

DOCTORS' BILLS.

The *New York Medical Record* has a spicy article on this subject, from which we cull a few paragraphs. After alluding to the difficulty of collecting this kind of bills, the writer remarks:—

Willingness to pay the doctor is too often narrowed to that short period when the grateful patient can focus his pocket-book through his tears. In looking over the items in his day-book, the physician can now recollect when was the favorable opportunity for receiving the fee, and how he missed it. Then, any sum would not have been too great to pay him for the relief of pain or the actual saving of life. The doctor smiles now as he thinks of the pretensions of his grateful patient, and verifies afresh the forgetfulness of impetuous gratitude. The man who then would have no other attendant now apparently feels so many obligations to the one who once saved his life, and whom now he owes, that he does not wish to trouble him any more. His readiness to pay at the time he thought his wife was dying, or when his Harry was snatched from the jaws of death, has vanished into the shadowy uncertainties of a more convenient season, and he now comforts his conscience that, after all, it was nothing more than an ordinary service, and the doctor can wait for his money. . . .

To return to the relations of gushing thankfulness to actual pay,—what a sorry lesson does the man of experience learn in studying them! We almost imagine him to be cold-hearted, when, unmoved, he listens to the tearful acknowledgments of Jones when Johnny is out of danger; to the outpourings of generous sentiments by Mrs. Black when Cræsus Black, Esq., is again restored to health. Nor must the younger practitioner believe his elder brother to be unthinking or profane if, when long after he bill is due, he hears him humming Rabelais's couplet concerning the sick devil who thought of becoming a monk. When the young man's ledger is four or five years old, and he refreshes his memory concerning promises of patients unfulfilled, he too will become a trifle suspicious, and learn to sympathize with his seniors. It has often been said, even by those who are disposed to pay every one else promptly, that physicians should never be in a hurry for their money. Really, it would seem that the services

of the doctor are placed even below those of the plumber in regard to the time and willingness for payment. On the other hand, it is well-known that, in the majority of cases, the longer the bill is deferred after the thankful, appreciative, or tearful period, the less the chances are of getting it at all.

In a subsequent number of the same journal a physician gives the following amusing experience, called to mind by the article from which we have quoted:—

I was called at midnight to visit a gentleman who had just returned from a late dinner, where he had succeeded, by hasty eating, in lodging a large fish-bone in his throat. I provided myself with an emetic, a pair of œsophagus forceps, and other paraphernalia designed to give him relief, and hurriedly repaired to his room. I found him pacing up and down the floor with a look of intense distress and anxiety, occasionally running his fingers down his throat and gagging. He told me, in tones of despair, that he thought it was all up with him, but begged me, if the least glimmer of hope remained, to proceed at once in my efforts to relieve him. He extravagantly declared, in the generosity of spirit begot by the vividness of his fears, that he would give a million dollars to have that fish-bone removed. I assured him that such cases were frequent, and ordinarily not attended with much danger, before proceeding to carry out measures for relief. His fears underwent some diminution on the strength of this, and he then declared that fifty thousand dollars would no more than repay the skill and art required to extricate the unwelcome intruder. I smiled and proceeded to introduce the forceps, but, after several attempts, failed to grasp the bone. His fears again induced him to mention a fabulous sum as the meed of the service that would expel the object of his terrors. I then gave him the emetic, its depressing effect causing his generosity to rise again, barometric-like, to a very high pressure. In a little while the emetic disburdened him of the greater part of his dinner and with it up came the fish-bone. He gave a sigh and a look of relief, and solemnly looking towards me said, "Doctor, I wouldn't have that thing in my throat again for five dollars!"

My fee eventually resolved itself into the "valuable experience" that the occasion afforded me.