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Original Communications.

STEALING PATIENTS.

There are certain conditions which complicate the body medical and which do not seem to be understood as well as they should, not by the laity, but by physicians themselves. In our daily intercourse with these we are continually regaled with the recital of certain little stories of more or less doubtful authenticity concerning acts which may or may not be true. These tales are related with some purpose in view and do but little towards the furtherance of the intended end except within the narrow bounds of some small circle composed of equally narrow individuals. That this should exist is no matter for surprise as medical men are human, swayed by human passions and likely to give way upon occasion and be influenced by the small traits of character which are almost universally observed in human beings.

The subject which we desire to consider is that of stealing patients. It is a cause for common complaint among a certain class of physicians who seem never to tire of the subject. They are full of illustrative cases and seem to know more about similar instances in the practices of others than those directly interested in the matter. Of course, they never steal cases from any one else

and the reason for this will be considered later on. For the nonce suffice it to say that this robbery is one which we have been endeavoring to trace in a sort of general way and in this pursuit after knowledge we have become acquainted with a few facts that shed much light upon the subject.

We will premise by saying that there is no such thing as stealing a patient. We must distinguish, however, as to what constitutes a patient; for, unless this is understood, our position will be misapprehended. An individual is not a patient until actually in the care and under the treatment of a physician. So far as stealing a prospective patient is concerned, it is not only possible, but almost of daily occurrence. Such action is simply contemptible. It is of such a character as to be debasing to the individual practicing it and is a prostitution of a noble calling, such as only a vile and criminally inclined disposition could be low enough to practice. What we desire to speak of is stealing a patient—one who is under the care of a physician. To our mind this seems not only impossible but incomprehensible. We will explain our position. What is denominated stealing patients may be explained in this wise: An individual has been under the care of a doctor and leaves him. He seeks another for treatment