EDITORIAL.

THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER AND EYE DISEASES.

UNDER this caption, adopted for the lack of a more exact title, we propose to discuss briefly several points which have frequently occurred to us as being of great importance, whether regarded from the purely medical standpoint or as regards the general and increasing prevalence of a class of ailments than which nothing can be more important in its effects on the individual members of our communities, either as bearing upon their personal comfort and happiness or their usefulness as members of society. Oculists have not ceased within recent years to point out that amongst the educated classes and the children of public schools, whether in the larger cities of this continent or in the older countries of Europe, there is seen from year to year an increasing prevalence of myopia, a form of imperfect eyesight, due, it is asserted to undue application to book studies, and to a certain character of type, such for instance, as the German letters. This in itself might perhaps be considered of comparatively temporary importance; but when it is remembered that on all sides we are learning from authorities, whose observations have been most extended, and from the statistics of government asylums for the insane, that nervous diseases of all sorts are increasing from year to year, we cannot fail to view with alarm the potent influences which are at work tending to create in future generations a definite type of eyesight due to the unfortunate fact that diseases of the nervous system have in a peculiar sense a tendency to become hereditary.

In the present number of MEDICAL SCIENCE will be found an article in which this particular fact is unequivocally asserted. From the classes of the graded schools, as for instance of New York city, we are given the results of observations going to show that the increase of myopics is in an invariable ratio to the number of years in which a pupil has attended school. Thus there were found by Prout and Mathewson, among 549 college students, 59% myopics in the introductory class; 40% in the freshman class; and 56% in the junior class.

Similar statistics have been given us from Germany and elsewhere. As stated by Donders, "This defect in vision is met with much more frequently amongst the inhabitants of towns than of villages, amongst men devoted to study than amongst laborers. Again, it is very common in any nation where education is very extensive."

"But, while this is true inasmuch," says Meyer, "as many persons study throughout their latest life without becoming myopic . . . we must suppose a special predisposition to the development of myopia. This being the case, the development of myopia and its ulterior course depend on the manner of life of those who are hereditarily subjects to it. If during youth, especially at the period of puberty, the individual does not use his eyes on any fatiguing work, if he only reads or writes under good hygienic conditions, the myopia may not be of any great amount." According to Donders, after a careful examination of 2,500 myopic eyes, it has been ascertained that the antero-posterior diameter may be increased to 33 m.m., the normal being from 22 to 25 millimetres. How permanent such abnormal conditions are likely to become through heredity, cannot be better illustrated than by the remarkable experiment, the results of which were witnessed by the writer, performed in the physiological laboratory of Brown-Séquard. Brown-Séquard pithed the optic centre in a pregnant guinea-pig, which subsequently had a litter of some half-dozen. These, within a few weeks after birth, showed in every instance, a progressive amblyopia, or blindness. The eye, at birth apparently well-formed, not only ceased to develop normally, but became visibly diseased, atrophy and the destruction of vision tending to completeness. The hereditary character of the hypermetropic eye and other aberrations from the normal type are equally well known. If we add to these the many instances where neuroses occur through many causes, as for instance disturbed menstruation, we may begin in some degree to realize how important becomes a branch of Medicine, hitherto very largely, we think, a *terra incognita* to the general practitioner. The reasons for this are apparent. Our medical schools have hitherto paid but small attention to the subject, neglected