

## COMPANIONSHIP IN THE FADING IMAGE DEPARTMENT

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A characteristic that has always been a source of wonderment and amusement to the more worldly and cynical Europeans is our capacity for self-analysis and deprecation. Our juvenile desire always to look good, create favorable impressions and have everyone love us is exemplified in the concern of our administration over the state of our national prestige and our "image" abroad. (We are reluctant to use the word anymore; we have been imaged beyond the point of nausea since the advent of new frontiers.) Long searching inquiries into why Texans act like Texans, or why ugly Americans act like ugly Americans, are the subjects of frequent magazine articles.

In the last fifteen years, the medical profession has been a choice target for probing of this type and has itself been a leader in this popular pastime of self-analysis and castigation. We have discovered that no one loves the doctor, that his image has faded and that the old doctor-patient relationship has disappeared.

The cover of a recent *Saturday Evening Post* pictured a capped and masked surgeon, brow wrinkled in apprehension, looking up toward a preoccupied assistant; the title above this scene of perplexity was, "Exclusive: A Penetrating Study of the American Doctor – Troubled by His Wealth and His Changing Image." The article bemoaned the "Death of a Legend," offered sympathy for the costly years of medical education and training, but sniped at the doctor's conscience because "he cannot help but make a great deal of money." It concluded that while the public still retains some respect for the profession, it has very little love for it because of its specialization, impersonality, concern over economics and high income.

Except for possibly five or six practitioners, the other one hundred and twenty or so of this community would be happy to argue and compare incomes with the bankers, contractor and other businessmen in the area as well as with those whose incomes derive from the past energies of long-departed grandfathers and great grandfathers. Be that as it may, until just the other day, little has been heard from the law, medicine's sister profession in training and public prestige. Whereas for many years the doctors have been torturing themselves with introspective analyses and concern over public relations, the lawyers, with much the same problems, have wisely kept mum. If the law profession has had misgivings about its image, it has successfully avoided washing its linen or wringing its hands in public until now.

Last month, however, we read a newspaper story that portends evil for the lawyers. The Missouri Bar has conducted a comprehensive survey of the legal profession and has

concluded that the gap between the lawyers and the public has been widening in recent years and has found that "the Bar has declined in public image".

This was an interesting study covering a three-year period and involving 5,000 laymen and lawyers in the state of Missouri. It stated that the public now seldom thinks of the lawyer as a guardian of the rights of the individual but usually only in connection with accident and damage cases. Some of the quotations from the article have a familiar ring to medical ears. Another complaint was that lawyers were indifferent, a shocking lack of confidence among laymen about the possibility of obtaining a fair trial in our courts. Forty percent of the public, the surveyors found, believe lawyers' fees are too high. People tend to rate their own lawyer higher than lawyers in general, (translation: I like you fine because I know you, but the rest of you bastards are a bunch of crooks. Ed.). The caliber of students entering the legal profession and consequently the judiciary has been affected.

Oh, woe to the lawyers, now started down the faded-image path with the doctors. It is sad to see a learned profession imitating our mistakes and sowing the seeds for its destruction with these soul-searching surveys of self-criticism and recrimination. Within the year, a cover of *Look* or *Saturday Evening Post* will portray a shifty-eyed individual in a court setting, fumbling suspiciously in his brief case and slyly winking at the judge, under the provocative title, "Can We Trust Our Lawyers?" Even though it might be too much to expect from horse trainers and politicians, perhaps sometime in the future the pangs of remorse and introspection will strike other segments of society like the realtors, bankers, insurance executives and newspaper editors. Until then we extend our sympathy to the lawyers and welcome them back into the professional fold. We need company in our shrinking-image misery.

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