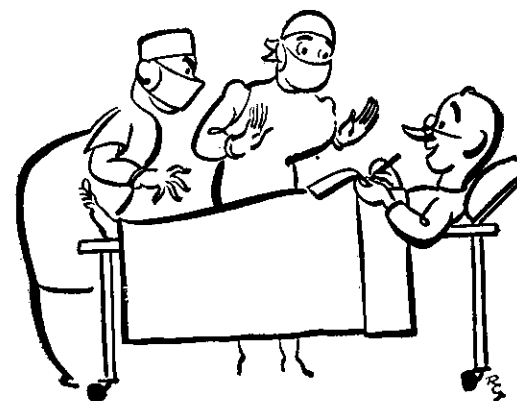


# A JOURNEY ROUND MY WISDOM TOOTH

Written for "The Listener"

By J. GIFFORD MALE



IF it hadn't been for Frici Karinty, this story wouldn't have happened, for it was while I was reading "A Journey Round My Skull" that I bit clumsily on a boiled sweet and felt an agonising spear of pain that told me almost certainly I had an abscessed wisdom tooth.

You may think a man must be pretty morbid to spend nearly 300 pages describing how he was operated on for the removal of a tumor from his brain, but that is just the thing a man of fine sensibilities like Frici Karinty would do. Personally I think medicine owes him a debt. It is not everybody who would struggle to keep conscious for four hours with half his skull removed, and afterwards tell what he was thinking about and how he reacted.

And without boasting I think dentistry will owe a debt to me, for I've never before heard of anyone who has put down on paper his reactions in the dentist's chair having a tooth out under gas. I don't pretend I'm going to do it as efficiently as Frici Karinty did, or in such detail, because I haven't time to write 300 pages. But don't think for a moment that getting a tooth out was any less worrying to me than his tumour on the brain was to Frici Karinty. If you've ever had an abscessed tooth and felt chilly little waves of fear go through you at the thought of getting it out, you'll understand what I mean.

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AS I said, it was a boiled sweet that first made me conscious of the abscess. One minute I was reading "A Journey Round My Skull" and sucking a boiled sweet, and the next my tooth was leaping and throbbing in an exquisite agony. I had had toothache before, but never anything like that. You know how it is sometimes; waves of pain that won't let you stay still. I paced up and down all that night trying to stop the pain, but it was no use. When day came I was only waiting until I could telephone to my dentist.

Now I have always had a fear of dentists, principally due to an unnerving

experience I had when I was quite a small child. I had been given gas for the removal of a back tooth. As I hadn't had gas before, I endured the rubber nose clamp and the tightening feeling round my throat without making much fuss, but when I was under the gas I had the most frightening dream I have ever had.

I remember every detail of it clearly. I found myself, how I do not know, suspended in the air in a corner of the room, looking down on the dentist's chair and watching my tooth being removed. There I was, up in the air, and yet my body was in the dentist's chair groaning loudly while the dentist perspired and tugged at my back tooth. It was a puzzling predicament, and I remember thinking to myself, "Well, I must be dead. They gave me too much gas."

I came round all right, of course, but the experience left its mark, and ever afterwards I suffered horribly at the mere thought of taking gas.

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THERE was no option about going to the dentist this time. Anything to put an end to the pain.

I made an appointment as early as I could, and eventually I found myself in the dentist's chair, still suffering wretchedly.

The dentist took one look at the tooth, and instead of reaching for his hypodermic needle as I expected him to, he said, "I won't touch that tooth with local. We'll give you a whiff of gas."

Would you believe it, at that very moment my toothache left me completely.

Five seconds before, the nerves in the left side of my jaw had been screaming out to be rescued from the abscess. Then—not a vestige of pain.

I know people often talk about their toothache leaving them when they get to the dentist's. It is nothing more than imagination, as I know very well. But this was not imagination. Every tooth in my head might have been as sound as a bell.

"That's funny," I said to the dentist. "The pain has gone completely."

He laughed in the hearty, objectionable manner that dentists have and said, "Frightened it away, eh? But it didn't

frighten the tooth out. Come along, we'll give you a whiff of gas."

I began to break out into a profuse perspiration, and I could feel the colour ebbing from my face. I gripped the arms of the chair to steady myself, and said in a low voice. "I think I'll leave it. It doesn't hurt at all now, and maybe I could get it stopped."

The dentist laughed again and said, "In an hour or two it will be back again, worse than ever, and it's well past stopping."



I said, making an attempt to treat the matter as if it were a joke, "It's a funny thing with me, I'm scared stiff about taking gas. It's because of an experience I had when I was a child. I have what you might call a gas complex."

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I wish he had laughed at me again, because then I would have got mad and walked out of the chair and left him. Instead he became interested and said he had once had something of the sort himself. But he had cured himself by adopting a purely scientific attitude to the taking of anaesthetic, counting his own pulse beats, trying to measure his resistance to the anaesthetic, and so on. He was soon cured, and he and another dentist even used to give each other gas regularly just to study its effect.

"Now if you'll be scientific about it," he said, "you'll conquer that complex as easy as falling off a log."

Well, the upshot of it was he talked me into it, and I sat huddled up in the chair thinking, "Good God, I'm in for it. I wonder what it will be like. Suppose I have a weak heart and he gives me too much." And the worst of it was I didn't have a suspicion of toothache. It was like going out to be shot in the early morning on an empty stomach.

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MEANWHILE the dentist was wheeling over a contraption with a couple of metal cylinders and a round gauge and some rubber tubes. Then he swung the chair back until it was almost horizontal, and seemed to be tying my head with a cord that cut into the corners of my mouth.

"You'll find this a most interesting experience," the dentist said, and then he whipped a little rubber nozzle over my nose and told me to breathe in

slowly. It wasn't any use struggling, as he was holding me down in the chair. I breathed in deeply, and to my surprise I didn't suffocate immediately. I began to feel a little better, and took a deep breath. I could hear the gas hissing somewhere.

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I TOOK some more deep breaths, and I was still feeling fine until suddenly my ears began to buzz, and the window which I was watching began to swim out of focus.

Then I was away up in the corner of the room, looking down on myself just like that time when I was a child. There I was, stuck away up in the corner, and there were the dentist and the nurse working over me in the chair. I knew very well it was me in the chair, as I could recognise myself, and I could even hear a dim sound of voices talking. But I knew that I was really in a corner of the room near the ceiling, looking down on the whole operation.

And that's where I am at the moment, thinking this over just as though I were writing it down on paper. I've been up here for an eternity, and I can't seem to get back into the chair.

The dentist and the nurse seem worried. They're working away at a great rate, and now the nurse is running out of the room.

I wonder if anything is wrong?

## Is "Insane Music" Doomed?

THIS war is likely to cause a reaction among composers against the "insane music" for which the last was responsible, according to Dr. James Lyon, noted English composer, who is examining in Sydney for the Trinity College of Music.

"It is hard to see how the pendulum can swing any further in the direction of mad, outre music, and it seems that it must soon swing back to sanity," he says.

"It is likely that, after this war, there will be a search for beauty, and that composers will be less war-minded in their compositions than they were after the last war."

Dr. Lyon advocated Government registration of music teachers in Australia to ensure that no one should teach until he or she had been taught how to. Registration had done much to improve the standard of teaching in England and Canada, he said.