

Seabury (Fr. N.)

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE,

AT THEIR

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING,

HELD IN BOSTON, OCT. 26, 1881.

BY DR. F. N. SEABURY, D. D. S.



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*Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the American Academy
of Dental Science:—*

“ ‘ Facts, facts, facts,’ said the gentleman, ‘ Facts, facts, facts,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘ We want nothing here but facts, hard facts.’ ”

Facts are the foundation and superstructure of all science, eminently so of Dental Science, which it is the object of our Academy to develop and disseminate. But if we confine ourselves to the bare facts of our calling, as an applied science, or a manipulative art, we are in danger of losing sight of that other and more important side of our life-work, namely, the development of our own manhood, which, after all, is the paramount good we are to do in, or get from life's work, and failing in which, all other goods are trifles.

At our monthly meetings, the facts and theories of our profession offer themes for discussion and demonstration of constantly increasing interest, and he who imparts most,

is the one who receives most. "There is that giveth, and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth, that tendeth to poverty," saith the old proverb. And in no field is it more manifestly true than in the interchange of thought among professional men.

Last year we had the privilege of listening to an admirable treatise on the unwritten law of Dental Ethics.

At this time, I shall speak of the Professional Spirit, the false and the true, and indicate some of their results in a professional life.

We are always at the parting of two ways, the narrow and the broad.

What shall I get from my profession, and what shall I do in it?

And we fall or rise, in the scale of being, as we yield to the seductions of the one, or resolutely pursue the other.

Any man, be he young or old, who proposes to himself no higher motive for work than to make money, is looking *down*, and not up, and assimilates to that low type of animal life that roots and grubs in the earth, to satisfy animal tastes. Gloss it as he may from himself or others, the true motive of his life will ultimately declare itself. He will limit his qualifications to the point of the greatest pecuniary returns. He will do his best *only* for such patients as can afford the largest fees. He it is who says, "I studied enough medicine and surgery to get my diploma, and that is all I care about it." He it is who, when he obtains a full and paying practice, directs his door-keeper to say to the humble caller, "Dr. A. or B. does not work for servants." In which he violates *all* ethics, professional, human, and divine.

When he examines a mouth, his concern is not what is the best I can do for this patient, but what will yield me the most money. Will it pay best to *extract* or *fill*; to preserve the natural teeth, or insert artificial substitutes?

In these, and in many other ways, which will suggest themselves to practical men, may the disposition I am trying to portray manifest itself.

He is suspicious and ungenerous with his professional neighbors. Thinks they are plotting against him, misinterprets any friendly advances on their part, and by detraction and faint praise, will neutralize, as far as he can, any credit they may be entitled to.

Will patronize societies and associations, as long as they confer on him honors and emoluments, and will flout them when they do not.

Now such a man, if he is smart, which means if he is cunning enough to conceal from his patrons the motives which actuate him, may make money; but the constant watch and ward he must keep over himself, to continue the disguise, makes him a slave to the meanest and hardest of task-masters, and he must be a very genius in duplicity, to keep the secret to the end. The end! What is the end? We will suppose he has attained to his object. By industry, he has accumulated money. By shrewdness and good judgment, he has made profitable and safe investments, and is a rich man. The whole habit of his life has tended to stifle his sympathies. Constant watchfulness has made him suspicious of others. In fact, selfishness bears its legitimate fruit. Expecting from others only what it has to give, namely nothing; and so, being centred in himself, his riches turn to "Apples of Sodom,"

filled with ashes. But our main interest is in that other way. What shall I do in my profession? And here opens to view a very satisfying career to the man who feels himself to be one of the great human family, and who, wishing to help on the general good, chooses, as his part of the world's work, the practice of dentistry. He is never entirely satisfied with the thoroughness of his preparation, nor the perfection of his methods and appliances. He welcomes the suffering to share in his ministrations, rich and poor alike; and to him, the most profitable *day* is the one in which he accomplishes the most substantial good for his patients. His firm, yet sympathetic manner of conducting painful operations, his gentle insistence in pursuing his own methods, the results of experience, in accordance with correct principles of practice, against their preconceived notions, will secure to him, in the *end*, the lasting respect and gratitude of his patients. Having nothing to conceal, his mind is free from suspicion of others, and the generous flow of friendly thought and feeling between dentist and patient, converts the severest labor into an agreeable service. His intercourse with his professional brethren will be characterized by open and pronounced hospitality. And while he will strive to make each operation an improvement on any that have preceded it, he will rejoice in any advance from any quarter. Having freely received, he will freely give to any honest seeker after truth. In the appointments of his office, while its business aspect should never disappear, it should express the dentist's true regard for his patients. It should contain as much the air, and as many of the comforts of a home, as is compatible with its business character and the

means at the command of the owner. But shall the true dentist take no thought for his own? Shall money not intrude itself, as an element of his professional life? By all means. It was said by one whom we all revere, "The workman is worthy of his hire," and again, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." Good work is entitled to good pay, and as a rule will receive it. There are exceptions, we all know, but as a *rule*, we get our deserts, and find in the world the counterpart of the disposition we carry into it. Every man should put a proper valuation on his work, and firmly insist on its payment, and as a *rule*, his claim will be recognized.

