

## PROFESSIONAL COURTESY.

ONE hears so much about the jealousy of physicians, of their mutual backbiting, quarrelling, and generally splenetic state toward each other, that it is really somewhat refreshing to learn that we are not in reality a disunited body. Our esteemed contemporary *The Journalist*, for example, has recently celebrated our united state in the following somewhat ferocious terms :

“ There is not in this world to-day a more powerful, more monstrous, more unjust, and iniquitous organization in existence than that mysterious bond which fetters the medical profession as with links of steel, which is known as ‘ Professional Courtesy.’ Professional courtesy is an excuse for neglect, for procrastination, for carelessness which is in too many cases tantamount to murder. It is no rash statement to assert that there are hundreds of cases known to physicians who are in other respects reputable men, where patients have died through the criminal neglect and stupidity of the attendant physician. Yet you could not worm an admission of that sort out of them in a court of law—they are bound by ‘ professional courtesy’ to allow their ignorant, incapable fellow practitioner to go on murdering without a word of remonstrance.”

Thus it seems that physicians do stand by each other after all. This is not very surprising, when one considers the difficulties and limitations of our art. When an architect miscalculates in building a bridge, his incompetency can be demonstrated mathematically, but when a chronic invalid with some obscure malady receives a series of prescriptions under which he or she gets no better, the incompetency of the physician is hard to prove. The malady may itself be impossible of recognition and of cure. Doctors know this. It compels them, if they have any sense of justice, to charity toward their fellows. We follow a difficult and laborious calling. There are black sheep everywhere, and sometimes, perhaps, “ professional courtesy” has been made to shield them. But we do not think that harm often comes from its exercise, and, indeed, medicine could not be practised without it.

In one respect our contemporary signally errs. He says :

" If you employ a physician to patch up the health of a member of your family, and you find after a reasonable trial that instead of building up he is tearing down, you can dismiss him and get another? 'Not much. Go and ask another physician to take the case and he will tell you blandly that 'professional courtesy' will not allow him to take another doctor's case, without the first doctor giving his permission, and if number one chooses to be ugly you have a boycott beside which the boycotts of the labor organizations are mere child's play."

A patient who is dissatisfied with a physician has only to say, in as amiable terms as possible, that he has no further need of the latter's services. He can then engage any other physician that he wishes.