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"THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA" OR MEDICAL ETHICS IN PEACE AND WAR¹

By Professor EDWIN G. CONKLIN

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

SOME thirty years ago George Bernard Shaw, the famous English author and playwright, published a play entitled "The Doctor's Dilemma," which, like Molière's play, "Le Médecin malgré lui," has had a long and successful run on the stage. As in most of Shaw's published plays there is here a preface as long as the play itself in which the author condemns in wild but witty phrases current social conventions, and advocates Shavian Socialism as a cure-all. In "The Doctor's Dilemma" his unreal and emotional attack on medicine and science in general has just enough of truth in it to make it take with the general public. He denounces current medical ethics, pours contempt on the conscience of doctors, their assumed infallibility, their mercenary motives, their craze for surgical operations. He declares that doctors are not scien-

tists, but pill dispensers and saw-bones; he denounces vivisection, and goes so far as to declare that bacteriology is a superstition, vaccination a craze, inoculations a public peril, and that doctors in general are animated with primitive savage and cruel motives. Finally the only remedy for this sad state of affairs is the "social solution" or the socialization of medicine.

The public, who see only the play on the stage and do not read the preface of the printed book, miss much of this diatribe, but they see Dr. Ridgeon of the play and his apprentice acting the part of Satan in the tangled human relations of greed *vs.* generosity, lust *vs.* love and murder *vs.* mercy.

My purpose in calling attention on this occasion to this and other absurd misrepresentations and exaggerations of the lack of ethics on the part of medical men is to contrast the high level of genuine medical

¹ Address at the graduation exercises in medicine, University of Pennsylvania, December 22, 1943.

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