

The Legal News.

VOL. IX. MARCH 20, 1886. No. 12.

A curious attempt to make wounded feelings a basis for damages is disclosed in a recent case of *Blakeney v. Western Union Telegraph Co.*, which came before a court in Indiana. The question was raised whether an action for damages could be sustained against a telegraph company for failing to deliver a message, by reason of which the person to whom it had been directed had missed the opportunity of attending the funeral of his brother. The judge held that, while a plaintiff might be entitled to recover the statutory penalty, he could not recover substantial damages, because wounded feelings are not of themselves a ground for the recovery of damages. He therefore sustained a demurrer to the complaint. The opinion says: "By the present action John Blakeney charges that the telegraph company was guilty of negligence in failing to deliver the message, and he asks damages against the company in the sum of \$1000 for his mental distress and wounded feelings occasioned by this negligence. The question presented is whether an action can be maintained for this mental suffering. It is true that telegraph companies are liable for special damages occasioned by their negligence. Special damages are such as result not necessarily, but naturally and approximately. And the question remains whether mental suffering comes within the statutory rule. In many actions at law, distress of mind becomes an important factor in estimating damages. Such damages enter into the recovery, when the plaintiff has sustained, by the negligence or wilful act of another, some corporal or personal injury; but mental suffering alone, unconnected with any other injury to the person, will not support an action. No case can be found where a person has been allowed to recover damages for a shock, injury or outrage to the feelings, unaccompanied by an injury to the person. A different doctrine would lead to absurd and curious litigation. Take, for example, a

railroad collision; it is proper that every passenger on the train who is personally injured should recover for the negligence, but shall every one who was frightened by the collision, maintain an action against the company?"

A writer in the *Law Magazine* (London) suggests a rather remarkable scheme for giving young barristers an opportunity to try their 'prentice hands: "Another useful employment for junior local barristers might possibly be the establishment of a central general consultation office, which the junior bar might 'walk,' after the manner of medical students in county hospitals. This would be for the benefit of poorer clients, who might obtain advice gratuitously or for a small entrance fee, on any legal difficulty in which they might be placed, the advice being taken from any perambulating junior barrister, who, however, if the case were carried further, would be bound to charge the usual fees and, presumably, to obtain instructions only in the regular way. There must always be a large class of people to whom resort to courts of law is practically impossible, no matter how low the fees. So long as this is so, it is useless to boast that English justice is available to all, nor does it appear that we can ever see a different state of things, unless in an overtaxed Socialistic State of the future. A consultation office, such as here suggested, would be a useful experience for barristers at the beginning of their career; sound advice might get them known even in such a humble sphere, and rules would soon be enforced limiting such legal 'walking' to barristers of two or three years' standing, while professional respect would prevent a practising barrister from haunting the premises. Such a system would serve to carry out the sound principle that the State, and its local representative the 'Community,' should provide means of justice, as well as of health and education, to all its members according to their several means."

The judges of Georgia are by turns poetical, rhetorical and metaphorical. The decision in *Cunningham v. National Bank of Georgia*, 71 Ga. 403, affords an illustration of the