



about those

TEETH

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IT HAS been estimated that more than 60 per cent. of sickness in industry is due directly or indirectly to dental origin. Indeed, dental disease is one of civilized man's worst enemies. It causes suffering and ill health, and shortens many lives. Yet it can be conquered or, at least, checked if only the patient plays his part, remembering that "an ounce of care is worth a ton of repair" in maintaining sound healthy teeth.

During our lifetime we produce two sets of teeth—the first or primary dentition, and the second or permanent dentition. These first teeth are also known as baby teeth, milk teeth, or temporary teeth, and begin to appear round about the seventh month after birth. Usually, by the time a child is two and a half years old, a complete set of twenty teeth is present—ten in each jaw. Nature has intended these to remain until the permanent teeth have developed and are about to appear; and these temporary teeth have been aptly described as the "reserved seats" for the permanent teeth.

Great care should be taken to see that temporary teeth are preserved and not lost through decay. Normally, they are shed when the permanent ones, which are lying below them, push upwards to break through—an event which begins to take place about the sixth or seventh year, and continues perhaps until the thirteenth or fourteenth year, when all but the four wisdom teeth will be present. Thus there are usually twenty-four permanent teeth in position at twelve years, and at fourteen years, twenty-eight teeth are present. The remaining four teeth will not appear for some time yet, varying between the eighteenth to twenty-sixth years. Then the permanent set of thirty-two teeth is complete.

The temporary set is therefore intended to remain intact for at least the first six years of a child's life. They are needed not only for mastication, but to maintain sufficient space for the permanent teeth below them to occupy their normal positions. While the permanent teeth are developing beneath them, the roots of the temporary teeth are slowly being absorbed, enabling them to be shed at the correct time. Should even one of the primary teeth be lost too early, the distribution and arrangement of the permanent teeth might be affected, resulting in mal-occlusion and overcrowding of the arches.

So great is the need for keeping these first teeth sound and healthy until the second teeth are ready to appear that the Government has provided a School Dental Service free of cost. School clinics undertake this work, and in addition they keep a watchful eye upon the oncoming permanent teeth. When these show the least tendency towards decay, they, too, are filled before the cavities become larger. Unfortunately, this treatment by the School Dental Service is limited on account of staffing and other difficulties, but the time may not be far distant when all primary- and secondary-school children will receive complete dental treatment.

The military authorities also realize the necessity for maintaining healthy mouths in all Service personnel, where physical fitness is of the greatest importance. Treatment is compulsory, but it is free and pays good dividends in sound health and physical fitness.

In industry, too, many of the large industrial plants in Britain and America maintain their own dental services free of charge to employees. Production is thereby maintained and less time is lost on account of general sickness. Employers