

TOOTH EXTRACTION AND ITS ALTERNATIVES FOR THE RELIEF OF PAIN.

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The following remarks are intended as an earnest remonstrance against the practice of extracting teeth for the mere relief from pain, a practice which those country surgeons who are, by reason of distance from special dental aid, compelled to pay attention to the teeth of their patients seem to think is the only possible form of treatment, and therefore perfectly justifiable. I am aware that many who call themselves dentists are guilty of a still more extravagant waste of human teeth; often, I fear, prompted by a motive of self-interest, which ought to be a sufficient reason for striking their names off the register; but, while an appeal to these men—if, indeed, any appeal would influence them—would be more in place in the pages of the dental journals, those special journals do not, as a rule, come into the hands of general practitioners of medicine and surgery, and no country surgeon can do without his *Lancet*. I constantly hear cases like this: "I got toothache while I was staying at such and such a place, and, as there was no dentist near, I went to the doctor, and he took the tooth out." There is never any mention of an effort to save the tooth, and in these days, when surgery is making such rapid advancement in every direction, it is time that such empiricism should come to an end. I doubt if there is any other organ possessing a title of the functional importance to the maintenance of human health and strength that rightfully belongs to a grinding tooth which would not receive far more consideration if it were a source of pain than any surgeon ever thinks of giving to a tooth.

When a tooth aches, the first suggestion is to have it out. But I do not hesitate to say, after many years of experience, that it is never necessary to extract a tooth merely for the relief of pain. That there may be, and are, many other reasons of sufficient importance to justify extrac-

tion I of course admit, and these should have proper consideration in cases of toothache; but what I mean to say is simply this, there are two forms of pain arising from teeth, which will include at least 90 per cent. of all the cases that will come to a dentist in good practice; we will call these primary and secondary toothache, and I contend that in neither of these is extraction ever the remedy to be chosen without careful deliberation.

Primary toothache is congestion of the tooth pulp; the unyielding walls of the pulp cavity permitting no expansion, there is intense pressure on the nerve tissue, and consequent pain, which finally terminates by strangulation of the pulp. This is true toothache, arising in the tooth, but it may be felt in the terminals of any of the branches of the fifth nerve on the corresponding side of the face, and is rarely felt in the tooth where it originates, unless there is suppuration in the pulp, in which case the peridental membrane will be affected. It will be obvious that many cases of so called neuralgia in the face are simply toothache, and a careful search will generally reveal the offender, but there will be no occasion for extraction. Careful excavation, sufficient to allow an escape of blood from the pulp, will at once relieve the pain, and an arsenical dressing will devitalize the pulp, and there need not be anything like the pain of extraction. To complete the operation, the pulp must be removed from the root canals, and these filled to the apex; but this will call for special skill, and no harm will be done if there should be three or four weeks of delay. Nothing in a dentist's experience is more melancholy than to look into a mouth and to see six or eight detached grinding teeth without an antagonising tooth in the opposite jaw.

The secondary form of toothache is usually admitted by the sufferer to be toothache, because the pain appears to be intensified by occlusion with an opposite tooth and by pressure of any kind. In reality the pain is caused by gangrene of the pulp, and I am quite aware that this is considered so serious a matter that most surgeons would order immediate extraction, but it is not at all a necessity. It is a matter of every day practice with