

CHAPTER I.—OPTICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

The eye is pre-eminently an optical instrument, and the phenomena of vision all depend upon the laws of optics. Hence, a knowledge of some, at least, of the elementary principles of light is essential to a correct appreciation of the physiology of the eye. The diagnosing of optical defects of the eye,—long and short sight, &c. &c., and their treatment with the scientific use of spectacles, require some knowledge of the laws of refraction, and the properties of convex and concave lenses.

The philosophy of the ophthalmoscope can hardly be understood unless the principles of both refraction and reflection are thoroughly mastered.

You will therefore, I hope, not consider the time ill spent if, before proceeding with the investigation of diseases of the eye—you review with me some of the elementary principles of optics which lie at the foundation of all ophthalmic science.

The *nature* of light is not known. I can no more tell you what light is, than your professor of physiology can tell you what life is. We know that the sun shines, but how it shines we cannot tell.

“Two different theories have been advanced of the more intimate nature of light.” “One, the *Newtonian (corpuscular)* conceives that each luminous point is constantly giving off a succession of luminous corpuscles which follow each other in uninterrupted succession on an imaginary line or axis like a string of beads on a rigid thread.”

The *undulatory* theory (Christian Huychens') on the other hand considers space as pervaded by a subtle gaseous fluid or ether; that luminous bodies have the power of communicating to this ether a wave motion which affects the retina the same as vibrations of the air affect the auditory nerve.

Sir John Herschel, speaking of the great ingenuity of the undulatory theory says, “if it is not true it deserves to be.”

The sun is the great natural source of light; as it shines by its own light it is called *self-luminous*. The fixed stars are also self-luminous; so is a lighted lamp and bodies in a state of ignition. But most bodies by which we are surrounded, are seen only by reflected