

In a practice dating back only a comparatively short time I have many times already heard the words, "Oh dear, I had such good teeth until I began taking iron." I have no doubt those of you who have been in practice some years can recall instances where, after you have put a patient's teeth in a splendid condition, they return to you after an absence of a few months, and to your surprise exhibit the ravages of extensive decay. On enquiry you have found that the patient has been using a medicine containing tincture of iron. Some years ago Dr. Smith, of Edinburgh, Scotland, conducted a series of experiments from which he concluded that of all the salts of iron the most corrosive were the tincture of the chloride, and the sulphate. The authorities, so far as I could find, throw very little light on the nature of the chemical action that takes place any more than to say that it is undoubtedly due to the action of the free acid present. Attfield, in his "Pharmaceutical Chemistry," says that it is practically impossible to obtain a preparation of ferric chloride free from an excess of H.Cl. It is noticed on experimenting on teeth in the test tube that the first appearance of change is a white spot, which rapidly extends over the whole surface of the tooth. This would indicate disintegration due to a mineral acid.

Admitting, then, this disastrous effect on the tooth, we come to the question: What is our duty as dentists? This question is one needing to be handled with great delicacy, involving as it does that other much-vexed question, the relations existing between the physician and the dentist, and it is with some timidity that I approach it. The conscientious dentist will not be content only to repair damage done, but will strive by every means in his power to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of any further damage. If he felt that the use of vulcanite or amalgam would seriously endanger the health of his patient by producing a species of blood-poisoning, he would abandon the use of these articles, though they might seem indispensable to the practice of dentistry. The conscientious physician, judging from the same professional and humanitarian standpoint, will be careful that in treating one condition he does not seriously affect some other organ or part of the system of his patient.

All the works on materia medica and therapeutics that I have been able to consult in preparing this paper, very distinctly say that this preparation of iron is specially injurious to the teeth, and should be used with great caution, so that if physicians are guided by recognized standards of medical practice they will not neglect, when they prescribe it, to give the patient such directions as will enable him to intelligently guard against evil results. From enquiries made and from my own observations, I am led to believe that there is a lamentably large class of physicians who,