



DENTISTRY—Its Earlier and Later History



DENTISTRY is that branch of the healing art, which has for its province the treatment of diseases and lesions of the human teeth and their replacement by substitutes when lost.

While civilized nations consider their teeth the most beautiful in their natural color and form, some nations mutilate their teeth by chipping, filing and altering their form, in some cases also staining them to conform to their peculiar ideas of beauty. Mutilation is practiced by certain wild tribes of Africa, New Guinea, Java, and the Tasmanian coast of Australia, and is prompted by fashion, superstition or conformity with religious rites.

Filing of front teeth to points is practiced by Abyssinians to increase the savageness of their aspect and terrify their foes. With the Malays, filing the teeth is a religious act. In Indo-China and Japan, girls have their teeth stained black at the time of marriage.

Early History — Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells of the attention given to diseases of the teeth as well as of the eye and ear in Egypt. Belzoni and other writers claim to have found in Egyptian tombs artificial teeth, made of ivory and wood, some of which were mounted upon gold plates.

Teeth in mummies are said to have been found filled with gold and a white cement, but of this there is no positive evidence.

In 1884, Dr. Van Marter, of Florence, discovered in the museum of Corneto, Italy, skulls exhumed from Etruscan tombs in which pure gold wire was wound around natural teeth which indicated that in the spaces between where teeth were lacking, artificial or possibly human teeth had at some time been thus supported in place.

Later History—During the eighteenth century, dentistry became a subject of more critical inquiry and thorough investigation. Men of intelligence and education devoted themselves to it exclusively, and, as a result, its advancement in both literary and scientific directions during the nineteenth century has been most marked. This is evidenced by the fact that from 1800 to 1892 there were published in Europe and America some 200 volumes, treating exclusively on the diseases of the teeth.

Until the latter part of the eighteenth century any advance in dentistry was confined to Europe, but since then the most rapid advancement has been made in the United States.

The first dentist practicing in the United States of whom there is any account, was one Le Maire, who accompanied the French army in 1775-83, then came to this country. Soon after LeMaire's arrival, came an English dentist named Whitlock. The first native dentist is believed to be John Greenwood, who began practice in New York about 1778.