

The Function of the Schools.

We frequently hear the charge urged that dental schools are engaged in making scientific men, and not dentists; that they teach too much of theory and too little of practice. Instances are cited of graduates who were unable to insert as good a filling as some practitioners who had never attended a college. These criticisms are almost invariably made by illiterate men, who affect to despise book knowledge, and who claim that they themselves, all unlettered as they are, can teach a student more of dentistry than any school in the land.

When such an imputation is made, it is well to enquire what is understood by dentistry. If it be the extraction of teeth and the insertion of cheap rubber substitutes, robbing the people of the organs supplied by nature that fees may be charged for the frightful caricatures of the shop, there may be a modicum of truth in these assertions. That was the dentistry of a half-century ago. The practice of to-day is a very different thing. The schools teach that the first duty of the dentist is to save teeth, and this demands a knowledge of something more than extraction. The practitioner of to-day must be competent to treat all forms of oral disease, and this requires a knowledge of physiology, of pathology and therapeutics. The man who knows nothing but the making of false teeth, is no more worthy the name of dentist than is the man who makes wooden legs entitled to the name of surgeon. Even the ability to insert a thoroughly compacted gold filling does not make a dentist. He may have attained to the highest point in manipulative ability, and yet be nothing more than a mechanic. There is altogether too much of this judging of a man's professional standing by his mere skill in technics. Something more is demanded from a really professional man.

Not infrequently do we hear it said that Dr. A. is an excellent dentist, because he has the ability to make a beautiful artificial denture, when he knows nothing of the broad principles upon which a really intelligent practice is founded. Or Dr. B. may have won a great reputation as a professional man, because he can with a mallet hammer gold into a cavity in a tooth, and so finish it as to make a fine artistic display. We do not mean to under-