

Editorial.**Doctors' Dangers.**

It may once have been true that the physician's vocation was one of honor and held in high respect by the community. But if it ever occupied this relation it must have been in the days when doctors were philanthropists, pure and simple, when, like virtue, their labors were their own reward, when their fees came in as honorariums and when it was unprofessional to render a bill, and when to have sued for it at law would have been an unheard-of procedure. Since, however, the profession has been placed on a commercial footing as far as reward for services is concerned, there are few, if any, callings more thankless. We would not, of course, be understood as implying that gratitude to the doctor has entirely forsaken the hearts of the people, or that the family physician is never regarded with other feelings or with more respect than if his were merely a commercial or mercenary vocation. His life is still often made happy and the burden of his labors lightened by attachments on the part of his patrons which are never extended to others, but the number by whom he is regarded with the feelings which, if we are to credit tradition and the novelist, he once inspired has, in these latter days, become comparatively small. It has become the rule among the people to place a strictly commercial value on the physician's services, and to reward him, if they reward at all, with grudging when he fails to effect a cure.

But the physician is, furthermore, liable to positive dangers. We do not especially refer to his increased liability to disease from exposure to contagion and infection, to his heroic exposure and death at the post of duty when all beside have fled, to the perils which beset him in treating the vicious and depraved, nor to his exposure to inclement weather and his broken seasons of

sleep and repose. These, one would think, would be enough to deter any young man from entering the profession; but there is yet another danger, which, though not directly inimical to life, nevertheless frequently infringes on liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We refer to his liability to suits for malpractice, and to criminal prosecution. Nature is the physician's powerful ally, and, doubtless, in the majority of cases is entitled to the largest meed of praise. Without her innate capability of setting herself right when she becomes disturbed, medicine would, in a very literal sense of the term, be a dead science. But it occasionally happens that she is unable to restore herself, and it is then, being herself a very intangible and pecuniarily irresponsible agent and execution proof, that the doctor comes in for the brunt of the blame. This blame not unfrequently takes the form of an action at law for damages. There is a *genus homo* (we will be pardoned for the unintentional slur on the race), a sort of human vampire, who initiate and encourage actions of this nature, and who justify their doing so on the plea that they are lawyers, and it is therefore their privilege to levy this species of blackmail. Their plan is first to urge the doctor to "settle," and, failing in this, they seek to extort by a resort to law.

Two unusual cases have occurred in this city during the past year, one of which ended in a suit for damages, and the other in a criminal prosecution of the attending physician. The cases are both very interesting as well as instructive, and one illustrates a new danger to which doctors are liable. The first case was that of a physician who, having been called to attend an accouchement, made the usual examination, and, having administered a dose of ergot, left the patient to attend some other calls in the vicinage. During his absence the pains came on with a considerable degree of

severity, and he returned just after the head had been expelled. The child was still-born and efforts to revive it proved unavailing. The father of the child manifested great grief at its loss, and placing his estimate of its value at \$20,000, commenced an action for the recovery of that amount. Of course it required only an examination of the case to demonstrate its baselessness, and the judge did not even allow it to go to the jury. The annoyance, however, and the expense of preparing and retaining lawyers for the defense were considerable. The physician in question was a reputable and qualified practitioner and a gentleman of high standing in the community, but his reputation was not sufficient to save him from attack. The fact that he administered ergot was *prima facie* evidence that it was necessary, and the profession will not be properly protected in its rights until a thorough course of instruction and graduation from a reputable medical college is regarded as sufficient protection, in the eyes of the law, against suit for malpractice.

The other case to which we refer illustrates, as we have said, a new danger to which physicians are liable. A married woman sent for her family physician to consult him in reference to a fœtid discharge *per vaginam*. The nature of the discharge and a knowledge of the fact that the woman was syphilitic convinced the physician that the trouble arose from a dead fœtus, the woman being about three months advanced in pregnancy. Means were instituted, with success, to remove the mass. Through some means the report that an abortion had been procured came to the ears of the authorities, who at once instituted an investigation, which resulted in the physician's honorable discharge from the arrest under which he had been placed. The annoyance, however, and the stigma of arrest for a crime second only in turpitude to murder itself, remain, and there are no means of redress.

It is difficult to suggest a remedy against evils such as these, and they will probably always remain among the dangers to which doctors are liable.