

once discovered in all parts of our country; the daily papers were devoting space to it, and it became a matter of serious concern to parents everywhere.

The disease is now placed in the same category with other infectious diseases; children infected with it are, in the discretion of an inspector or a school nurse, treated at school or sent to this or that dispensary on pain of being excluded from attendance at school. They are followed up at home during vacation, and in very large numbers, subjected to what is practically compulsory operation at the hands of department surgeons, in whose choice the parents have no voice, and whom they cannot hold responsible for any unfortunate result. More and more the tendency is everywhere evident to establish departmental standards of treatment to which outside physicians must conform, and to establish departmental hospitals and dispensaries which the children must attend no matter how inconvenient.

No one questions for a moment the very great value, both present and potential, of the medical inspection of schools if it can be kept reasonably free from fads and red tape, and no treatment would be considered too rigorous if we were sure that these unfortunate children were really suffering from a dangerous infectious disease. But, as I shall show you, there is great doubt in the minds of many competent men as to whether the disease in question is really trachoma at all; as to whether it is really infectious or not; as to whether it causes any serious present or future inconvenience to the patient; and, finally, whether he does not derive much more harm than benefit from the prevalent modes of treatment.

Trachoma was a term first employed generations ago to designate any and all diseases of the conjunctiva which were characterized by roughening of the inner surfaces of the lid. It has been known since the time of Celsus, who has left behind a description of the disease and its sequellæ which is unmistakable. It first attracted attention in modern times when the remnants of Napoleon's defeated army returned from Egypt and Syria, when it rapidly spread over Europe in an epidemic form.