

An appeal to parliament, the medical profession, and the public, on the present state of dental surgery / by George Waite.

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AN

A P P E A L

TO

PARLIAMENT, THE MEDICAL PROFESSION,
AND THE PUBLIC,

ON

THE PRESENT STATE

OF

D E N T A L S U R G E R Y .

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AN APPEAL, &c.

It is quite an anomaly that so important a branch of the Medical Profession as Dental Surgery should so long have remained unprotected ; that the abuses to which the public has been so long exposed should have been quietly passed over ; and that the regular and respectable practitioners should have patiently submitted to the grievances under which they have been oppressed, without seeking redress in the proper quarter.

The necessity for Legislation in the Medical Profession, involves in it that part of the science comprehended in the art of dentistry ; and it is a matter

of importance that those interested in the Medical Reform Bill, should immediately give attention to this point, otherwise, under the emergency of the case, some self-constituted body may rise up, and dictate laws that might aggravate rather than remedy the evils complained of. I purpose showing the necessity of the Legislature and the Medical Profession recognising this as a legitimate branch of the science, and that no persons be permitted hereafter to practise without having undergone examination by one or more censors of the Royal College of Surgeons.

As it now is, Dentistry can be considered no profession; a person, however illiterate and uneducated, may commence practice; and society being unprotected, there is no reason why he may not be consulted: in which case, there being no guarantee that he is professionally competent, he may operate on a tooth in the neighbourhood of an incipient malignant tumor, and thereby do the greatest mischief; for it can hardly be supposed

that he can know the diseases to which the jaws are liable, their intricate anatomy, and the kinds of irritability which ill-judged dental operations may give rise to. He may advertise himself the author of a work which he may have employed some person to write ; and parents, seduced by the advertisement, will take their children to him. In lancing the gums he may cut the ranine artery of the tongue, and the hemorrhage would be so great that the infant would only be saved from death by a miracle ; for it cannot be presumed he can know how to control an accident which may arise from an irregular distribution of the arteries, which often occurs, and which requires the greatest skill to manage.

Again ; in lancing the gums of grown persons, he may do the greatest injury. He may, with the teeth, mistake sympathy for other causes, and extract every tooth in the head, after which he can easily procure workmen to make false ones. If his patient should be unprotected and friendless,

possessing too great a feeling of delicacy to name her infirmity, he may make enormous charges, and he may go on in this system of atrocity and imposition without being amenable to any law.

To me it appears extraordinary that in this great capital, the most enlightened in Europe, and in this age of advanced science, such charlatanism should not directly be checked ; and I have no hesitation in saying, that the rank of the profession, and the interest of society, demand legislative interference.

To the few members of our profession recognised by scientific bodies, I would suggest that they step boldly forward at this moment, and leave nothing undone, which private or public interest can suggest, to place them in their proper position ; therefore I call upon the medical profession, of which dental surgery forms a very important part, to state, whenever opportunities occur, the necessity which exists that a proper system of physiology and pathology be inculcated to all those who wish to practise. The majority must remember the

butcher-like extraction of teeth which, under the old and common key instrument, they have perpetrated in their early days; the many bits of jaw they have fractured; and, allowing something for the advancement of dental surgery, they will agree with me that the time has arrived when this branch of their science ought to be placed on the footing it is entitled to.

Public voice will, I am sure, aid my efforts; we all have friends and relations who may read newspaper advertisements, and be imposed upon, after which they will obtain the satisfaction only of an enormous bill, and perhaps be dragged into a court of justice, where a scene worthy of the "immortal Pickwick" might occur, as will be hereafter seen. Whatever medical bill be passed into a law, it may be years before any change takes place. Cases of abuse must be fresh in public memory—*Necessitas facit Legem*, and I think this is a very strong case of necessity.

