

DR. GORDON SMITH AND DR. HARRISON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In Number 258 of your Journal, (for August the 9th) there are certain animadversions upon my undertaking, in the affair between the College of Physicians and my friend Dr. Harrison, which can hardly be passed over in silence. Indeed, had I seen them at the time they were published, you should have heard from me sooner; but absence from town has caused a temporary interruption to my literary occupations of *reading*, as well as writing; and *THE LANCET*, for several weeks, did not come into my hands.

I must confess that I have felt a little surprise, and even some dissatisfaction, at certain parts of the animadversions in question. They contain a sort of accusation against my *consistency*, at least, which I shall in the outset of this reply endeavour to rebut. You have, (twice in the course of these remarks, and once upon a former occasion,) rather broadly asserted that I have failed in redeeming a *pledge* I had given to *transmit you a defence of Dr. Harrison*. Now, Sir, I beg to ask you when or where I gave any such pledge? If you refer to the 256th No. of the Journal, (in which my correspondence with the Doctor is inserted,) you will find that the only pledge I did give has been actually redeemed. In my communication to you, of July 17, I promised (or *pledged* myself, if you prefer the word) to forward the sequel of the curious affair to which that communication was introductory. This was my pledge, and the whole extent of it. What reached your hands along with that communication, viz. the correspondence with Dr. Harrison, and my preliminary remarks on the question at issue, bears a date of two days prior to that of my letter to you; which I wished and expected you to have published the week before the transmission of the "*sequel*"* alluded to. The whole, however, having been reserved till the 26th of July, by which time you had received the account of my interview with Dr. Harrison, on the 16th, the pledge and its redemption were both laid before the public together. I closed my prior communication with these words: "the issue (i. e. of the interview) SHALL NOT BE CONCEALED;"† and my letter, of July 21, records that issue in a somewhat circumstantial manner.

In this latter communication there is also

the following passage.—"*The documents which I have now upon my table are far too voluminous for any journal.*"* Were you to set apart three or four entire numbers of *THE LANCET* for the exclusive purpose of containing copies of them, I am inclined to think it would not be sufficient; and I apprehend that should I come to the determination of laying them fully open to public inspection, they will form a considerable *pamphlet*, at least. Whether this shall be done or not, I cannot at present *pledge* myself; and I say *MYSELF*, because Dr. Harrison will give *HIMSELF* as little further trouble about the business as he can. It may not be believed that "*THE ORDER OF DEFENCE*"† differs from the course pursued by the defendant's counsel, and I shall not, therefore, run the risk of exciting any doubt as to my own veracity, by *pledging* my word that it does. Nor shall I go before an alderman to make affidavit that I have seen it. I say, upon the word and honour of a gentleman, that *I have seen it*; which the public have not; and what it contains I shall reveal or not, according to circumstances. Let the readers of *THE LANCET*, however, and the medical profession, look to *ME* for further explanation of this matter. Dr. Harrison has other occupations; and the business between lawyers and doctors of medicine I have rather a desire to attend to; not being much afraid of robes and periwigs.

As to the question of Dr. Harrison's courage upon this or any other occasion, there could be no propriety in my making a single observation. Dr. Harrison I know to be a *GENTLEMAN* who does not possess a single idea or feeling which is not a great honour to human nature, as well as a credit to the profession to which he has said (with unimpeachable truth) that he is "*enthusiastically devoted*."‡ Throughout the whole of the arduous and momentous contest in which he has been engaged, he has stood almost alone. Those who were involved in the issue could be of little use to him, and were nothing more than interested on-lookers. The Doctor was always ready to listen to the opinions, and make use (if available) of the advice, of others; but I fear that the very parties who will be benefited by the issue of the recent trial, did not clearly understand the merits of the case. There has also been a singular apathy on their part. The respectability and the fortune of many hundreds have been at stake; but I am quite aware that Dr. Harrison never could reckon upon the counter-

* *Articulo citato*, p. 539.

† *Ubi supra*.

‡ See his letter quoted in No 258. of *THE LANCET*, p. 595.

