis, of which we, as ophthalmic surgeons, have no special knowledge." We do not see that the present correspondence tends to alter this view.

ABSTRACTS

I.—GENERAL MEDICINE


(1) Bhaduri states that retinal haemorrhage is of not infrequent occurrence in kala-azar, he refers to cases in the literature which have been reported from China and gives reports of three cases of his own. In his first case there was a flame-shaped haemorrhage