ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Figuier’s Forlorn Figure: Horace Wells and the “Humbug Affair”

From Paris, France, in 1868, Furne, Jouvet and Company published the second volume of author Louis Figuier’s *Les Merveilles de la Science ou Description Populaire des Inventions Modernes* [The Wonders of Science or Popular Description of Modern Inventions]. This volume focused on telegraphy, electroplating, ballooning, and etherization. In Chapter 3, on page 645, figure 341 (left) depicts an anguished medical student–turned–dental patient seated next to the forlorn standing figure of dentist Horace Wells (close up, right). The illustration’s legend translates to: “Horace Wells’ [sic] experience, of the extraction of a tooth, after the inspiration of nitrogen protoxyd [nitrous oxide] made before the students of a Boston hospital.” This incomplete anesthetic would later be dubbed the “Humbug Affair” by Wells’ detractors. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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