

Orthodontia: Its outlook

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100
years

As the last century turned, Edward Hartley Angle¹ walked to the front of the room to deliver his presidential address titled as that chosen for this article. This was the first meeting of the newly formed Society of Orthodontists, the forerunner of the American Association of Orthodontists, and he was to deliver the first paper. As he looked into the faces of those in the small audience that morning, it must have been clear to all that he was eager to begin and determined to seize the opportunity presented.

He acknowledged with “tender reverence” some of the pioneers of orthodontia and those who provided foundation for the organization, by showing pictures of several individuals: Fauchard, Schange, Fox, Harris, Wescott, Magill, Kingsley, Baker, Guilford, Brady, Case, Matteson, Ottolengui, Jackson, Farrar, and Goddard. Some of them were in the audience before him.

As he began his opening remarks, it was clear that Angle was particularly exhilarated for he said “this meeting marks something so grand, so noble, something destined to elevate dentistry in general and so greatly benefit humanity that even we who are assembled here this morning do not yet dream of its full importance, though we, as founders, are most interested and our hearts beat highest in enthusiasm, anxiety, and love for this branch of science...”

The focus of this excitement and the theme of Angle’s paper centered on the founding of the Society of Orthodontists, which he referred to as “a society organized for the promotion and exaltation of that branch of dental science known as orthodontia...” Although unbridled in enthusiasm for this development, Angle spent most of his words describing the sour conditions in which orthodontia was found and its relationship to dentistry. In so doing he argued the rea-



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sons the Society had come to be formed, its potential, and its responsibilities.

Angle pointed out that the initial history of orthodontia was interwoven with that of dentistry, a situation that was advantageous, but also very problematic. Commenting on the times, Angle suggested that dental science had made marvelous progress both in its teaching and practice, but similar efforts in orthodontics had “...so far amounted to little more than the merest smattering.” Angle characterized the teaching of orthodontics as “lamentably defective” and went on to say that “I do not believe there was another branch throughout the whole realm of science so badly taught as that of orthodontia, its teaching in many schools being truly a disgrace to the science and to pedagogy.”

He suggested that although dentists had a high degree of skill in performing general operations in dentistry, the same cannot be said of the practice of orthodontia. In fact, he was emphatic in noting that “...more

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blunders are committed than successes gained, and ...more injury has been done...than benefit conferred." He noted that able and competent, and even brilliant, dentists were available in nearly every city and town, "...yet the number who could pass an intelligence test in orthodontia or who could scientifically diagnose and meet the requirements in treatment...is remarkably limited. In fact they might easily be counted on the fingers of one hand. The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

He noted that the great mass of literature on the subject of orthodontia was almost wholly devoted to the description of many thousands of "regulating appliances." He suggested that some are "... marvels of ingenuity and skill, others absurdly complex, most unsightly, crude, and inconvenient in the extreme, as inefficient and faulty in principle as it is possible to imagine, and made to operate in direct violation to many of the true physiological requirements of tooth movement..." Angle concluded that "they are produced in ignorance and operated in ignorance."

He suggested that the breadth of attention in treatment was narrow and usually directed at correcting the malposed incisors of the maxillary arch, which were only "...mere symptoms of the true condition..." He strongly suggested that the science of occlusion was utterly disregarded. This, of course, was linked to his feeling about the "pernicious" extraction of teeth characterized as "...though rarely wise is, alas, far too often resorted to, even at the present time, by those whose duty it is to care for the teeth and who should resort to less harmful, far wiser, and more effectual and scientific plans of treatment."

He noted "...that the merest fraction of those needing attention (ie, orthodontia) are receiving it..." He also suggested that parents seeking treatment for their children are often given erroneous and conflicting advice in response to inquiries when they are told the children are "...too young, or, too old, or let them alone and nature unaided will perform the desired cure, or wait until all teeth have erupted before beginning treatment, or other discouraging answers, such as prohibitory fees, etc."

