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The Relation of Medical Literature to Professional Esteem.

THE LANCET-CLINIC, Cincinnati, Aug. 7, 1915. p.113.

***** Beside being timely and newsy, medical literature should be sustained and defended, just as the legal brief is sustained. It matters very little to too many physicians what the thesis of an article is, they make it the opportunity to tell the same old story of personal experience. It is related of Sir William Osler that while yet a young man he was secretary to the most dignified medical society in Montreal, and he felt deeply this tendency of some of its members to outdo any thesis with exaggerated personal experiences of their own, and he set about one of his characteristic tricks to discover the sham. In reading his correspondence to the society, at a certain meeting, there appeared an application from Dr. Edgerton Y. Davis, late assistant surgeon in the United States Army, now located in the Indian Reservation opposite Montreal, with a thesis entitled, "Some Peculiar Observations in Obstetrics Among the Caughnawaga Indians." An evening was set for the reading of the paper. The learned society convened and awaited the belated candidate. When all patience was about exhausted, a breathless messenger dismounted at the academy's door and announced the inconceivable absence of Dr. Davis, who was attending the confinement of the squaw of the Indian chief. By order of the waiting society the secretary was directed to read the thesis, which he did remarkably well considering the novelty of the subject and the idiosyncrasies of the chirography. It is needless to say that some previously anomalous incidents were related of the accouchement of these Caughnawaga squaws that had never been recorded of any civilized or savage people. After the thesis had been read, Dr. Osler sank into his seat and buried himself, after the manner of secretaries, in his many papers. A moment of silence followed when the biggest bluffer of them all rose meditatively and expressed satisfaction that the admirable thesis gave him an opportunity and so forth and so forth. Then another and another followed until the Munchausen-like thesis fell back from an astounding novelty to an almost forgotten commonplace. The essayist was unanimously elected to membership and the thesis and discussion ordered printed in the Medical News, of Philadelphia.

During the following week, the spirit moved several of the disputants to visit the reservation to call upon the remarkable essayist, Dr. Edgerton Y. Davis, late assistant surgeon in the United States Army, but no such person was known to the commandant at the fort, or at the reservation store. Considering the pre-automobile and pre-telephone days, alarm spread quickly. The secretary was urged to stop the publication of the fraudulent thesis, but the embryo Sir William Osler informed his frantic colleagues that proof of the article and the discussion had already been corrected and returned to the publisher. The die was cast. The hoax was off. Since that mournful night, modesty has prevailed at this provincial medical society. The curious reader may look up the files of The Medical News and compare the first edition of "Winckel" with succeeding editions, to see how even the German obstetrician was taken in by Sir William's cruel hoax.

Holmes Versus Y. D.