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THE ECCENTRIC DENTIST OF MOUNT STREET

BY

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D.D.S., L.D.S., F.I.C.D., F.R.S.E.

*Honorary Member, The Pierre Fauchard Academy
and La Société Française de l'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire*

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MARTIN VAN BUTCHELL was born on February 5th, 1735, in Eagle Street, near Red Lion Square, London. Of Flemish descent, he was the eldest son of John Van Butchell, who, early in the reign of George II, received the appointment of Tapestry-Maker to His Majesty.

Martin decided against entering his father's business. Probably he was at least partially influenced thus by meeting many cultured persons who frequently lodged with his parents at Crown House in the parish of Lambeth.

Being of attractive appearance, well

educated and a linguist of no mean ability, it is not surprising to learn that several notable persons were anxious to enlist his services. Sir Thomas Robinson wished him to become a travelling companion to his son, but he entered the family of Viscountess Talbot as groom-of-the-chambers and remained there for nine years.

Even as a young boy Martin Van Butchell displayed striking mechanical skill; and, as his duties with the Talbot family were not unduly onerous, he had time available for pursuing his hobbies. Besides, he was able to save sufficient

money to enable him to study anatomy and surgery, which, for long, had intensely interested him. In fact, even during these nine years, he is believed to have practised the healing art in a limited degree.

Although dates are uncertain, it is, nevertheless, highly probable that there was only a brief hiatus between Martin's departure from the Talbot household and his becoming a diligent pupil of the celebrated William and John Hunter. From them he acquired a sound knowledge of anatomy and surgery. This, along with his inherent and highly developed mechanical skill, enabled him later to gain ascendancy over many contemporary healers.

He became particularly interested in dentistry due, it has been stated, to a mishap to one of his own teeth. Nevertheless, the determining influence was, conceivably, his association with the renowned John Hunter, who was unusually enlightened concerning the dental organs. Not improbably, he frequently met, and conversed with, James Spence and his sons and with William Rae, all dentist intimates of John Hunter.

Although it has not been possible to ascertain exactly when, or where, he embarked on dentistry on his own behalf, it would seem highly probable that this was in the mid-1760's.

It is known that, early in 1769, he was residing and practising in a large house in Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, London. Proof of this is forthcoming from the *St. James's Chronicle*, February 7th, 1769:

"ARTIFICIAL TEETH

"Any Number of, from one to an entire set, with Gold Springs, on new Principles; also Gums, Sockets and Palate, formed finished and fixed (not drawing Stumps, nor causing Pain) so accurately as to answer every Purpose

of, without being felt or discerned from, the natural; whereby Deficiencies are supplied and Imperfections covered with useful Ornaments, most helpful to Enunciation, Mastication, etc. The Nobility and Gentry, sending written timely Notice, shall be punctually waited on, and the profoundest Secrecy observed, by M. Van Butchell, Upper-Mount Street, Grosvenor-Square, who (neither goes Journeys nor gives Credit) but aims and is acknowledged to excel in performing the various Operations, after Methods and with Instruments peculiarly his own, invented or improved, through a Series of close Application, expensive Study and much Experience.

"At home each Day, from Nine till Three, Sundays except:

"Advice is freely given, and specimens are shown.

"Mr. Van Butchell having made all his Employers happy (though many had been much hurt by Operators esteemed famous) hopes discerning Minds, when others cannot please, will apply to him: Who cures the Tooth-Ach, and with Care prepares every Thing expedient, innocent, yet efficacious, to cleanse, recover, and preserve the Gums and Teeth.

"VAN BUTCHELL over the door."

Starting about 1770, he was in the habit of riding through the West End of London to Rotten Row, Hyde Park. As he resolutely declined to practise dentistry on Sundays, these were his gala days! Many contemporary dentists and surgeons were, likewise, keen equestrians, but Martin Van Butchell differed markedly from most of them.

His was, undoubtedly, a most curious outfit. For instance, one day he would appear mounted on a diminutive white pony painted entirely purple. The next day there would be purple spots; while on another occasion these would be



[Courtesy, Royal College of Surgeons of England]

An early print of Martin Van Butchell riding in Hyde Park prior to the time he began to paint his pony

black, with the pony's face and hind-quarters adorned by circles of mixed colours.