To the point, Angle concluded that orthodontia "...is least understood, least studied, and made secondary alike in dental colleges, in practice and in dental societies." Better considered, it "...is a great science by itself..." that deals with "...different tissues, principles, and art problems from those treated in ordinary dentistry and is extremely exacting in its requirements, necessitating peculiar talent, energy, fitness and devotion to certain lines of study which are unlike those of other branches of dentistry..." He noted that at that time "...there have been only a few who have had the courage to completely specialize the practice of orthodontia, but the result of

the efforts of even those few has been truly remarkable. Orthodontia has been revolutionized... Indeed this is the very age of specialization, and was there ever such an age of progress? Wise is he who recognizes the natural and resistless power of specialization."

So Angle provides a charge, "So we must work patiently and wait and believe that orthodontia, so replete with possibilities for improving health and the happiness of orally deformed humanity, and for uplifting the highest phase of art, or that of improving lines of beauty ...applied...to the living, divinely patterned human face, will and must be a firmly established and useful specialty of dental science, and if this is inevitable, as I believe it is, then it is fitting and proper that this society should be established, for our best efforts can only yield the best fruit in strong, earnest, sincere, concerted action."

If I could be granted an impossible wish, it would be that, after Angle concluded his remarks and was standing in front of the audience to receive applause, he would see Tom Graber rise in the back of the room to offer a report on how things have turned out.

Although others of this present generation of orthodontists could be chosen, Tom, by all measures of knowledge, experience, and contribution to orthodontics, would be an exceedingly ample spokesman to comment on the material presented in Dr Angle's paper and to reflect on the milestones of advancement attendant to the turn of the new millennium, century, decade, and year 2000. Best of all, he would absolutely love to do so.

With buttons bursting and bow tie dancing as he spoke, Tom could give an extensive accounting of the extraordinary progress that has been made across all aspects of orthodontics over the past 100 years, advancements so stunning and beyond the vision of Angle and his colleagues that they might consider whether Tom had lost his senses. Unfortunately, Tom would also have to report that, although great progress has been made, several of the issues raised by Dr Angle remain frustrations today. Still, in the end, Angle would surely be pleased.

Alas, this wish cannot be granted, and this encounter will not occur, except in the literature. This then is the purpose of this celebration issue of the *American Journal of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics*. Designed to provide significance to the centennial anniversary of the American Association of Orthodontists and the culmination of outstanding and honorable service by Dr Tom Graber as Editor-in-Chief of the *AJO/DO*, the articles that follow intend to offer an opportunity for a look back at our history, consideration of our present, and a glance forward into the future of orthodontics.

As to the value of placing this message in a bottle to be considered in present and future times, more than merely taking stock, this issue marks an opportunity for

reflection and consideration of the development of the specialty of orthodontics, its educational foundations, its body of knowledge, its practice, and its organization. To a certain extent, prediction becomes reality. Thus, to pay attention to the driving forces in orthodontics—the knowledge, thoughts, excitement, appreciation, sense of responsibility, and even the dreams—of some of the leaders in orthodontics is to know some of what is to come. Having read their words, it will be

clear that we will face challenges to progress, as did Angle. Yet, as in our past, there is greater determination toward the advancement of the specialty and the quality of the care provided our patients in the future. The best is yet to come.

REFERENCES

1. Angle, EH, Orthodontia: Its Outlook. Presidential address. Amer Soc Ortho Trans, 1901,1-7. Den Items.

AAO MEETING CALENDAR

- 2000 — Chicago, Ill, April 29 to May 3, McCormick Place Convention Center (*5th IOC and 2nd Meeting of WFO*)
- 2001 — Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 5 to 9, Toronto Convention Center
- 2002 — Baltimore, Md, April 20 to 24, Baltimore Convention Center
- 2003 — Hawaiian Islands, May 2 to 9, Hawaii Convention Center
- 2004 — Orlando, Fla, May 1 to 5, Orlando Convention Center
- 2005 — San Francisco, Calif, May 21 to 26, Moscone Convention Center
- 2006 — New Orleans, La, April 29 to May 3, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center