However much I may hitherto have kept aloof from any obtrusion on the public, I now feel it a duty imperative on me to make this appeal; and the experience I have had, will, I trust, plead in support of a cause in which I may otherwise be only a feeble advocate. It has become a common remark, that loss of teeth is much more frequent of late years than formerly, that false teeth are much on the increase, and there is just reason to believe that many mouths have been sacrificed by Mercenaries, whose only object has been to obtain enormous sums for their pretended repairs. Before we proceed further, it will be well to enter into the many opportunities which this profession affords for impositions of all kinds; hence unprincipled adventurers, workboys from unscientific mechanists, decayed

tradesmen, vendors of quack medicine, even old-clothes-men, and others assuming false or foreign names have dispersed themselves throughout England, and, regardless of any feeling of truth, put forth advertisements professing impossibilities:—thus enticing to their houses females, and others, they have in the great majority of cases, where timidity has existed, and a fear of naming their loss of teeth to intimate friends, extorted sums of money too enormous for public belief! When these have been paid, and the operations failed, fear of exposure may keep all *sub umbrá*: sufficient however has come to light, to shew that some check should be placed on these glaring abuses upon professional men on whom these circumstances have fallen heavily, for unjust opinions have been formed of their abilities, and the incompetency of the Empiric misconstrued into prejudice against the science.

Among Dentists, at present, no cordiality exists; first-rate science has been confined to a

limited few ; no new and essential theories on practice have been suggested under fear of piracy ; narrow feelings entertained towards each other ; and the practice of the one, however perfect, depreciated by the other to answer his own selfish views.

To members of the medical profession following dentistry, and skilled in the higher walks of the profession, and mechanics, this has become intolerable ; for it is a fact, that medical practitioners bear to each other high feelings of honour and friendship ; that on all occasions, in practice, in sickness, in absence, and in poverty, there is no class of men, however much they may be misrepresented, in whom better and more charitable feelings are more constantly portrayed. Turning aside from these considerations to those feelings which exist between dentists, it is impossible to do so without the deepest regret at the heterogeneous mass arrogating to themselves the professorship of the art.

It cannot be thought that I am indifferent to the respectability of our profession ; circumstances have for years connected my family with it. But however much I argue in favour of philosophy, I wish by no means to imply that a man of theoretical acquirements can be compared, as an useful dentist, to one of practical experience. Theories are at all times attainable ; but manual dexterity, pliability of finger, steadiness of hand, and other requisites, require tuition from an early period of life to attain ordinary perfection. As regards genius, the case stands the same as with all theories, where the fingers come into operation. The surgeon may theoretically know the distribution of every nerve and artery, but without manual dexterity, which experience alone can give, he never will be an efficient operator. He would never be a Brodie, a Cooper, or a Liston. Genius fostered by theories is invariably of tenfold value. With the conflicting ideas of dentistry which exist, it is not possible to discern where talent really is.

The general practitioner, not acquainted with this manual art, neglects the subject, or too frequently in the attempt bungles an operation. He therefore occasionally allows himself to be imposed on; and it was only a short time since, that a dentist presumed to read to one of the learned societies, an article giving out that man was furnished with teeth similar to those of granivorous quadrupeds, with which he could ruminate, or in other words, “chew the cud!”

It will not be inappropriate here to quote a ludicrous scene which occurred a few days since at one of our public offices, shewing the present degraded state of this branch of the medical profession.

“*Magistrate.*—Then after he made three sets of teeth, which were of no use, he persuaded you to go to Mr. ——, whose pupil he said he was?

Complainant.—He did.

Mag.—Did you go?

Com.—Yes.

Mag.—What did he say?

Com.—That for a hundred guineas more, he would make me a set of teeth with which I could eat beefsteaks, and which would last me my life.
(*Loud laughter.*)

Mag.—Did you pay him the money?

Com.—Yes.

Mag.—Have you a receipt?

Com.—No. I asked for one, but he would not give it me, and I have called on him without being able to see him.”

In another instance, I was requested by my friend Dr. Scott, to give advice where an elderly and helpless lady had been defrauded of an enormous sum for two most clumsy-looking bits of gold, which it was pretended were worked up at Paris, by some extraordinary workmen, which were to be found nowhere else in the world.