The saddle, too, presented a strange appearance. It had been designed by the rider himself, and incorporated several of his own mechanical devices. These at a later date included a blind which he could operate instantly in the event of the pony taking fright; by pulling this over its eyes he could halt it at will.

So much for the pony. Now for a vignette of its owner!

A flowing beard (eight inches long) and wavy locks were but two of his "decorations." Of short stature, he invariably wore an almost threadbare, shallow, black hat with a narrow brim. His old, curiously cut coat was of russet brown; while his boots, likewise not in a pristine state, matched the colour of his hat. In fact, he was attired like an eccentric Jewish mendicant. The en-

semble created a whimsical and ludicrous effect.

Martin Van Butchell was, as might be expected, a not infrequent target for insults from urchins. Consequently, in his early equestrian days he usually carried a large, white bone attached to his wrist. When molestation appeared imminent he swung this around in order to ward off attackers.

In an advertisement which appeared in 1775 he stated that he had studied anatomy under eminent teachers and was a "perpetual pupil to John Hunter." Also that he confined his practice to diseases, deformities and defects of the teeth, gums, sockets and palate. Further, he welcomed as patients "his Friends, the Noble, the Generous and the Discerning."

As this article is intended to be a brief sketch of the life and activities of Martin Van Butchell, reference is essential to

the death of his wife, Mary, at 2.30 a.m. on January 14th, 1775, from pleurisy and extensive empyema of both lungs. He desired her body to be embalmed; and entrusted this to the eminent Dr. William Hunter and Mr. William Cruikshank. The former was, generally, regarded as an expert in this speciality, having acquired considerable experience when visiting Holland c. 1743, accompanied by his *protégé*, William George Douglas, only son of Dr. James Douglas.

The vascular system was injected with oil of turpentine and camphorated spirit of wine, to which a colouring medium had been added in order to impart a lifelike hue to the cheeks and lips. The cavities of the body were packed with powdered nitre of camphor. Mrs. Van Butchell's body was afterwards embedded in 130 lb. of plaster of Paris. The various stages of the embalming, at all of which her husband actively assisted, were minutely recorded in a document believed to be in his own handwriting.

So satisfied was Dr. William Hunter with the completed work that he escorted many eminent persons, including Sir John Pringle, Sir Joseph Banks and Dr. William Heberden—in some cases with their wives—to inspect it. In fact, a minor contemporary poet expressed himself thus:

*Hunter, who first conceived the happy thought,
And here at length to full fruition brought.*

Although the preservation of his wife's body revealed yet another of Martin Van Butchell's eccentricities, it was, nevertheless, macabre in the extreme to make it a subject for publicity and financial gain.

He kept her body in a case with a glass lid; his custom was to exhibit it to patients and other interested persons.

However, as 56 Mount Street was so frequently besieged by the curious, all desirous of seeing one of the acknowledged side-shows of London, Van Butchell inserted this notice in the *St. James's Chronicle*:

"Van Butchell (not willing to be unpleasantly circumstanced and wishing to convince some good Minds they have been misinformed) acquaints the Curious no Stranger can see his embalmed Wife, unless (by a Friend or personally) introduced to himself any day between Nine and One, Sundays excepted."

After the lapse of a few years Martin Van Butchell remarried, this time a lady whose Christian name was Elizabeth. She, not unnaturally, resented the presence of his "dear departed"! As the outcome of her strenuous entreaties, the embalmed body was removed; it remained in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, along with other Van Butchell relics (including a walking-stick with an inscribed silver plate offering the finder a reward of 5s.), until destroyed by enemy aircraft in 1941.

An enlightening advertisement appeared in the *St. James's Chronicle* of March 1st, 1777:

"VAN BUTCHELL, Surgeon-Dentist, attends at his House, the upper part of Mount-Street, Grosvenor-Square, every day in the Year, from Nine to One o'clock, Sundays excepted.

