

DENTAL BILL.

Adjourned debate on second reading.

The Hon. G. BROOKMAN intended to support the second reading. He had felt for many years that they should have some legislation on the subject. For a long time there had been an influx of gentlemen claiming to be dentists, and many people in South Australia regretted having placed themselves in their hands. Only a short while ago he accompanied a friend to one of the registered dentists of another state. The way he went about his work was something marvellous. Not only did he take the tooth out, but a large portion of the gum also; and as a matter of fact if the man had known his work he needed only to cleanse it, and not take out the tooth at all. Much as he disliked it he was prepared to allow the registration of those who were at present practising. He should prefer that all should pass an examination, and certainly in regard to future dentists he would say that they should pass the examination set by a competent board. He would insist, so far as his vote went, on having two competent dentists with diplomas and two medical men on the board, and he was willing to have two laymen. If that were done the status of the profession would be raised. In the examination at the University they secured the best talent possible, and often sent the papers to London and the other states. Mr. Guthrie mentioned that the Marine Board was composed of all sorts of persons, and they granted certificates to seamen. The granting of a certificate to a seaman was altogether different from qualifying a dentist. The dentist was to act on his own afterwards, while the seaman acted under officers. (Hon. R. S. Guthrie—"They don't give certificates to seamen at all. I said they give them to officers.") Then they should be competent to do so. He had noticed in many of the Acts of Parliament passed in recent years a tendency to have qualifications, such, for instance, as qualified mechanics in the Factories Act. He hoped that before long a chair would be established at the University of Adelaide to enable the dentists who wished to pass the examination to become qualified by lectures and a proper course.

The Hon. J. L. PARSONS, in reply, said that in ordinary circumstances a member who had charge of a Bill and had promised support for the second reading, was glad to at once enter committee and proceed with the measure in detail. But in the present case the conditional promises of support which had been vouchsafed to him, in some instances, at any rate, threatened not only to spoil, but absolutely to reverse, the purpose for which the Bill was introduced. Some of the proposals were distinctly hostile to the object he had in view. When the Greeks came with presents it was time to beware. So those voluntary offers of assistance accompanied with explanations were to him like so many danger signals, and he took due warning. As he held tolerably strong opinions in regard to what the Bill ought to be, and as he distinctly intended to pursue a definite course, it was expedient that he should reply, and state more in detail some matters in connection with the measure than he did on the second reading. His connection with the Bill was simply that, having had for many years a knowledge of the serious mischiefs wrought through unskilful treatment, he was seized with the fact that in this community there was not, as in all other English speaking communities, an Act controlling dentistry. The Government of the state ought long before to have introduced the Bill. It should have been a Government measure. Negotiations were entered into to that end, but they broke down, and he stepped into the breach, desiring solely and only to bring about a better state of things in regard to the unfortunate people who had to become the patients of dentists qualified and unqualified. The condition of the state from a dental point of view was deplorable. The result in delay of legislation had been that South Australia had become the breeding and dumping ground for quacks and charlatans. (Hon. R. S. Guthrie—"That's a libel on the men who are practising.") He was not going to do any one now practising an injury, but when legislation existed everywhere else, the absence of legislation in one place made it a place to where the unqualified went; and the absence of legislation had caused a large number to take the name of dentist, and carry on the practice of dentistry, who had been absolutely unqualified, and had been doing infinite mischief. (Hon. R. S. Guthrie—"No proof of mischief.") The hon. member must have been living in an obscure part of the state if he did not know that serious mischief and wretched malpractice had been constantly occurring in the past 15 or 20 years. The introduction of the Bill last year was like lifting a stone which had been lying still for a long time. They had all done that, and noticed how the peculiar creatures underneath squirmed when they saw the light. That accounted for the eager efforts that had been made by a certain class of practitioners to secure favourable consideration and votes of the members of Parliament; and he believed the loudest clamour had been made by the most unfit. He was not there as the representative of either the qualified or the unqualified or the incompetent man. His disposition was to say, "A plague upon all your houses." He wanted to get on the statute book a measure which would secure to the people that those who attended to their teeth should be competent. The Bill was most carefully drawn by Mr. L. von Doussa, who had given an immense amount of time and attention to it. It was a marked instance of good draftsman'ship, and in his opinion the provisions were just and equitable. In it there was no monopoly desired or intended for the qualified dentist. Qualified men were open to come at any time and compete with those already in the state. But there was a distinct advantage to the unqualified man if the Bill became law. It would secure for him a status by legislation. He entirely agreed with the views expressed by Mr. Brookman that as a matter of abstract right every practising dentist ought to be called upon to pass an examination before he was allowed to practise. It was a mon-