Not long since, I was informed that a gentleman received an account of 170*l.* for work done for his family, which was not worth 10*l.*, and which enormous sum was compromised for 100*l.*

A lady, caught by the advertisement of a man calling himself the first operator of the day, and other high-sounding titles, stating that no one in the world but himself knew anything of the art, was compelled to seek redress in a court of law: the verdict was against her, but in the trial it came out that a model was made of her mouth before the teeth were extracted, therefore, how could the work answer? If any dentist of respectability had been subpoenaed on this trial, the verdict would have been different. We find governesses and servants who have saved money are too often duped by these men, and in many instances they are left wholly destitute.

I refer only to cases which have come within my own knowledge.

The system is not confined to London. Near Oxford, a dentist persuaded a poor groom, who had just received 8*l.* for wages, that unless his teeth were cleaned and some extracted, he would lose his life. He sent him home *minus* the 8*l.* His master is an intimate friend of mine.

It may be said that a person sufficiently foolish to be gulled by such people deserves any ill treatment ; but it is the duty of the Legislature to protect the public, more especially against any system of systematic imposition which can deteriorate the health of society.

London being the central city of the world, numerous persons continually pass through it. Many are without friends — they know not who to consult—they cannot imagine that such robbery can exist in the open day—gladly seek information in the public journals,—and the case more strongly demands our attention, as this class of persons are those most to be sympathised with.

This system of cruelty and extortion demands suppression by the Legislature.

The liability of the public to be overcharged seems also to point out the necessity of a *ratio* of charges being determined by some respectable members of the profession.

The College of Surgeons might easily nominate a board of officers from Dentists, members of their College, who might issue diplomas to such dentists as undergo competent examinations, and act as Censors appointed for that purpose ; and hereby they would place an important branch of the profession on a high footing, which would contribute materially to the welfare and health of the community.

Dentists likewise would enjoy many advantages under such regulations ; for it is but fair to state, that many are not properly remunerated under the present system. This would not be the case did a better understanding exist generally. Many having been engaged with a patient in operations extremely fatiguing, are often compelled to submit to very trifling remuneration, dictated by the patient himself, who has not always the generosity to consult his own circumstances, but who, from the illegalized position of the dentist, often carries away nearly as much gold in his mouth as the dentist

does in his pocket. This subject has been most strongly impressed on my mind by Mr. Brewster of Paris, whose operations are of first-rate excellence.

To patients I appeal, if the dentist's ordinary fee for an operation, when compared to the enormous charges of the unqualified Mercenary of the day, is at all too much. I would ask others whether for 500*l.* they would lose a front tooth?

The system of compelling Dentists to perform as many operations as possible in a short space of time is unadvisable, inasmuch as the operations must be ill done, and tend to the prejudice of both parties.

In glancing at the manner in which the learned professions are overstocked, the time, assiduity, and interest required to get into practice before a competency can be acquired; it may be said that dentistry is virtually the only profession (if it may be called one in its present state), which is open to every one, whether skilled in it or not. Assurance,

plausibility, and impudence, are alone necessary to commence. It will require but little comment to show that a proper curriculum of study required by examiners before the profession be entered, would greatly change the aspect of affairs—that its higher branches and philosophical parts would be more followed, and the preservation, not the destruction of teeth, most attended to. That it may not be thought I am adverse to the practice of many Dentists in our metropolis, I beg most distinctly to assert that I wish by no means that changes should be made unacceptable to the regular and present respectable members of our profession, whether recognized or not by any scientific body. It is but justice to remark, that among their number are men who, although unprivileged by diplomas, are of high honour and respectability—it is *their* interests I am advocating; and I consider it much to their honour, that in these days of dentistry, somewhat similar to those of surgery three centuries ago, they have attained

the science to have practised with so much credit to themselves. In what therefore I have herein stated, I feel assured of the support of my professional brethren, to whom I submit that my statement is not over-coloured.

