

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE TEETH? WHAT METHOD OF CARING FOR THEM DO YOU ADVOCATE—FOR A SCHOOL CHILD, FOR A HEALTHY ADULT, FOR A SICK PERSON? WHAT UNTOWARD CONDITIONS MAY RESULT FROM DEFECTIVE TEETH?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss A. M. Douglas, University College Hospital, W.C.1.

PRIZE PAPER.

The teeth have three functions: (1) to bite; (2) to grind; (3) to aid in voice production.

Animals that use their teeth for defensive purposes have long pointed teeth in the front of the jaw; those that live on herbs are provided with flat-topped grinding teeth. Man has his teeth arranged to suit his method of living. For the first six months of life he lives on milk and does not require them. He then gradually cuts twenty teeth. At the age of five or six these fall out one by one, and are replaced by thirty-two, which accommodate themselves to the growing jaw. Incisors and canine teeth are arranged in the front of the jaw, bicuspid and molars or grinders at the back.

The teeth break up the food into particles and mix it with saliva, so that it becomes a soft mass that can be swallowed without danger of causing an obstruction.

A well-kept set of teeth are not only of benefit to the owner, but aid general health. They are a great pleasure to look at and form an asset to beauty.

A child should be made to clean his teeth before breakfast in the morning and at bedtime as a habit. He should clean them systematically: (1) with teeth closed, brush front teeth, teeth on right side, then those on left side; (2) with jaw open, teeth on left, teeth on right (crowns) in upper and lower jaws; (3) inner side teeth on left and right. The mouth should be washed out thoroughly several times. If possible the child should be instructed how to gargle. When circumstances permit a dentist should see the teeth at least once a year, so that any decay may be detected. Some children require to have teeth extracted to make room when the jaw is unusually small. Sometimes mechanical devices are necessary to keep the teeth straight and within biting distance of each other. All plates should be rinsed after each meal and removed at night when possible.

A soft tooth brush of suitable size should be used, and an antiseptic dentifrice. The least expensive is precipitate of chalk (mixed with

half the quantity of camphorated chalk it is pleasanter to use).

Inflammation of the gums, and even abscesses at the roots of the teeth, are common. Such accumulations of pus are rapidly absorbed into the lymphatic channels, resulting in enlarged glands, tonsillitis and serious systemic poisoning. The normal character of the permanent teeth is frequently greatly impaired both by the local infection of the temporary teeth, and by the effects of the generally lowered vitality.

An adult should clean his teeth in the same manner. It is of course better if they can be lightly brushed after each meal.

All false teeth should be removed at night, cleaned, and left in a tumbler of water until morning.

Decayed teeth should never be left un-stopped as they are the cause of endless disorders. Charcoal gives a bright polish, but corrodes the dentine and leads to decay.

A sick person able to care for his own teeth should be provided with the means after each meal. Those who are too ill require much care in this from the nurse. The mouth should be swabbed out with cotton-wool rolled round the end of a pair of forceps, soaked in glycerine and borax or glycerine and lemon. In cases where the mouth and tongue are very coated a weak solution of peroxide may be used, followed by the glycerine. This attention may be required at frequent intervals, varying to three times a day, according to the patient's condition. The mouth-tray should also contain a bowl of weak carbolic (1 in 20) or cresol, into which the used swabs can be put.

Before an operation the teeth and mouth must be thoroughly cleansed, as this helps to prevent post-operation pneumonia and parotitis. False teeth must also be removed and not replaced until the patient has quite recovered from the anaesthetic.

Defective and decayed teeth are responsible for disorders of the whole body: (1) Nasal disorders (communication via anterior nares); (2) oral diseases (via Eustachian canal); (3) throat infection; (4) dyspepsia; (5) parotitis; (6) pneumonia; (7) gingivitis; (8) inflammation and ulcers of the mouth.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss P. Thomson, Miss J. Mason, Miss M. Robinson.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What treatment have you seen given in a case of ex-ophthalmic goitre, and how would you nurse such a case?

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)