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OUR EYES

AND

OUR INDUSTRIES.

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OUR EYES AND OUR INDUSTRIES.

MASSACHUSETTS is largely engaged in the education and preparation of teachers, as also in the education of those who are to enter the so-called learned professions, where their daily bread is to be earned by the use of their eyes. If at any time during their career these organs fail either class, they are worse than beggars, since they have by educational refinement become habituated, and their families accustomed, to a certain amount of the amenities of life, the loss of which will be most keenly felt. Besides all these members of the educational and professional classes, are the great mass of those engaged in mercantile pursuits, whose very existence depends on their ability to use their eyes most continuously. All so far spoken of come from our universities, colleges, academies, or public schools. But from the latter come also the still more numerous class who must support themselves and their families by manual industries which tax the eyes fully as much as if not more than does the pursuit of the educated professions.

While so much has been said, and so much written, in notes of warning, as to the dangers of overwork and strain of the eyes, in reference to those who are in or about to enter professional life, but little has been presented to our communities as to the equally dangerous deterioration of the eyesight of those who are to engage in our industries. Publicly I raised this note of warning in "The Boston Medical Journal," and in "The Massachusetts Teacher" in 1869, pointing out some unnecessary causes of impaired vision dependent upon defects in schools, school-books, and school-teaching. My experience since then in private practice, and, of course, more especially in work at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, has shown me that it was quite time that the community should be equally well instructed as to the dangers of the future in

reference to the so-called mechanic class, on whose continued good vision depends the position of our State as a manufacturing centre. Defective vision from unnecessary causes during school life becomes therefore a rather important subject, touching, as it does, not only the mechanic's daily wages, but the capitalist's returns and income. All the so-called learned professions, law, medicine, theology, and the others now equally recognized as professions, are, in fact, but so many agencies whose business it is to keep in working order the merchant's brain and the mechanic's hands. But while the former may scheme and think out methods of profitably employing accumulated earnings, the latter can never support himself and surroundings, or be a producer, without the eyes to guide the hands. How restricted are the mechanical occupations of the blind, even when their sense of touch is best cultivated by patient teaching!

It has seemed to me, therefore, quite time that the unnecessary causes of impaired vision, as well also as the natural and unavoidable ones which specially affect the mechanic and working classes, should be equally explained and set before those who have it in their power to control them; namely, our educational and school authorities, and those who engage any and all classes of employés in mill or workshop. While the professional or educated man, as he grows up, can, and probably will, look after himself and perhaps also his children in this respect, it is very different with those upon whom our great industries are dependent for their success, and who are the muscle and sinew of our State. These require as good, or better, eyesight, by which I mean capacity for continuous labor for many years with the visual organ, as do the educated professional or mercantile class. A bookkeeper who has to write and compute in some large concern six or eight hours a day does not have to tax his eyes more than does the mechanic in certain departments of shoe manufacturing. These are unrealized and unrecognized facts which it has long been my purpose to bring before the community, and which it is the object of this article to point out and draw attention to.

Near-sightedness or myopia has been shown to be on the increase wherever civilization is calling for further education. The warning note of the steady increase of near-sightedness