

fevers, whose stomachs turn if they taste the millioneth part of a cucumber, or point a fork at an early radish. The realms of medical and surgical practice are full of such biographies of bigotry and idiocy. Vaccination alone has been and still is accused as the cause of disease, as the parent of blotches, rashes, erysipelas, suppuration of the glands of the neck—all of which were due to a pre-existing tendency. It would be wearisome and unprofitable to recall such analogies. Weak-minded people are susceptible to all sorts of mental impressions—the people who make fortunes for quacks; they are as easily possessed of the amalgam devil when it is set on its legs as of any other demon.

What has chiefly led to the cry against amalgam? Precisely in 1898 what roused so many in 1842: the fact that it is used by quacks indiscriminately, with faulty manipulation, faulty preparation of cavities, faulty preparation of abscessed roots. It is used as a hasty stop-gap, as a last resort, often, in teeth which are pathologically unfit for any filling. Most of its failures are those of manipulation. To crown all, like vulcanite, it is cheap, and this is its curse, in one sense.

But what of the mercury in it? When it is properly prepared and hardened it loses all mercurial properties. The fact that mercury enters into its composition is no more evidence that it will produce mercurial effects, than that the muriatic acid in common salt will decompose meat when applied to it. The law of affinity protects both the mercury and the muriatic acid from any injurious consequences when united with the other materials. The mercury is held by this law so firmly by the other metals, and is so completely incorporated with them, that it is no longer mercury, but forms with the other metals which are united with it, a new metal, chemically compounded. To obtain any mercurial effects, we must obtain from the hardened amalgam an oxide, or have it combined with an acid. How can the separation be effected? By heat, or by dissolving the paste in strong nitric acid; but either process would destroy life, for it requires a heat of 700° before silver can be forced from its union with mercury, and an acid of such strength that the tooth and surrounding parts would be destroyed long before the paste was dissolved.

If mercurial vaporization enters the circulation through the lungs, the infinitesimal amount can do no harm; but any mercury that vaporizes in the temperature of the oral cavity, would remain vaporized and pass out by the expiration, as it went in, a vapor.

I regret that I have had to run these remarks together in a very hasty manner, as I intended to give a talk instead of a paper. The revival of the question meets us face to face. If we are using poison, let it be proved; then let it be anathema. But let us not lose the courage of our convictions, every time a crank yells a war-whoop of self-praise conjoined with the condemnation of the practice of his confreres.