

EXTRAORDINARY CONDUCT OF A LECTURER.

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To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The character of the profession as a body, is formed of that of its members individually; and when any member is base enough to inflict a wound on this, it behoves the rest to take some notice of his conduct, especially if he be an individual who endeavours to push himself forward into public notice. If this be admitted as a principle, I feel satisfied that both you and your readers will hold that I am justifiable in laying before the profession an account of the following occurrence, which took place on Thursday last at a medical school in the metropolis, although I was, unfortunately, myself one of the principal actors in the drama. The other actor was Dr. David D. Davis, of George Street, Hanover Square, lecturer on midwifery at the Medical School in Aldersgate Street; and the performance took place at the theatre of that school. I know not how far a public lecturer is entitled to the privilege of making an improper use of persons' names before his class, and of heaping calumny and falsehood upon their heads, when he thinks them no longer able to defend themselves; but that Dr. Davis assumes this privilege, will appear evident from the following facts, which are well known to his pupils. Being in town on Thursday last, and meeting a friend who attends Dr. Davis's lectures, I was informed that the Doctor, some weeks previously, when lecturing on *mollities ossium*, made use of my name in these scandalous words: "I should have had a pelvis to show you, as a specimen of this disease, had it not been for a gentleman named Davies, who lived in Tottenham Court Road, and to whom I gave it to clean. Instead of returning it, he said that the rats had eaten it; but I suppose Mr. Davies was fitting up a little Museum at the time. He is now gone into the country, I believe, in a decline, and I suppose the rats have eaten him before this time." That the Doctor was perfectly conscious, when expressing these words before the class, that he was stating that which was untrue, I feel fully convinced, from the following circumstances: At the time this said pelvis was destroyed, I explained to him every thing connected with the occurrence, and offered, if he wished it, to bring my partner and assistant to prove, that what I stated was correct; but as he did not seem to require that, and as he appeared satisfied with the explanation I gave him, as I also lived more than two years in London after this occurrence took place, without hearing a word about, or thinking any thing

more of, this pelvis; I could not suspect that he had registered the affair in his black book, in order to calumniate my character after my death. The facts, in a few words, connected with the case, are these: Dr. Davis, in 1823, requested that I would examine the body of a woman, at Mr. L——'s, the chemist's house, in Tottenham Court Road. She had died in child-bed, and was very correctly supposed, by Dr. Davis, to have *mollities ossium*. He said that he had never seen her during life. Whether this was the case or not, I cannot tell; there were marks of severe injury inflicted on the uterus. I there met him, with another gentleman, who also knew nothing of the case, and who was a perfect stranger to me. After I examined the abdominal and pelvic viscera before the Doctor and his friend, they both took their departure; the former requesting that I would take out the pelvis, and carry it home to clean for him. I may here remark, that this subject presented the most perfect specimen of *mollities ossium* I have ever seen; the texture of the bones of the pelvis, as well as that of the other bones, was something of a cellular nature, very dissimilar to any organised substance that I have ever witnessed. It was not so dense as that of cartilage, but at the same time softer. In cutting the bones with the scalpel, they imparted a rough sound, like that produced by a hard apple when cut. I took the pelvis home, and put it to macerate in a pan in a vault at the back of my house; and, in going down, about a fortnight after, with my then partner, Mr. L'Estrange, of Gower Street North, to see how the preparation was going on, we both were as much surprised at seeing, as Dr. Davis could be at hearing, that the rats had devoured the whole of it, excepting a few pieces of the hardest parts, which were scattered about round the pan. I may also mention, that not a drop of the water in which it was put to macerate, remained in the pan. This is the whole history of the pelvis, respecting which Dr. Davis thought proper to make such an illiberal use of my name in public; and that this is the true account of its fate, Mr. L'Estrange and my then assistant can still testify. As I was neither lecturing, nor intending to lecture, the pelvis could have been of no manner of use to me; and that I was not "fitting up a little museum at the time," the gentleman whom I have already mentioned can bear testimony. But, Sir, supposing the Doctor felt sceptical upon the point of explanation I then gave him, did it show manly conduct, or even common feeling, on his part, to remain silent for two or three years, and then not only to doubt the truth of my explanation, but to accuse me publicly of having secreted this pelvis, when he thought I was beyond the verge of ex-