"To the pure all things are pure." The true dentist will keep his mind pure, and his body under, and so will be slow to recognize anything but purity in others. To him all men and women visiting his office are *gentlemen* and *ladies*, and he will in no case omit the observance of the strictest rules of politeness. He is temperate in all things, remembering that the fumes of mingled whiskey and tobacco are not more offensive than the surcharged breath of the glutton and dyspeptic. But the preparation for a true professional life and usefulness, does not end with the acquirement of scientific knowledge, manipulative skill, and mechanical appliances. The true dentist must be a cultivated man, cultivated on all sides. He is intelligent, in the general acceptation of that term. No delectante smattering of a few fashionable accomplishments, that he displays on every convenient occasion, to attract attention to himself; but having posted himself on topics common to educated people, and the passing events, he will become a good listener, if not a good talker. He

cultivates the social element in society, and among his professional brethren. No society is long held together by the consideration of bare facts *alone*, however valuable in themselves.

As I have said before, the facts of any science constitutes its foundation and framework, and their consideration are necessarily the common topics of any society constituted to develop such science; but unless they are occasionally clothed upon by the imagination, and enlivened by social converse and good cheer, their constant repetition palls upon the mind. Unless society meetings are occasionally relieved from consideration of the Gradgrind system of hard dry facts *alone*, society interest will wane, and the membership will fall off.

When on returning from a society meeting, one is asked what new thing or idea he has gained, he may be unable to answer the question satisfactorily to himself, or his questioner; but at the same time, he is conscious of having received an *impulse*, that quickens and brightens his life and thoughts, and lifts the weight of drudgery from the routine of professional work. This the stay-at-home member misses; for, while he can gather the facts which can be stated and published, and weave them into the monotonous fabric of his plodding life, the life weariness is not alleviated by them, nor relieved from the monotony of work. "All work, and no play, makes Jack a dull boy," is an adage older than any of us, and was always true. Count not that time wasted, or that money squandered or misspent, that we part with in social enjoyment.

It is the loosening the bow-string, by which the elasticity of the overstrug bow is regained. For the *moment*,

we are boys again, when the wisest man gives place to the funniest. If our youth is not regained, the youthful spirit is, and "As a man thinketh, so is he." But, says one, "I take vacations, and recreate then." All very well, and the more the better; but that is not professional recreation, but recreation out of it, and is no manifestation of professional life. The true professional man is happy among his fellows, and will esteem it a privilege to promote, as much as in him lies, the social and family feeling in his society meetings.

And so I would say my word in favor of the social side of our meetings, monthly and annual. If we analyze the forces that constitute our lives, we shall find the social element one of the most potent for our good.

Our annual dinner, while the *menu*, choice and elaborate as it may be, would not of itself tempt any of us away from the delights of our home circle and its humble fare, supplemented as it is with the generous flow of social sentiment and feeling among choice *friends*, it becomes the brightest spot in our professional calendar, cementing our friendships, and forming the strongest bonds of society life.

"He must increase, but I must decrease," was said by one who was accounted the greatest of all the prophets, of his illustrious successor, the brightness and glory of whose career was to eclipse his own; and it was one of the sublimest marks and proofs of his *sainthood*, that he could thus yield the palm, and rejoice in the rising light before whose brightness his own should pale.

We cling to our positions, and may be are jealous of the rising reputations of young men, who make inroads on our

domain. We are slow to acknowledge to ourselves that we are growing old. We wonder that our riper judgment is not always sought, and are ready to complain that patients leave us for younger men; but it was always so. The world renews itself. Each individual and race of men, animals, and plants, have their bounds that they cannot pass. They rise, flourish, and decline, in their allotted time, and give way to their successors in the grand march and round of the universe. Happy he who fills up the measure of his allotted time with useful deeds, and bequeaths to his successors a worthy example of faithfulness in his calling. Welcome, then, the oncoming hosts' increase, enlarge the field, multiply and improve methods of practice, and while our time has been glorious, may yours be more glorious.

Be not alarmed at the coming numbers, lest the ranks should overflow; there will never be too many who will do their whole duty, never too many good men in any profession. And so, pursuing the even tenor of his way, doing his part in life, the valued friend, the confidential adviser, the true dentist, comes to the end of his professional career; life's work faithfully done; a healthy mind in a healthy body; he fills out the picture of Shakespeare's Adam:—

“ Though I look old, yet am I strong and lusty, for in my youth I never did apply hot and rebellious liquors to my blood; nor did with unbashful forehead woo the means of weakness and debility. Therefore my age is as a lusty winter, frosty but kindly.”

