

CORRESPONDENCE

active airway and an appropriate stimulus seems to be all that is needed.

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The First Anesthetic Mixture: A Correction

To the Editor:—We suggested that the originator of anesthetic mixtures was not John Gabb, as generally assumed, but Josef Weiger, a Viennese dentist. He used a 1:4 chloroform-ether mixture in December 1847 or January 1848.¹ We were wrong.

The London dentist John Tomes and his friend Jacob Bell, a pharmacist, used a mixture of sulphuric and chloric ethers for dental surgery at the Middlesex Hospital in early 1847.^{2,3} Tome's obituary mentions that ". . . in 1847 Sir John was using it (sulphuric ether) at the Middlesex Hospital for tooth extraction with varying success, sometimes using a mixture of sulphuric and chloric ethers. . . ."² Jacob Bell commented in an editorial that ". . . as a substitute for sulphuric ether . . . it (chloric ether) . . . had been tried with success . . . it was found to be more agreeable to the taste than sulphuric ether and less apt to produce coughing and irritating of the organs of respiration. In other respects, the operation of the two agents corresponded, and we have repeatedly administered them both together. . . ."³

These two sources do not specify the exact dates, the mixture's ratios, nor the principal anesthetist. O. P. Dinnick, reviewing the contemporary medical journals and the Middlesex Hospital records, recently provided circumstantial evidence that Bell administered chloric ether (and, presumably, its mixture) for Tomes' dental surgery in early January 1847.⁴ It must have been before January 25, when Tomes, disappointed with chloric ether, resumed using sulphuric ether exclusively.^{4,5} Both he and Bell soon enthusiastically adopted chloroform.³ Chloric ether, also known as oil of the Dutch chemists, was an alcoholic solution of chloroform of variable strength that had been used in medicine for many years. Dinnick's article⁴ brilliantly reviews its chemistry and history, as well as Bell's contributions to

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anesthesia and pharmacy, including his discovery of chloric ether as an anesthetic.

Thus, Bell and Tomes, preceding Weiger by 1 yr, were the originators of the first anesthetic mixture.

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