"Name in Marble on the Door. Advice £2"1/-. Taking out a Tooth or Stump, £1"1/-. Putting in artificial Teeth, £5"5/- each. A whole under Row, £42. Upper Row, £63. An entire set, £105. Natural Teeth, £10"10/- each. The Money paid first."

This reveals an interesting insight as to the high fees which he could com-



Martin Van Butchell seated on his pony painted in mixed colours. He is attired like an eccentric Jewish mendicant

[Courtesy, Royal College of Surgeons of England]

celebrated, and generously paid this tribute to him:

"... It is not generally known that, amongst the number of his occupations, Martin Van Butchell was a good dentist, as a mechanic particularly."

It is very difficult to determine, with accuracy, how long Martin Van Butchell restricted his activities exclusively to the practice of dentistry: certainly not beyond 1783.

On December 1st of that year he petitioned for the granting of a patent for "New spring bands or fastenings" which he subsequently advertised extensively. Here are a few excerpts from an undoubtedly crazy document:

"To all to whom these presents shall come, of Martin Van Butchell of the Liberty of Westminster, Surgeon-Dentist, sends greetings. New spring Bands or Fastenings for the apparel or furniture of Man or Beast, which bands or fastenings, by their certain reaction or small friction, were more easy, safe, or lasting than other bands or fastenings, and of public good.

"Seeks from His Majesty, King George the Third His Royal Letters-Patent under the Great Seal of England for the term of fourteen years, for the sole making and vending the same within this Realm, the

mand thus early in his career. One hundred and five pounds for a set of dentures is at all times a very considerable sum of money, but more so in those far-off days. From this and other evidence, he would seem to have acquired a widespread reputation for fitting patients with comfortable, efficient artificial dentures, besides being a highly successful practitioner in other branches of the dental art.

For instance, James Snell, a respected member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the author of several works on dental practice, referred to the subject of this sketch as

Dominion of Wales, the Town of Berwick-on-Tweed.

"The brass wire to make spiral springs for my new spring bands or fastenings, which are called horse blinds, and fixed to the front of the bridle to be occasionally drawn over or before the eye of a brute creature by means of a rein, two pieces of lacing and four bits of string from the bottom of the said horse blinds, the said rein being pulled by a human being while on the back of the said brute creature."

He explained that these spiral springs were of a style similar to the "springs for an entire sett of artificial teeth," and could be used for any of the undernoted purposes:

"My new spring bands or fastenings are applied to the parts following—hat, bonnet, kerchief, hood, cap, curls, head, spectacles, œsophagus, stock, cravat, neck, shoulder, arm, glove, wrist, hand, finger, back, breast, belly, loins, navel, side, waist, womb, pessary, urethra, penis, thigh, knee, patella, leg, tendo-Achilles, ankle, heel, foot, toe, necklace, gallows, shoulder straps, stays, jumps, waistcoat, belt, girdle, truss, petticoats, pockets, breeches, stockings, garter, boot, spatterdash, gater, half boot, slipper, shoe, calash, clog, patten, artificial teeth, artificial arm, artificial hand, artificial thigh, artificial leg, artificial foot, bedstead, sofa, settle, couch, chair, stool, bell, clock, time-piece, watch, perch bolt, horse blind, bridle, harness, bredoon, snaffle, bearing rein, meadows rein, martingale, breastplate, saddle, saddle tree, saddle civet, saddle seat, saddle girth, surcingle, stirrup, stirrup leather, crupper, roler, and every other part and all other parts of the common chirurgical military, naval, travelling,

and all other apparel and furniture, or apparel and furniture of man or beast, or of human beings and brute creatures, where my new spring bands or fastenings can well be used."

Around 1785 a Dutch physician, having learned of Van Butchell's reputation as a dentist, decided to visit London specially to consult him about his teeth. So impressed was the visitor, not only with Martin's skill but also by his profound knowledge of anatomy and surgery, that, as a token of appreciation, he revealed his secret for the cure of fistulæ. From then onwards the versatile Van Butchell became even more renowned in this branch of the healing art than he had been in dentistry. Although he continued to practise the latter throughout his career, it was thereafter relegated to a subordinate place.

Further, he invented a special truss for hernia, vending at four guineas. It had a widespread popularity.

