

THE CANADA LANCET.

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Communications solicited on all Medical and Scientific subjects, and also Reports of Cases occurring in practice. Address, DR. J. L. DAVISON, 12 Charles St., Toronto.

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PHYSICIANS AS BUSINESS MEN.

The Rev. Dr. Alexander, in a recent address to medical graduates, very wisely remarked that the first duty of the practitioner was to keep out of the poor-house. That this will be a question of vital importance with the majority of young graduates in the future none will deny. It is true that the primary object of medicine as a profession is not the accumulation of wealth; a physician who has made a fortune by professional means, being rarer than political purity in Canada. Many no doubt acquire a competence, and it is the duty of every man to try and do so, if within his power. For the doctor must pay his taxes or rent; he must eat and drink; he must be supplied with instruments and books; he must support his family and educate his children. The thanks of patients do not, however, pay the bills. Fees only will do that.

Day by day competition grows keener, and the struggle for existence more active. Young graduates are told by wiseacres to marry a wealthy wife, and settle the problem that way, but unfortunately education has become so commonplace, that men are going into medicine to day who a few years ago would have taken up telegraphing or book-keeping as a means of support, and socially speaking the profession of medicine does not occupy the same position by any means it used to, and the title M.D. no longer unlocks the gate of the upper classes; unless, of course, the man himself is entitled to it by intrinsic qualities. We firmly

believe that medicine is a calling, not a trade; that the tradesman and business man may, with entire propriety, adopt methods that would degrade the physician. There is, however, a business side to medical practice which the doctor is proverbially lax in managing. The amount of work he does is by no means the key to his income.

Laxity in business matters will explain the apparent lack of success of many a physician; others from indolence or overwork, neglect giving proper attention to their collecting, while others from failure to realize the value of their own services, prostitute medicine by greatly insufficient fees. Another factor not to be overlooked in Canada is that the people have little money; that is relatively speaking. Just regard for the poor and unfortunate is a duty which very few physicians are inclined to evade. The laborer is worthy of his hire, and there is no more worthy laborer than the conscientious physician. He is under no obligation to deprive himself or family of remuneration justly due him from the well-to-do.

By cutting rates he gains nothing in the long run. He injures not only himself but his fellow-practitioner, by degrading the value of medical science. There is, perhaps, no more fruitful source of loss than laxity in rendering bills. There is great truth in the old saying, that short accounts make long friends. It is frequently said that doctors' bills are hard to collect; the fault is frequently the medical man's, he neglecting to render his account until such a time as the patient has ceased to be grateful, not a very long time, as a usual thing. The old rhyme "When the devil was ill," etc., being very applicable to the subject under discussion. The age of long credits in commercial life has gone. This is largely true of professional work in the great centres of population. In some country localities and among certain city physicians, it is not true. They allow accounts to run for months or years without rendering a bill. The doctor's bill thus becomes a formidable thing and difficult to pay; and must usually be discounted. It is not proper or dignified to place anything on a bill that will seem an apology for rendering it, such as the statement, "Bills rendered monthly."

The struggle to make a living, is for most medical men, a hard one. They enter upon their professional career, without having more than the