strous thing that any one who had taken a title and rented premises would be granted the right by law to style himself a dentist when 12 months before he might have been a blacksmith or photographer, or barber, or anything else. It was the extreme of liberality, and it was only the fact that it was impossible to get the measure through without such a provision that made him agree to it. He therefore accepted that all who were practising before November 1, 1901, should receive by the operation of the Bill the right to carry on the practice of dentistry, and be allowed to inscribe upon their doorplates "registered dentist" or "registered dentists;" but should not be permitted to put upon their doorplates or their stationery, or in advertising any other title. (Attorney-General—"Do they do more than that?") In answer to the Attorney-General he would say that in consequence of the style of and the titles used by dentists in another state, and also because the Dental Board had taken action in the matter, he wrote to the Dental Board of New South Wales and ascertained that it was a fact that two dentists who had been practising and using the titles of "D.D.S." had been compelled to remove those letters from their doorplates. He was credibly informed that similar cases existed in South Australia at the present time. The operation of the Act would be to provide greater safety to the people from the unskilled and uninformed, and afford the gracious protection of a benevolent state. The people would be protected from the sordidly incompetent who only used their position for the purpose of charging fees and filling their pockets. In order to carry out the purpose of the Bill it appeared to be absolutely essential that the board to be appointed, certainly in the first instance, should consist of qualified professional men so far as the professional members of it were concerned. But he was quite willing that there should be a layman who was neither a doctor nor a dentist, who was a man of affairs, a man who was perhaps more free from professional prejudice, to assist the professional members of the board. Dentistry as it appeared to him should not be a trade, but a profession. He wanted to raise it. Considering the important part the teeth played in the general health of the individual and the community, and considering the serious physiological matters involved, only those should practise dentistry who were competent and whose ability had been tested; and of those only the ones who possessed the highest qualifications should be appointed to manage the affairs of the profession. That was his reason for considering that to appoint any practising dentist simply because of the introduction of the principle of universal registration seemed improper and absurd. A man might be carrying on with fair success both as regarded the extraction of teeth and the manufacture of pieces and whole sets of teeth, and yet be absolutely unqualified to sit on a professional board, especially when that board was to be charged with the duty of examining as to the qualifications of article pupils, and those who after the first registration had the privilege of applying to be registered as dentists in the state. Suppose the conditions of the medical profession were similar to those appertaining to dentistry at the present time, and it was considered necessary that every herbalist, bone setter, and faith healer should be registered. Would anybody suggest that a herbalist or a bone setter or a faith healer should be appointed to sit on the medical board? (Hon. E. Lucas—"What is the object of putting a layman on the board?") A layman would be a commonsense man of affairs, and would see that fairplay was rendered all round. In the amending Bill now before the New South Wales Parliament it was proposed to appoint two laymen on the board. Supposing the law was in the same condition as dentistry at the present time, and that every bush and fo'castle lawyer, every smatterer, who was carrying on a certain quasi-legal practice, was registered, would any one think that one of their number should be appointed to a legal board? It would be only the qualified men who would be appointed. When the Licensed Surveyors Act was passed the qualification was—"a) Any licence granted before the coming into force of this Act, and existing the holder thereof to practise as a surveyor in South Australia; or (b) any actual appointment as a surveyor in the service of the South Australian Government at the time of the passing of this Act, and for three years prior thereto." There were some whose position was a little doubtful at the time. There was universal knowledge and registration, but they were not put on the board of management. Only those who were qualified were thought fit for the position. Who would ever think of confounding an engineer with a stoker, or a boilermaker with a sledge hammer hand? Neither the stoker nor the sledge hammer hand would expect to sit with the boilermaker. In an article on trade unions in Temple Bar, it was stated that "No one must make beliers unless he has served his apprenticeship or is a member of the union." When the Factories Act was passed in 1900 the question of appointing inspectors came up, and clause 41 of the Act read "Every inspector under this part of this Act shall be a qualified mechanic." This was a question of looking after the mouths of the people, and they proposed to put on the board men who understood their business. In the inauguration of a new system, and in dealing with such a condition of things regarding the so-called dental profession in South Australia, it was according to right, reason, and commonsense that those appointed to sit upon the board should be qualified men. The layman would be a useful member of the board, but he would not be called upon to examine any physical or scientific subject. Mr. Vardon asked him why they should be more particular and stringent with regard to the members of the first Dental Board than they were in the other states. His reply was because there had been no legislation here, and because South Australia had been the last refuge to those who could not get in in the other states. Because they were in the worst case the establishment of such a board required that they should have competent and qualified men at the head. He put himself in the position of a man who had no diploma, and