The phrase "eccentricities of genius" uttered by Sam Weller to Mr. Pickwick may aptly be applied to Martin Van Butchell, but, in his case, these were akin to madness and aimed at focusing the spotlight on himself. With this end in view, from about 1790 he supplemented his equestrian antics by advertisements which deliberately violated all the accepted rules of syntax.

Although obviously unbalanced, his newspaper notices were, nevertheless, arresting; consequently, their presentation rarely failed to arouse hilarity. They appeared frequently in such widely read newspapers as the *St. James's Chronicle*, *World*, *Telegraph*, *Argus*, *Morning Herald* and *Morning Post*. In fact, a considerable circle of readers must have eagerly awaited each issue for entertainment from Van Butchell's effusions. Here is an excerpt from one in the writer's collection; it appeared in the *Argus* of June 18th, 1791.

"MONARCHS
Good—as Great—pray pay
ATTENTION!

DOCTORS—are distanc'd—they don't
move one WEN;
But send—far away KING'S EVIL
Patients.

Few things more common—than keen
Heads to think—
What they can not do—Others never
will.

SCROPHULA—May be cur'd—Van
BUTCHELL says!—
By often touching—with his BALM
of LIFE;—

And other easy—outward—pleasant
helps:—
'HEAVEN gives a will—and directs
the way!'

JOHN HUNTER, Esq., F.R.S.
(—of Leicester-square,—)
Surgeon-Extraordinary to the King,
And Surgeon-General to His Majesty's
Forces.
PAIN

In the Teeth,—Gums—and adjacent
Parts.
Heal'd—without burning,—drawing,—
or any
Unpleasant sensation;—by the Author:
More than TWENTY years—a
Surgeon-Dentist,
(—He might have been so—to a
gracious King.—)
At his private House,—56,—Mount-
street.
Attends not—from home,
(—Between TEN o'clock—and TWO;
—nor at all,—)
Unless a GUINEA—with the
ORDER'S sent."

The naïve reference to the fact that
he might have been Surgeon-Dentist to
His Majesty (George III) is explainable
thus. It seems that Van Butchell had,
unsuccessfully, approached Lord Salis-

bury with a view to securing the Royal
Appointment. Not to be outdone, he had
the audacity to imply that, although
nominated, he had declined the honour!

Here is part of a striking advertise-
ment which appeared in the *Argus* on
July 9th, 1791:

"SOME ancient DONS

Having been modern Match'd,
Are told (with Respect) that for the
small Fee of an Hundred Guineas
(—Better so laid out—than on a
Mistress!)

MARTIN VAN BUTCHELL (—who
has six of the best made Babys in
Mount-street—)

will teach one Learner
'Such pretty—little—elegant—
Lessons—'

(—Unless he in DEED—should be a
LUBBER,—)

As may help to make him—comfort-
able: without expiring—like brave
MIRABEAU!

Heavy cash:—No Notes:
The Money—paid first!"

In referring to Spring Band Garters,
he informed his readers that the Mar-
chioness of Salisbury and the Countess
of Aylesbury wore them. Further, that
John Hunter had not only worn them
himself for six years but had also recom-
mended them to others. As a warning
to readers not to risk wearing imitations
he stated (*World*, June 3rd, 1791) that:

"Some—illegal Makers, Users, Exer-
cisers and Vendors of Patent Spring
Bands—have been cut off—(sorrowing)
—in their sins!

Let many others—(—warning take—
—in time!—)

'Cease to do evil!—and learn to
do well!'

(—COMBINATIONS—may—
Be weak—as COBWEBS!—)

—'MONARCHS—frowning—are—
Like LIONS—roaring!'—"

Present-day readers will, justifiably, condemn Van Butchell for revealing patients' names. However, this appears to have been quite customary in those days, because Stephen Paget states:

"When he [John Hunter] came to lecture . . . sometimes he quoted cases from his private practice—This kind of fracture happened to the Archbishop of Canterbury. When the Duke of Queensberry broke his *tendo Achillis* . . . Lord Cavendish's father always felt pain in his left arm from a stone in the bladder . . . General Murray, to whom I have often expressed a wish to peep into his chest, was twice wounded in this way."

