

In all scientific work in our day there has come a recognition of the fact that the prevention of disease is equally a subject for investigation as well as its cure. In medical science the labors of a Pasteur or a Koch have excited universal interest because they have sought to anticipate the inroads of disease, and to fortify the citadel of life from its attacks. Political economists are no longer content to deal with social and economic evils with a view of alleviating their effects, but, if possible, to prevent their recurrence. And statesmen are asking for that which shall keep the body politic in a healthy state, and thus avoid the necessity of empiric legislation. This is nothing but the application of common sense to the affairs of life, and the attempt to carry out in practice the old proverb, "that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Certainly the professional man is fully aware of this, as he is continually asked to fight evils after they have become desperate, and when all he can hope to do is partially to restore diseased parts to health, perhaps to be blamed that he cannot effect a perfect cure. How often it is to our regret as well as to the patient's permanent loss that our aid was not earlier sought, when good results could have been attained. Both we and our patients would then have a satisfaction which fatal delay has now rendered impossible. Even from a selfish point of view it is important to impress those who seek our aid to do it in time. In China, where everything is reversed and done just opposite to what we do, it is customary to pay physicians while their patients keep well; when they fall sick the pay stops. How it would work with us, I do not know. It looks as if our fines would be heavy, indeed, if we were fined every time a patient had a toothache. But, perhaps, it would work the other way and render us more alive to the importance of seeking to prevent in those under our care the great American disease of bad teeth and of no teeth. The time might come when he would be most honored in our profession who could show the greatest number of sound teeth in the patients under his care, rather than the man who had best succeeded with desperate cases; or who had best supplied, by artificial means, a permanent loss of the natural apparatus for the mastication of food.

The laws of heredity and congenital defects may be trusted to furnish cases enough which will test our skill and scientific ingenuity to the full, and the perversity of human nature is such that do what we may a large number will neglect the proper care of their bodies, and continue to furnish cases enough of a desperate character.

I venture, therefore, to call your attention to the subject of the care of the teeth in childhood as a matter where neglect is almost universal, and where prevention properly begins.

We have all been surprised at the neglect of intelligent parents