

Medical Matters.

RINGWORM.

The *Lancet* has done good service to the community by inviting two thoroughly competent dermatologists to inquire into the whole question of ringworm, its prevalence, influence, and treatment as it is affecting the school-children of the Metropolis.

The whole report should be studied by those specially interested in the question. The commissioners say, in part:—"Much has been done to check the prevalence of parasites among human beings, but more remains to be done. The risks of the spread of infection are especially great among children, for they are either unaware of the danger of contagion or unwilling to undergo the restraint which precautions entail. The spread of education has resulted in increased facilities for the spread of contagious diseases amongst children. Thus it has come to pass that in all large cities the vegetable parasitic diseases of the scalp are widely prevalent. A large proportion of all children are affected by some form of ringworm, and especially are the children of the less educated classes affected, for in this point it must be recognised that the less educated are really representatives of lower grades of civilisation."²

The commissioners proceed to show that with the recognition of the necessity for sequestration, children known to be affected with ringworm were excluded from the schools, public and private. The weak point here was that, though the children were forbidden to associate with their fellows in the schools of the country, no attempt was made, or hardly any attempt worthy of the name was made, to prevent infected children from associating after school hours with those who were healthy. Meanwhile the infected children were excluded from educational facilities, perhaps for years.

Dr. James Kerr, the medical officer of the Education Committee of the London County Council, has said: "The extent to which ringworm prevails amongst school children at the present time is a serious handicap to about 5,000, many of whom have been compulsorily absent from the school for periods varying from a few weeks to as much as three years. The loss of education sustained by these children can never be regained. Calculations based upon an examination of the registers of a dozen schools taken at random prove that the loss of grants by reason of absence through ringworm alone amounts to £5,654 per annum,

so that any methods which can eradicate this disease, or even diminish its duration, must not only be welcomed by all educationists on behalf of the children, but will prove to be an important economic factor. The argument at one time put forward against taking the matter in hand was that proper treatment was not available, and that the only treatment which was available was tedious and very uncertain, but now that the method of treating this disease by X-rays has long since passed the experimental stage, and has been proved to be certain and rapid, and in the hands of experts absolutely free from risks of any kind, any argument against the adoption of this method no longer holds good."

After giving details of the result of treatment of ringworm by the X-ray method in various hospitals, the commissioners say:—"We may, therefore, take it as proved from the evidence which we have brought forward, and which accords with the opinion of practically all dermatologists, that at the present time the X-ray treatment is the most certain and the most rapid method of treatment of ringworm of the scalp, and that with care and in the hands of an expert no danger is incurred. This being the case, it has to be determined what is the best method of applying the X-ray treatment to the enormous number of children suffering from ringworm who now attend, or rather ought to attend, the public elementary schools of London. Only two methods can be suggested. Firstly, the work may be undertaken by the existing charitable institutions of the metropolis, or secondly, special centres might be established by the London County Council to deal with these patients. At present there have to be dealt with not merely the annual increase in the cases of ringworm but the many cases which have failed to recover under the older methods of treatment. At the present time about 1,000 cases yearly are added to the previously existing cases, so that for the next few years arrangements made must be able to deal with 1,000 new cases yearly in addition to the 5,000 cases which at present remain uncured. . . . The establishment of four ringworm centres in the County of London, each provided with two coils and worked by experts, would in the course of a year make a very appreciable impression upon the prevalence of the disease, and would probably by the end of the third year reduce it within inconsiderable limits. For calculations based upon 500 consecutive cases show that, allowing for school holidays and for careful treatment of the induction coils, each centre could turn out 700 cured cases in one year."

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