

Register
5th Dec 1895

DR. CAMPBELL IN REPLY TO MR.
HOMBURG.

"Slander is the solace of malignity."—Joubert.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Mr. Homburg has not delayed in forwarding his reply to my challenge. In the interval I have ascertained authentically the following facts:—1. The *post-mortem* on the body of Annie Lane was made by Professor Watson, the pathologist to the Hospital, and a recognised high authority in his profession, in the presence of Dr. Way, Dr. J. A. G. Hamilton, Dr. Clindening, and Dr. Hone, and not, as stated by Mr. Homburg, by a student, or, in his revised version, by a House Surgeon. 2. Mr. Homburg stated that the whole of the members of the Destitute Board had resented the result of the inquest, and had unanimously given Mrs. Thompson a testimonial. The Chairman of the Board denies the statement. 3. No student had for official purposes come to any conclusion as to the cause of the poor woman's death. The absurdity of such a suggestion seems never to have dawned upon Mr. Homburg. In some hazy fashion his memory told him there had been an opinion expressed. The verdict of the Coroner's Jury evidently haunted his brain, but in confusion and carelessness he attributed it to a student. 4. The verdict of the Jury was—"That the deceased came to her death from hemorrhage after giving birth to a child, and that had a medical man been present the woman might have lived, and that the conduct of the midwife in this case was careless and open to grave censure, though not amounting to criminal negligence."

It is well to observe that this verdict was published at the time. Also to note, that every fact to which I have now alluded could have become known to Mr. Homburg by his giving five minutes of his time for the purpose. If, however, simple facts such as I have narrated could become so hopelessly mangled and distorted in his mind, what must the confusion be in his imagination over the details of a question of conduct when his feelings towards the Hospital and everything relating to it were, as they have long been known to be, at rabid heat? Can the public accept the statement he makes, notwithstanding his assurance that "he was not in the habit of making statements in the House unless he believed them to be true."

In his reply to me he says, "It is too unreasonable to ask me to prove every statement I hear." How adroitly he changes the position. It is true that it would be unreasonable to ask him to prove every statement he *hears*, but it is equally true and reasonable, and imperative also that Mr. Homburg must prove every statement he *makes*, assailing the character of any one, no matter what form that statement may take. Whether he is pleased to put it as a question or as an assertion his responsibility remains unaltered. Does he propose to shelter himself under the theory that he was only innocently

asking for information when he boldly affirmed—"That he was told that some house surgeons from the Adelaide Hospital, and a number of University students, were in the habit of going down to enjoy the fun at the confinement of unfortunate women in the Destitute Asylum. . . . That some University student had gone down to the institution and made rude remarks whilst poor women were in agony." Does he propose to add cowardice to his audacity, and shelter himself behind a pitiable plea that he was only asking the Treasurer a question. The condition which society would speedily reach if men's moral characters were permitted to be whisked away by any and every malicious person who chose to pretend he was in search of information only, is very easily pictured. Why, the days when "tar and feathering" was common would be back upon us. The stiletto of the assassin has to be met with the stiletto of the peaceful citizen in self-defence, although society is endangered all the same. The

moral assassin is a public offender, and exposure is what he merits. He may with an air of assumed innocency tell us it is not reasonable to ask him to prove his statements, but one wonders all the same at the obliquity of his moral sense. It would appear that his tender skin is not to be touched. From his rostrum of privilege he may use his moral bowie-knife, but no questions must be asked, or he regards you with astonishment. I am thankful that freedom has not yet quite disappeared from this country, and that there is still left elbow-room enough for every peaceable citizen to defend himself and his home.

This letter need not have been written. It is forced upon me by Mr. Homburg. I have waited to find him in his place in the Assembly express his regret and disavow his hasty words. If he had done so I should have remained silent. But generosity has its limits. With an effrontery unparalleled he defends himself, and with a moral obtuseness inconceivable says—"The idea of doing any of the students an act of injustice had never occurred to him." Who shall read this Sphinx? He goes off in his second speech in the Assembly on the tack of the relative value of the services of an experienced midwife with no knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of parturition, and a young man with a complete knowledge of both applying the same. I cannot compliment him upon his utterances, nor upon the conclusion he arrived at. But this is not the point. It is still open to him to withdraw unreservedly his statement, and his apology will be accepted. If, however, he persists in the position he has taken up, circumstances amply justify my telling him that he has slandered a class of young men, of whom two are members of my family, in the exercise of a noble and humane benevolence, even although it is in the line of obtaining professional experience; that he has sheltered himself under the flimsiest of defences; that he declined, as no gentleman would have done, to withdraw his assertions when the opportunity arose for him to do so in the Assembly on Wednesday last. I affirm that he stands convicted of having uttered what he admits came to him by hearsay, but which he never dreamed of verifying for himself. He has been the dupe of a tattler. He has harrowed the feelings of this community by drawing a false and shameful picture of coldblooded and cruel levity, and laid it at the door of a few young men who are as little capable of such conduct as Mr. Homburg himself. I leave him to receive from every well-thinking fellow-colonist the measure of respect to which the position he has taken and from which he declines to recede entitles him.

On behalf of the medical students Lady Colton offers spontaneously her experience gathered in connection with the Maternity Association. She writes to me:—"Feeling as I do that a great wrong has been done to the young students of the Adelaide Hospital, I wish to say that in all the cases they have attended for our Maternity Association they have been spoken of in the highest terms for their attention, care, and kind gentlemanly bearing." Lady Colton verbally affirmed in addition, that she had taken pains to ascertain in almost every case the nature of the attendance by the students, and never once received a reply derogatory to them.

a reply derogatory to their conduct, frequently the poor mothers spoke most gratefully of the kind attentions they had received at a critical time. I am grieved at this controversy with Mr. Homburg. It is not at my seeking. But I should be allowing my judgment and feelings to be trampled upon did I not defend my own against his baseless aspersions.

I am, Sir, &c.,

ALLAN CAMPBELL.

North-terrace, December 5.