* *THE LANCET*, No. 256, p. 533.

† *THE LANCET*, *ubi supra*.

nance and aid of more than half a dozen of them.

I have no intention or inclination to follow the course of your remarks upon legal matters; but I cannot help adding, that your assertion as to Dr. Harrison "contending that he was a surgeon and *no physician*,"* says but little for your own knowledge of legal bearings.† I am quite aware that the medical profession at large is ignorant of the real nature, as well as the extent of their privileges; but I should have thought, the Editor of *THE LANCET* could not fail to know that, in the eye of the law, (as declared by the 32d of Henry VIII.,) every physician is a surgeon. I contend, therefore, that the defence in question amounted to no more than a declaration and proof that Dr. Harrison was a surgeon also, as well as a physician; and the inference that he made himself out to be "*no physician*," I hold to be in the face both of law and logic. Surgeons, however, are not physicians, although nothing can be more notorious, than that this class of the profession daily exercise themselves in medical cases; concerning which, consultations and meetings between them and the Fellows of the College are among the commonest of all occurrences.

This leads me to allude to a passage in my former communication, which you have quoted in the course of the animadversions now under notice, and which I have reason to believe has excited a considerable sensation. If it have the intended effect of preventing mischief, I shall not regret having promulgated it; and, perhaps, what I now feel it my duty to add, may contribute to this desirable object.

There are, among the physicians who disown the authority of the College, as AT PRESENT EXERCISED, gentlemen of unexceptionable claims in every respect. Some of them have borne, and others still bear, his Majesty's commission; and I repeat the assurance, that the insult alluded to, if offered to some of them, will not be canvassed upon the basis of a by-law, which is not *imperative*, and leaves the Fellows of the College at liberty to exercise their discretion as to whom they will meet. The responsibility of refusal will, therefore, be *personal*, not *corporate*, in the College sense of the word, at least.

With regard to the exercise of discretion just alluded to, I now declare that I am prepared to prove an instance in which the highly estimable and respected individual who presides so honourably, ably, and advantageously over the learned Corporation, met in consultation a Doctor in Me-

dicine, no way connected with the College, upon a *medical* case; that they met in *London*, and that Sir H. Haiford desired the gentleman in question to write the prescription, and conjoin his own initials—nay, I am almost certain, that the politeness of the President led him to insist, that my friend Dr. * * * should place these first! And this, I understand, to be one of but many instances that have occurred of a similar nature. Let the College be consistent, at all events, and not blow hot and cold with the same breath; for critical eyes are upon them.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN GORDON SMITH.

London, Sept. 1, 1828.

P.S. I have been censured by a Fellow of the College for writing in *THE LANCET*. Probably I may, hereafter, amuse your readers by relating what passed. In the mean time I beg to inform the gentleman who told Mr. Bacot in the public street, that the author of the communication which appeared in your 256th Number, must be *crazy*, that as soon as I can get his proper designation, he will hear something from my attorney on the subject of slander and defamation.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL.

EXTENSIVE FRACTURE OF THE RIBS, FOLLOWED BY EMPHYSEMA AND DEATH.

James King, æt. 45, a large robust man, was brought to the Hospital, August 20th, having fallen a height of sixteen feet into a cellar, and received a fracture of several of the ribs both on the right and left side. His respiration was loud, short and laborious; his countenance pale, and covered with cold perspiration; the pulse frequent and very feeble. There was slight emphysematous swelling on the right side. A rib-bandage was applied round the chest; and a small quantity of wine and water was occasionally given. On the following day the difficulty of respiration was much less; his countenance was improved, and he expressed himself much better; he had some sleep during the night. The emphysematous swelling was diminished. The pulse was full, and rather hard, 120; he was unable to take a deep inspiration, and complained of pain. He was bled to 20 ounces, and in the afternoon was much relieved, the pulse fell to 95, and had lost its fullness. In the evening the respiration was more oppressed and laborious, and his pulse grew more frequent and feeble; the emphysema was not observed to be increased

* *THE LANCET*, No. 258, p. 595.

† *Ibid*, p. 596.