who had passed no examination, but who had learnt by his own individual study and observation to become efficient, and he would neither ask nor expect to be placed on the board. With regard to the administration of anaesthetics, he wished to say that, on the broad commonsense and scientific grounds, only those who had a sufficient knowledge of the human body and a nature of anaesthetics should be permitted to employ them to take away the consciousness of any human being. To secure anaesthesia the vital organs—the heart, the lungs, and the entire respiratory system—had to be controlled and placed in an absolutely subnormal condition. He was sure there was not a member who would, in any circumstances, if he knew it, allow any one to administer anaesthetics to him unless he believed that the man understood enough about his body to know when he had given his patient enough, and understood enough about anaesthetics to be able to administer them wisely and scientifically. But that was a question for professional and scientific men. He directed the attention of members again to the letter sent to Mr. L. von Doussa, dated August 21, 1900, and signed by 43 leading medical men of the state. It was as follows:—"1. That it is most expedient for the welfare of the Commonwealth that persons who are not professionally qualified, and who may, under the suggested Act, become registered as dentists, should administer any anaesthetic except in the presence of a duly qualified medical man. 2. The fact that two inquests have been held in Adelaide upon fatal cases arising from tooth extraction with anaesthetics by unqualified men points clearly, in the interests of the public, to the necessity for the inclusion of the clause No. 33 in the Dental Act now before Parliament relating to the administration of anaesthetics by unqualified persons. 3. Our contention is greatly strengthened by the fact that other cases of injury following tooth extraction under anaesthetics administered by unqualified men are known by members of our profession to have occurred, and which cases were not fatal merely by happy chance." It was signed by the late Drs. E. W. Way, Drs. J. A. G. Hamilton, C. E. Todd, A. A. Hamilton, R. H. Marten, in fact, the leading medical men of the state. He had looked up some authorities on nitrous oxide gas. The textbook of inorganic chemistry, by G. S. Newth, F.I.C., F.C.S., demonstrator in the Royal College of Science, London, said, "Nitrous oxide when inhaled exerts a remarkable action upon the animal organism. This fact was first observed by Davy. If breathed for a short time the gas induces a condition of hysterical excitement, often accompanied by boisterous laughter, hence the name laughing gas. If the inhalation be continued, this is followed by a condition of complete insensibility, and ultimately death." (Hon. R. S. Guthrie—"If it be continued.") Yes; but it was a dreadfully edged tool in the hands of an unskilled man. The quotation went on:—"When the gas is to be used for anaesthetic purposes it should be purified by being passed first through a solution of ferrous sulphate to absorb any nitric oxide, and afterwards through caustic soda to remove any chlorine which may have been derived from the presence of ammonium chloride in the nitrate." Members would therefore see that it was not a simple matter of A B C. This was a chemical compound liable to deterioration, and through carelessness, to contain most dangerous elements. The Dictionary of Chemistry by Watts, vol. 4, page 67, contained the following:—"If nitrous oxide gas is to be used for inhalation great care must be taken in its production, as it is very liable to contain poisonous impurities." The Handbook of Chemistry by Leopold Gmelin, in vol. 2, page 374, stated:—"The effects of nitrous oxide gas on different people is remarkable, rendering some quietly to sleep, while it sends others into delirium with violent movements like St. Vitus's dance, which, in one known case, lasted for several days." Nood's Lectures on Chemistry contained the following on page 225:—"Nitrous oxide gas, as prepared for commerce, is frequently found to be impure . . . in which case the gas is very injurious to the lungs." The matter as to the limitation of the administration of anaesthetics to qualified men or in the presence of legally qualified practitioners was referred to Professor Anderson Stuart, of Sydney, who wired:—"Have read letter and two enclosures, and cordially recommend clauses limiting anaesthetics to qualified men." Having looked at those books it occurred to him that they had in this state two men of eminent ability who were in a marked degree qualified to give advice on the question. He had therefore communicated with Mr. J. Crowther, demonstrator in chemistry at the School of Mines, who had replied as follows:—"I have the same opinion re nitrous oxide as any other chemist should have, and that is that it should only be administered under medical or other skilled supervision, and not by any one who chooses. You may use this communication in any way you think it." The other authority he had consulted was Professor Rennie, of the Adelaide University, from whom he had received the following letter:—"I am very strongly in favour of the clause in your Dental Bill which is intended to prevent unqualified dental practitioners administering anaesthetics, including nitrous oxide, except in the presence of a legally qualified medical man. As regards nitrous oxide, it is frequently made by dentists themselves, and it is quite possible that an inexperienced man may so prepare the gas as to include in it impurities which would be a source of danger. But apart altogether from that the same considerations apply to nitrous oxide as to all other anaesthetics, namely, that if anything should go wrong with the patient the unqualified man does not know what to do. There is no doubt whatever in my mind as to the wisdom of the clause referred to. I hope you will succeed in getting it included in the Bill." He considered that the position he had taken up in regard to the board and to the administration of anaesthetics, including nitrous oxide gas, was abundantly justified. (Hon. R. S. Guthrie—"There are any amount of authorities on the other side.") He ventured to say that it would be impossible for Mr. Guthrie to produce authorities of the same standing as those he had quoted to contradict their