Martin Van Butchell's fees for curing fistulæ were unique. Prior to beginning treatment a sufferer had to pay him two per cent. of his previous year's profits. He undertook to return the fee in the event of failure to cure. As a warning to liars, he added to his advertisements these significant words:

"ANANIAS, FELL!—DEAD: For KEEPING BACK!"

Further, he proclaimed that "Not even if it were the Empress of Russia, the Emperor of Germany, the King of Prussia, an Immaculate, or the Pope of Rome that were sorely smitten in their hinder parts with bad fistulæ and tormenting piles," would he permit the presence of a third person in the room. His attitude was that he did not wish help or to be hindered by "half-witted spies, slavish informers nor sad alarmists."

He made it abundantly clear that all consultations must take place in his house at Mount Street, between the hours of ten and one o'clock! and that on no account would he visit any patient. Said he: "I go to none." Although an eminent jurist is said to have offered him a fee of five hundred

guineas to attend him at his home, he declined to rescind his resolution. Later this particular jurist's wife suffered from the same complaint. She approached Van Butchell, offering him not only a fee of one thousand guineas but also to send her carriage to Mount Street to bring him to her house; he would not, however, yield ground!

To many readers it may seem almost unbelievable that John Hunter would associate with Van Butchell. Yet Paget mentions that he (Hunter) was not averse to meeting, in consultation, Plunkett, the cancer curer, and Taylor of Whitworth, the famous quack—in fact, the latter used to refer to him as Jack Hunter. *Autres temps, autres mœurs!*

Incidentally, Martin Van Butchell stated that he ceased to shave as the outcome of a conversation with John Hunter, who believed that such abstinence promoted mental and bodily vigour. He was ever eager to refer the curious to Isaac d'Israeli's writings, wherein it is recorded that, in ancient times, maidens were delighted to behold their lovers with beards. Also that a shaved chin excited horror and aversion.

At one time Martin was involved in a dispute with the authorities, who were determined to levy a special shop tax on 56 Mount Street. The case for this seemed clear, because, in his consulting room, he exposed to view a selection of teeth, spring bands, etc.

However, he cleverly outwitted his "aggressors" by adapting his patent spring bands into a gadget which functioned on a clockwork plan for opening and closing the front door at his entire discretion.

He vehemently stressed that the distinguishing feature of a shop was surely free ingress and egress: and that such a state of affairs certainly could not apply to him. Eventually his plea was ungraciously sustained. In fact, the resource-

Martin Van Butchell seated on his pony painted with purple spots. As William Hunter died in 1783, and his brother John in 1793, this print must be subsequent to these dates

Courtesy, Royal College of Surgeons of England

ful and witty Van Butchell then informed his persecutors that it would have been about as easy for an unauthorised person to enter his consulting rooms as it would have been for a lover to have invaded Fair Rosamund's chamber without the aid of the silken clue!

Martin Van Butchell was not averse to incorporating references to Christianity in his advertisements. For instance, in justifying his own long beard he used to state: "The incontestible Jesus did not shave because He knew better." On another occasion he addressed a plea: "British Christian Lads. Behold now is the day of salvation, God gives grace to man. Glory be to God."

Although this savours of blasphemy, was it? It must be realised that Van Butchell was genuinely very distressed at the pernicious effects of the infidel writings of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) on the youth of the country. In an effort to combat them he participated in Sunday evening meetings, reading with extreme gravity passages from the New Testament. Somewhat of a religious fanatic, Van Butchell steadfastly believed himself to be imbued with a mission. Probably this explained an admixture of religion and business. In fact, to know all is to forgive all!



*The Famous M^r MARTIN VAN BUTCHELL
Pupil to the late M^r Hunter.*

Detailed information is sparse concerning Van Butchell's two wives and his family. He apparently, however, paid due attention to the Mosaic command, because it is known that altogether he had nine sons and daughters; his second wife gave birth to her fifth child on June 20th, 1795.