As far, then, as my humble abilities go, I shall feel proud to join any professional men in suggesting a code of laws and scale of charges, or in promoting any institution which, in the absence of support from the Legislature, (which I trust will not be withheld), may form the germ of a society which, at some future day, may obtain a Royal Charter. This is not advancing too much on the present condition of our profession. Mechanical Dentistry being much better paid than the operative part, its advancement has become more general. It is not, however, with new operators that any improvements have originated; the fact is, workmen who have been employed in melting and flatting gold, drawing wire, casting models, and in common subordinate occupations,

have started as dentists, not aware of the commonest principles of dental surgery. Men of this stamp are established in every direction.

It is my humble opinion that Dentistry will retrograde unless something be done to support it. It certainly has not advanced to the extent persons imagine. In the last century Mr. Crampton, Mr. Blake, Mr. Spence, Mr. Heath, Mr. Whitewood, and Mr. Dumergue, *senr.*, were men of high eminence and talent, excelling most of the practitioners of the present day.

In the beginning of this century, Mr. Heath, Mr. Scarman, Mr. Spence, Mr. Waite, Mr. C. Dumergue, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Horner of York, and Mr. Parmly of Philadelphia, obtained just and signal fame.

The opportunities which I have had of judging of the merits of these several practitioners, are such as to leave a most favourable impression on my mind of their respective excellences. Mr. Whitewood, who came from America, and estab-

lished himself in Old Burlington-street eighty years since, instructed my late father (his apprentice and successor) in the art of stopping teeth, and in this he gained well-earned and distinguished reputation. Mr. Cartwright had fortunately the *entrée* to the late Mr. Dumergue's cabinet, and this was the foundation of his good fortune. He simplified the forceps for extracting teeth, and has practised with extraordinary success.

The most important improvement in the science is the fact that theories are beginning to be extended, proving the connecting link which exists between the sympathies of the teeth and those of the constitution, and showing how greatly the one depends on the other. In the progress of life, sudden looseness of teeth is often the precursor of violent affections, such as congestion, or those which might be produced by violent medicines—decay of teeth in beautiful young females is the companion of *spina ventosa* and *mollities ossium*, and to ocular demonstration the sole index of the condition of the bones.

All this may be irrelevant to practice itself, to this no theories exist worth enquiring into, and novices in practice, commencing the profession, often do irreparable mischief, before they know the nature of operations. Many practise a whole life, and do not know what will, and what will not, save a front tooth;—to such persons these remarks may apply. The greatest practice without preliminary education is utterly useless;—their filings never succeed, for they do not understand how to file teeth; their stoppings with gold, tin, and lead, come out and are unavailing. In early life they may have applied force, or undue pressure to place the teeth in a straight position;—here they disturb the architectural foundation of the jaw, perhaps lay the origin for a loss of vitality in the tooth, and by the 36th year, it loosens and drops out. It may well then be said that dentists do more harm than good. All this, however, is the result of a system on which Dentistry is now founded!

In the use of a mercurial amalgam for teeth,

certain laws ought to be laid down ; for its effects are identical with those which mercury has on the constitution.

On the death of an eminent Dentist, his mental experience is lost to the world ; although his operations were open to the profession, they could be only seen by two or three of the next most eminent men, who have not always the mind to appreciate them. During his life-time having given the instructions to no one, his fame may be said to have been truly ephemeral.

But it is requisite to say a few words on false teeth, which are by no means a new invention. In order that false teeth may be serviceable in mastication, it is necessary to fix them on some substance in the form of a plate, adapted so as to fit exactly round the gum, and be capable of bearing the attrition necessary in mastication without pain.

The metallic plate may be made of either gold or platina, the osseous plate of the sea-cow, the

hippopotamus tusk, or the sperm-whale ivory. The metals are capable of some durability, the ivories are very perishable in proportion to the heat of the breath, acidity of the stomach, and vitiated state of the secretions. To the plate some teeth must be fastened; they may be either inserted into the bone, or carved on it.

