



Word of Mouth – 6

This issue's extract is taken from Anthony Trollope's "Barchester Towers", first published in 1857. It contains one of a number of interesting references to apothecaries in Trollope's novels. The setting is a cathedral city inspired by Salisbury.

Dr Proudie, the newly consecrated Bishop of Barchester and Mrs Proudie, his formidable partner had conceived the promise of an evening party on the largest scale as a happy harbinger of their advent. Tickets of invitation were sent out to everybody calling himself a gentleman or herself a lady within the city of Barchester including a circle of two miles around it. It was intended to be a thronged and noticeable affair and preparations were made for receiving some hundreds.

The guests came in shoals . . . The five Barchester doctors were all there, and old Scalpen, the retired apothecary and toothdrawer, who was first taught to consider himself as belonging to the higher orders by the receipt of the bishop's card.

Comment:

Toothdrawers and dental surgeons were indeed searching for professional recognition and social acceptability in the years preceding the Medical Act of 1858 which gave the Royal College of Surgeons of England the power to grant the qualification of Licentiate in Dental Surgery, the first such qualification in this country. The earlier Apothecaries Act of 1815 did not define accurately the functions of an apothecary and there is no doubt that from the earliest days, toothdrawing and other dental operations were considered within the range of their activity. This entitlement was so jealously guarded that, as late as 1921 any registered pharmaceutical chemist or chemist and druggist who could claim that he had a "substantial practice as a dentist" which included "all the usual dental operations" was entitled to admission to the Dentists Register without proof of any formal dental education.

H. W. N.

* * * * *