On Sunday, June 29th, 1806, Martin Van Butchell, then aged 71 years, experienced a very severe blow when his second son, Isaac, was drowned, a fate which his wife and another son and daughter very narrowly escaped. Early that day Mrs. Van Butchell, her daughter, two sons and friends—thirteen in all

—set off in a cutter for Richmond. There they dined, but tarried unduly long; in consequence, on the return journey it was necessary to row against the tide.

Van Butchell's third son, Jacob, aged 22 years, having nautical experience, was considered the most competent to navigate the vessel. As a barge was moored at Putney Bridge a discussion arose as to how best it should be passed. In the prevailing uncertainty Jacob failed to turn the helm sufficiently quickly, and a violent collision resulted in the stoving-in of the side of the cutter. Most of the occupants were precipitated into the river: all but three were saved. Incidentally, it is interesting to learn that a funeral service for Isaac was held in Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, London. Widespread sympathy was naturally aroused for the inconsolable parents and their family. In fact, it has been recorded that some time before the funeral procession left Mount Street a crowd of upwards of five hundred persons had congregated there.

With the passage of time Martin Van Butchell's mad eccentricities became even more pronounced; and his quaint advertisements continued to appear with unfailing regularity. Here is a typical one from *The Morning Chronicle* of January 1st, 1814:

"God worketh in us to will and to do
His good pleasure
Fistulæ we CURE when others
can NOT

FEES according to *ABILITIES*

Sirs, be liberal to have health restor'd
Those that have been *CUT*, much more
than they like

For Old Fistulæ, Prolapsus-ani, Piles
or Carbuncles;

Will be made quite whole: new ones
are Cured

Often quite soon.

All noble doubters shall have evidence
Martin Van Butchell permanently
Cures Fistulæ,

Strictures, Piles and Carbuncles, without
Confinement, Bruising or Cutting
Mount Street, in London, No. 56,
very near Hyde Park."

Readers will note that, in this instance, he refers to "We" instead of "I," thus confirming the view that, due to advancing years and diminished physical powers, he was then (and probably had been for some years) assisted by a son whom he had trained.

So much mystery surrounded the date of his decease that even the erudite *Dictionary of National Biography* erroneously entered it as 1812. Due solely to certain advertisements in his collection, the writer is able to state definitely that Martin Van Butchell died in 1814, aged 79 years. On November 5th he was interred, the Rev. E. Williams officiating, in St. George's Church burial ground in Bayswater Road—now a garden belonging to the church. It is strange that no obituary notice can be found in any of the newspapers in which he had advertised so extensively.

With contemporary conditions ever in the forefront, an effort will now be made to evaluate, without undue bias, the case of Martin Van Butchell.

Foremost one must, in fairness, regard him merely as a facet of his times. Quackery and blatant advertising were then rife. There was an inherent fascination for the miraculous and a willingness to be deluded.

There is no doubt whatsoever that, despite ability, Martin Van Butchell's tactics were undoubtedly those of the charlatan. Besides, in him, the figure of impudence was displayed superlatively in the grotesque. He rarely failed to hitch his wagon to the advertising star: and this yielded a rich competency.

That he was a genius and an eccentric



Martin Van Butchell in later years. The signature is believed to be a facsimile

Courtesy, Royal College of Surgeons of England

the case of anyone suffering from his inherent handicaps. Justice is impossible if we consider him in the light of present-day standards or in retrospect with the cynical outlook of the scoffer.

From his advertisements it is clear that he attended to the physical ailments of chiefly the *élite*; his clientele did not comprise men or women of straw. This was in striking contrast to numerous contemporary empirics who almost literally flooded the Press with testimonials from, more often than not, mere nonentities.

Martin Van Butchell's claims to success cannot be lightly disregarded. In fact, a writer who conversed with many of his patients has stated that they considered themselves fortunate to have

who later became mad none can gainsay. In this connection, it would be wise not to lose sight of Hamlet's dictum:

Though this be madness, yet there's method in't.

and of Dryden's words:

Great wits are sure to madness near allied,

And thin partitions do their bounds divide.

Accepting these sentiments as apropos of Martin Van Butchell, one feels that due allowance is essential in

been under his care; in most cases despair had been turned into joy!

His personal habits are interesting. For instance, he was a strict teetotaller and an amiable and cheerful companion who entirely disregarded prevailing fashions.

