

MS of Egerton Yorrick Davis, M.D., late U.S. Army

of
Caughnawauga, P.Q.

I never could understand about Egerton Y. Davis. He is reputed to have practised at Caughnawauga, nearly opposite to Montreal, where his collections were stored in the Guildhall. Some have said that he was a drunken old reprobate, but, the only occasion on which I met him he seemed a peaceful old rascal. One thing is certain he was drowned in the Lachine rapids in 1884, and the body was never recovered. He had a very varied life - in the U.S. Army, in the North West, among the Indians, and as a general practitioner in the North of London. I knew his son well - a nice, mild mannered fellow, devoted to his father.

These notes of customs among the Indian Tribes of the Great Slave Lake were sent to Dr. Molson* just after he had taken over the Montreal Med. Journal with Dr. Ross.* One day I was in the job-room of the Gazette office where the Jr was printed, and Conolly said "Oh there is an awful article for the Journal this month - Peter is in despair about it (P. was the compositor) and says Dr. Ross will never print it. I went over and found these sheets - all set up. I told Conolly that Davis had not a very good reputation and to hold the printing until Dr. Ross saw the article. Of course he saw at once that it was not fit to print.

I heard nothing more of Davis until I went to Philadelphia. I was on the staff of the Medical News, and Parvin, in 1884 and 1885, was very interested in the action of the perinaeal muscles, and in an editorial article discussed the question of the constrictor cunni, and the possibility of the old idea of a penis captivus. One day I met Minis Hays, the editor, who said "By the way, do you know Egerton Y. Davis, who lives somewhere near Montreal. Parvin is delighted as he has sent the report of a case of penis captivus, just see such as he thought possible". I said "Hays, for heaven's sake! do not print anything from that man Davis. I know he is not a reputable character. Ross and Roddick know him well". "Too late now," Hays said "the journal is printed off". So the letter appeared in the number. 1885. It is dated from . The case has gone into literature, and is often quoted. Minis Hays was disgusted, as Ross insisted that Davis was a joke, and he and Roddick hinted that I, of all people! was the only one who knew anything about him. Some went so far as to say that I was Davis, and the rumour got about in Philadelphia. I never but once met the man. Afterwards I often used his name when I did not wish to be known. I would sign my name in the Hotel Registers as E.Y.D., Caughnawauga. Once, at Atlantic City, after I had had broncho-pneumonia, I registered under that name, immediately after Mrs. Osler and Revere. I had been there a week when a man came up and said "Are you Dr. Osler? I have been looking for you for a week; your secretary said you were away and not to be got at. My son is ill here and I wished you to see him". He had said to Cadwallader Biddle "Who is that fellow, Davis, all the time with Mrs. Osler?" and was furious when he found that I had registered under that name. They tell in Montreal many jokes about Davis, and father many of them on me. I am always sorry that I did not see more of him, and that I never visited his collections at the Guildhall, Caughnawauga.

WILLIAM OSLER.

Note. For a very good variation of the Egerton Y. Davis story see Bayard Holmesq no. p. 8.

* For an Excellent variation of this story, containing all the essentials but the truth, see No. "The Relation of Medical Literature to Professional Esteem" by Dr. Bayard Holmes. W.O.