

## THE MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS.\*

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IT has taken a long time to realize the relation of preventive medicine to the school. In the school-room preventive medicine finds its most promising field. So far as the adult population is concerned, the function of the physician is like the work of the Good Samaritan. There are grievous wounds to treat aseptically and antiseptically, and to bind up. We often find our patient stripped of his raiment. Too often the food and wine that he needs we are not able to give him. But the physician who is devoted to preventive medicine cannot get over the thought that the wounds should never have been made, and the raiment should never have been stripped off. We must get near enough to the children to protect them before those thieves of germs have grievously wounded their bodies, before adenoids have stolen their chance of normal growth and development, before eye-strain and other nerve-strains have used up the nervous energy which should have been available for growth, play and study.

Nearly all the civilized countries in the world now have a system of medical inspection of schools. Germany has an excellent system, thoroughly organized and scientific. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark have good systems, well carried out. Japan established her system in 1888 and has now about 800 or 900 school doctors, more than any other country.

In Great Britain, the evolution of the school medical officer has been very rapid. First of all, there was for years an uneasy feeling that somebody ought to do something. Dr. James Kerr, Dr. Leslie McKenzie, and above all, Sir Lauder Brunton, did great work as pioneers. Then at last came the South African war. Sir Conan Doyle said that we ought to erect a monument to Kruger as big as St. Paul's because he had brought about for us what we had never been able to do for ourselves—the unification of the British Empire. When that monument is built, the apostles of preventive medicine should subscribe liberally to it, for probably the bill for the medical inspection of schools would not be law yet if it had not been that Paul Kruger and his doings set our recruiting sergeants to work. When it came to rejecting something like 60 per cent. of recruits for sheer physical inefficiency—when we needed recruits—the nation woke up to the consciousness that it had been living in a fool's paradise and that it was the business of everybody to set about finding ways and means to avert that threatened degeneracy of the nation. It was but a few straight steps from the recruit back to the schoolboy, and an intense interest was aroused in the enquiries that pointed only too plainly to the source of the evil.

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\*Read at the Academy of Medicine.