He always dined alone: his wife and family likewise by themselves. Further, to summon them, he whistled, varying the note according to the particular member desired.

Like most mortals, many of his

actions were decidedly open to criticism. Let us, nevertheless, be sufficiently generous to consider a few points on the credit side.

In spite of Martin Van Butchell's tactics, pursued throughout many years of practice, both as a dentist and in the cure of fistulæ, hæmorrhoids, etc., never once was he sued for *malpraxis*. This tends to confirm that he possessed sound judgment and ability.

Such immunity from legal actions is all the more remarkable when one dispassionately realises that he had been an extremely busy practitioner whose name was anathema to many contemporary physicians and surgeons. These mentors would undoubtedly have clutched avidly at his failures: and arraigned him, unceremoniously and publicly, hoping thus to eliminate a competitor.

Finally, Van Butchell did enliven the world of his day by quaint antics, which must have reacted as a tonic on many persons, tending to divert attention from minor ailments. Certainly ours is a strikingly colourless age compared with conditions that prevailed in the reign of George III!

An interesting story surrounds Martin Van Butchell's eldest son, who had been an apprentice with, and later assistant to, his father. In 1809 he was practising at 24 Broad Street, Golden Square, London, near where the firm of Claudius Ash & Sons was established about eleven years later.

Although christened Edward Martin, for business purposes he always omitted the former name. For example, one of his advertisements reads:

"The present Martin Van Butchell, sanctioned by noblemen, eminent physicians, surgeons, *accoucheurs*, grateful patients and subscribers."

He radically departed from his father's plan by offering, in return for a

fee, to impart his method of curing fistulæ, hæmorrhoids and strictures without confinement, caustic or risk. His hours were: "At home till 12 noon daily, Sundays excepted"; and his fees were "according to ability."

This son became his father's sole executor and successor. Unfortunately for him, other persons with the same surname were advertising that they, too, could cure similar disorders: in fact, they copied Edward's cards, etc. The worst offender was Sidney Job Van Butchell, whose efforts annoyed Edward so intensely that he was forced publicly to disclaim any connection with him. In fact, Sidney had a varied career, e.g., in 1808 he was a pawnbroker's apprentice and, later, a bank clerk.

It is worthy of mention that on May 20th, 1829, a coroner's inquest was held on the body of a silk manufacturer who had consulted Edward Martin Van Butchell (then practising at 2 Half Moon Street, Piccadilly, London) concerning a rectal stricture. He was alleged to have passed an instrument into the rectum. As an outcome, the victim expired six days later after suffering severe pain, in spite of having been attended by two well-known surgeons. They stated that death had resulted from peritonitis, caused by a small wound in the rectum, arising from the passage of an instrument.

After a few minutes' deliberation the jury returned a verdict of "Manslaughter"; and Edward Van Butchell was committed to Newgate.

In reporting this inquest the Editor of *The Lancet* stated:

"It is but fair to say that, although Van Butchell is not what is denominated a regular educated surgeon, he enjoys, and we believe deservedly, a great reputation for his treatment of diseases of the rectum. Had the coroner been a medical man, we be-

lieve that the verdict would have been different."

Commenting in a subsequent issue of *The Lancet* on Van Butchell having been liberated from Newgate, the Editor remarked that he doubted very much indeed if any evidence would be elicited at the trial to justify a verdict of "Man-slaughter," and added:

"Let it not be said that the balance of justice is held with a partial hand in England, even between quacks, whether of hospital, or of non-hospital notoriety."

This opinion was later confirmed. At the trial at the Old Bailey Edward Martin Van Butchell was honourably acquitted. Having examined only two witnesses for the prosecution the learned judge, Baron Hullock, stopped the proceedings, stating that there was no case; and added that he was "not aware of any principle in law which would sanction such a prosecution."

In an editorial *The Lancet* declared that the whole affair had been monstrous and unjust, and had aroused a widespread feeling of indignation among the public. Also that:

"Mr. Van Butchell has had many years' experience in these complaints, and we know that, in numberless cases of great difficulty, he has been pre-eminently successful, and patients are occasionally sent to him by some of the first men in the profession."

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