istence. That he actually believed I had paid the debt of nature, or, according to his liberal and gentlemanly expression, that the rats had eaten me, I have no doubt whatever; not only from his own statement to the class, but also from the grim and ghastly horror which his countenance expressed, when I went to call him to account before that class. Why he should have thought so, is best known to himself. It would appear that he is a strong opponent to the maxim, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Instead of wishing peace to the manes of his enemies, as most others have the humanity to do, he seems to feel pleasure in raking up the ashes of those, even, who never gave him the least cause of offence. The thrust of an assassin may sometimes be parried before the poignard reaches the bosom of his intended victim; or he may, perchance, miss his blow, and be made to suffer on the spot that punishment which the enormity of the crime he was about to commit so justly deserves: he therefore requires some degree of physical courage to carry him into the deed. But the wretch who aims a blow at the moral character of those by whom he considers himself beyond the reach of possible discovery, is justly set down as the most dastardly of all cowards.

Sir, as soon as I was informed of this infamous charge, I immediately, as the Doctor was lecturing at the time, presented myself before him and his class, that he might obtain ocular proof that the rats had not devoured me; and here his physical courage showed itself as negative as his moral turpitude had been positive. Whether or not he imagined that I was something less than flesh and blood, come from the shades below, to haunt him, I cannot tell; but the cadaverous state which his countenance assumed when I addressed him, rendered him almost an object of pity. His subsequent conduct in the theatre, however, will show that he scarcely deserved even this; for, when I repeated to him the words that I had been informed he had used, and asked him whether or not it was true that he had made use of such or similar words, he managed, after a time, to exclaim, "This is a most unexpected visit;" and, having recovered in some degree the use of language, to satisfy himself further that it was not a ghost that stood before him, he asked, successively, the three following questions: 1. Whether I had not left London? 2. Whether it was not illness that caused my leaving it? 3. Whether that illness was not a pulmonary affection? Having partly satisfied himself, by these questions being answered in the affirmative, that I was still composed of flesh and blood, he attempted to deny that he had mentioned my name; but

when he was informed that I was ready to prove that both my name and address were mentioned, he began to slink out of the theatre. As neither his courage nor arrogance could induce him to stay any longer, to have the case explained before that class, every member of which runs the risk of having a similar calumny heaped upon his head before another class, by the same individual, all I could say before he left the room, was, that he had stated an *absolute falsehood*; which he took away with him very patiently, and which he has kept in his pocket ever since. Almost any one but Dr. Davis would have either apologised for the fault which he had committed, or would have attempted to support the charge; but since a love of justice appears to form no part of his nature, there was only one of two ways in which I could make him answerable for the base attack which he aimed at my character. I have chosen to lay the case before the tribunal of the profession, in preference to that of law, because I hope by this means to bring the antidote to meet some of the poison which the malice of this liberal professor of the London University, has been endeavouring to disseminate. I have been since informed, from a pupil who has attended four courses of his lectures, that my ashes have been regularly stirred in every course. Now that he has had ocular proof that my bones, although once pulverised by the masticatory powers of rats, have again become invested with muscles and skin, I beg to inform him, that he shall probably hear of me, from time to time, until these voracious vermin take it into their heads to make a second attack upon me, lest he should bring himself into another such dilemma. In the mean time, as all his pupils, former, present, as well as those who are to come, (if he should have any more,) may be endowed with this reviving property with which I have been favoured, I would advise them not to forget to insert a clause in their wills, requesting some faithful friend to watch over that which was most dear to them while living, namely, the reputation of their moral character, lest it should be dastardly attacked when they are no longer present to defend it themselves.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOHN DAVIES.

Hertford, March 7th, 1828.