The average value of the materials to make a fine set of teeth mounted on gold, is from seven to nine pounds. The value of the materials for a bone set is from one pound to thirty-five shillings. Both are capable of suction, or sustaining atmospheric pressure: the plate of gold, if broad and well-adjusted, will hold up on this principle, and requires little support from the adjoining teeth; bone will do the same, but it is lighter, capable of greater moisture, and in this respect has the advantage. Imposition goes on in both: bad gold and very bad workmanship are often employed; and for the bone, which is common, enormous sums are extorted, and all kinds of praise given to it.

We find medical men led astray by dentists who talk largely of atmospheric pressure, whose works have this principle much less in reality, than those who adopt it as a matter of course and mention nothing about it.

All sorts of artificial teeth are open to all persons and to all dentists. Woe to the unhappy wight who gets under the hands of men professing peculiar ways of adapting them! they are egotists and quacks; and by one operation, perhaps ill-judged, or purposely perpetrated, the patient may find the whole comfort of his mouth completely destroyed for life. If false teeth are at first uncomfortable and painful to the wearer, this may be caused by circumstances, all of which are capable of alteration. It requires only an exercise of mind to see the defects and make alterations accordingly. A good knowledge of mathematics facilitates this operation.

It is not from the workroom of practitioners having pupils and apprentices that good work

issues ; from such men it is notoriously bad. The finest workmen all work at their own homes. The system of modelling which their employers adopt, the perfection to which they work up their ideas, and understand their marks, renders the whole system a most beautiful and ingenious science.

It is requisite, however, that both parties should be good workmen, and then few words need pass between them.

Accordingly with all this evidence before us, it is manifest that the interposition of the Legislature is demanded to place Dentistry, which is *de facto* a branch of surgery, on a legitimate footing. The interests of the medical profession and the public alike support the appeal which I have thus, perhaps imperfectly, submitted.

But perhaps I might subjoin a view of the system of education which I should recommend a dentist to pursue. Mathematics and mechanical philosophy should form the groundwork of his education. I would urge that it ought to be imperatively de-

manded by the Medical Reform Bill that he pursue a system of work for three years, at least, to gain a steadiness of hand and thorough knowledge of instruments.

In proof of the necessity for this qualification I may urge a case or two, (one occurred not long since,) where an instrument having slipped, lacerated the soft palate, broke the small bones contiguous to it, and stopped against the base of the skull. This occurred to the daughter of an exalted personage; both however are now no more.

In an other instance, a sharp instrument went through the cheek at once, and often instruments have slipped down the side of the lower jaw into the glands under it. Steadiness of hand, which work alone can give, should be an essential consideration. I would have every dentist well versed in chemistry, have attended three courses of lectures on anatomy, physiology, and surgery, and also have pursued hospital practice.

This should qualify him for examination, his

licence to practice, or his diploma, should be given to him on his qualifications being proved, and his pupils afterwards always apprenticed to and examined by a board of officers.

There might exist a reserved clause, that all dentists being established at this time, should be examined as to their qualifications, and their age noticed; and wherever gross abuse has existed and can be proved, the licence should be refused. What an incalculable benefit to society in country towns such an arrangement would confer!—and what difficulty can exist against such an arrangement? I trust this appeal, which is made to the Legislature, the Profession, and the Public, may in no way appear egotistical, or assumptive beyond what the necessity of the case demands. Although the subject may be a delicate one for me, as a party deeply interested, to advocate, I fervently trust that patriotism and the essential good of the suffering community will call forth the high feeling, clear sense, and unanimous approbation of Parlia-

ment, that matters of delicacy and minor considerations will be thrown into the shade, and this useful branch of medical science established, as it ought to be, on a footing equivalent to the emolument it receives, and the extended patronage which it unquestionably merits.

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general
 discussion of the subject, and the second part
 contains a detailed account of the experiments
 which have been made. The results of these
 experiments are given in the following table
 and are compared with the results of other
 experiments which have been made by other
 authors. The paper concludes with a summary
 of the results and a few remarks on the
 subject.



