

Miscellaneous.

The Income of Physicians.

Recently one of the best-known physicians in New York died, a man with a reputation on two continents, who reached the acme of his fame early and had far more than the average years of prosperity. Yet, when his estate was computed, great surprise was expressed on every hand at finding that he had managed to save during a long and busy life only the earnings of two or three years. The same occurrence can be noted every day. A supposedly prosperous physician dies, leaving nothing, while his son gives up his college education and his daughters are compelled to eke out an uncongenial existence as teachers or stenographers.

No doubt the incomes of most physicians are greatly exaggerated. The average income of the well-established city physicians is probably nearer twenty-five hundred than five thousand dollars, while the general average is said to be far below one thousand. But physicians apparently leave much less behind them than other men with similar incomes.

The business training of physicians is to quite an extent responsible for this. Each one does a vast amount of charity work for which he gets little credit, and this is especially true of the men who have an appearance of prosperity from the relative size of the fees they do collect. He is a poor collector, sending out his accounts at infrequent and irregular intervals and creating the not unnatural impression that he does not need the money. Small wonder, then, that the family medical bill is paid only after all other reasonable family desires have been satisfied.

We do not suppose it is possible to suggest any satisfactory fee-scale, but it is self evident that the scale which taxes the clerk a day's wages for consultation, while his employer escapes with the income of a minute, is, to say the least, not an equitable one. Neither can the system be defended as business-like by which the physician treats for nothing a multitude of patients who would willingly pay a small fee for the same service if the fee were in proportion to their means. And if the fees at one end of the scale are too high, those at the other end are certainly too low, as compared to other professions. The man who does not begrudge his pastor a handsome fee for a ten minutes' wedding ceremony, very often thinks the same fee too much for as many hours' work in facilitating the advent of his first-born. The business man pays his attorney a large fee for drawing his will in an emergency and then disputes the account of the surgeon who obviated the immediate necessity of that will.