Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE LECTURES OF WILLIAM HARVEY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Early in February of the present year you were good enough to publish an appeal from me to the medical profession to assist in the reproduction of the original MS. notes of William Harvey's lectures, delivered in the Royal College of Physicians in and after 1616. The response to the appeal shows that the subject excites considerable interest, not only on both sides of the Atlantic, but at the Antipodes. The College of Physicians at its last comitia appointed a committee, consisting of Dr. Johnson, Dr. Payne, Dr. Norman Moore, Dr. Stone, and myself, to superintend the reproduction of the lectures in autotype facsimile, and has guaranteed the cost of 100 copies. A printed transcript will be furnished with each page of the autotype; the bad handwriting, the curious phraseology, and the abbreviations used by the great physiologist rendering some interpretation necessary. The lectures contain the first suggestions of Harvey's discovery of the circulation, so that this MS. may be regarded as the most interesting monument of natural science. The number of copies to be produced will be limited to 500. Messrs. Churchill have liberally undertaken to publish the work, without the usual commission, as soon as 350 copies are subscribed for. At least 200 more subscribers are required before the work can be put in hand. Dr. Weir Mitchell of Philadelphia, who already sends the names of ten subscribers and promises more, says, energetically, that "the thing must be done." We now hope, as the College of Physicians has extended its aegis over the undertaking, that with your further kind aid we may soon be enabled to say that "it will be done."

I beg to remain, Sir, faithfully yours,

Manchester-square, May 10th, 1885. EDWARD H. SIEVEKING.

P.S.—Any communications on the subject may be addressed to me, or to Messrs. Churchill, 11, New Burlington-street, London, W. I may add that the cost of each copy, including the transcript, and bound, will be £2 2s. to subscribers and £2 11s. 6d. after publication.

DEATH BY HANGING.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Will you allow me to say, with reference to Dr. Kinkhead's interesting paper on this subject in your issues of April 11th and 18th, that I have seen four cases of death by hanging in soldiers, two of which were suicidal and two by sentence of a general court-martial, and that, so far as I can remember, the appearances of all these were very similar. There was the same pallor or lividity of the face, the same composed expression of the countenance, and the same absence of any trace of suffering or struggle on the part of all of them. The vertebræ were neither broken nor dislocated in either of the two suicides, and I believe they were not disturbed or injured in the case that was disposed of after this fashion under my own immediate observation. I was not near enough to the other to satisfy myself on this point one way or the other; and in neither was there, so far as my memory serves, any inquiry as to whether there had been any escape of fæces or semen. I have an impression, however, that discharges of this kind are neither invariable nor uniform after death from suspension of this kind, and a good deal will depend, I think, in this, as in other conditions of the subject, on the length of the rope and the age and weight of the body.

I have seen several natives of India despatched in this way, but have kept no notes of any of them; and the younger or the lighter the victim was, the lesser proportionately was the disfiguration produced in his remains afterwards. A more composed or less disfigured corpse than that of one of those here referred to (he was a small wiry man) I have never seen. In the other body, that of a larger, heavier, and older man, the face was somewhat bloated and puffy, while the conjunctivæ were slightly bloodshot; there was no post-mortem in either

case. The bodies were, indeed, carried off for interment in a neighbouring cemetery as soon as the medical officer in charge had certified as to their identity and extinction of life. I do not know if the vertebræ were broken or not, but the rope used in both these cases was not, I think, nearly so long as that mentioned by Dr. Kinkhead, and it is well known that those mild-mannered oily gentlemen, the Thugs of India,¹ who had "polished off" their thousands ere they were themselves "wiped out" by Colonel Sleeman and his followers, rarely if ever injured the vertebræ of their victims. Their *modus operandi* and simple implement—a Roumalo handkerchief—are described in Sleeman's "Rambles and Recollections of a Bengal Officer," as well as in the more accessible pages of the late Colonel Meadows Taylor, and I saw it myself *en apparence* at the hands of one of the initiated in the gaol at Lahore several years ago. It was nothing more than a species of *garrot*, but the old practitioner has acquired an aptitude for throwing or adjusting the "cloth" such as a Roman Retiarius might envy, and the rapidity with which he twisted the fatal knot more resembled a flash of lightning than anything else I can now remember.

As to the best, speediest, or most effectual method of taking away human life now known to science or civilisation, a word only must here suffice. The methods at present in use are—for we need say nothing about the old Jewish, Roman, or even mediæval practices—hanging, as above, and decapitations, as in France, &c.; and the methods suggested instead of these are narcosis, poison, and electricity. Of the first, which includes Richardson's lethal chamber, we need say nothing, for the process is neither certain, uniform, nor always expeditious, and its general enforcement would require such an amount of cultured intelligence, apparatus, and preparation as might not be always obtainable. Moreover, the process is too dramatic for this our sober atmosphere. As to the poison cup, it would appear to be as repellant to our notions of right as it undoubtedly is to our conceptions of religion and reality. The idea of forcing arsenic or opium, henbane or mandragora, *volens volens*, down the throat of a murderer, is too odious, as well as too theatrical, to be even entertained; and the hari-kari of Japan savours too much of suicide to be compatible with the requirements of Christianity. We are therefore, or so long as we retain the penalty of capital punishment, reduced to a choice of evils—to, in a word, a choice between the rope of the common hangman of the period and the great discovery of him who was called, in derision, by his contemporaries, "the dancing-master of the frogs."

We are unfortunately but too familiar with the former, while our knowledge of the latter is even now very imperfect. So far, however, as it has been tried, accidentally or otherwise, it has proved itself by far the faster as well as the "certainer" slayer of the two. It slew its man at Manchester, as well as on board the *Livadia*, in a few minutes, while its victims at Hatfield and in the Health Exhibition succumbed at once, and it has thus proved itself as painless as it is undoubtedly instantaneous. All that is wanted is to get the victim to touch the conductors with both his hands, or, failing this, so to place him as that, by a simple mechanical arrangement, these latter may enclose or impinge on two exposed parts of his person. The rest follows quick as thought, as a matter of course, and the apparatus required for the generation of this fluid or force might be packed away in an ordinary travelling trunk. It is a pity the thing is not tried, if only by way of experiment, on some of our lower congeners, whence it might be transported in time to the higher regions of Newgate and the provinces. Had such an arrangement or apparatus been available a few months ago at Galway, we should not have

¹ Sleeman says of these in a now utterly forgotten tract called "Ramaseena, or the Vocabulary of the Thugs" (Calcutta, 1836, p. 27), that "no men cultivated with more care the esteem of their neighbours, or courted with more assiduity the good-will of all the constituted local authorities" than they did, and yet were they murderers on a scale such as the world has never yet witnessed in connexion with any other organisation, secret or otherwise. They were kind fathers, blameless husbands, and it is well known that they performed religious ablutions and other rites before the shrine of the Goddess Devîrî before they embarked upon any expedition. They scanned the face of the heavens in search of an approving or discouraging omen, and turned back in alarm from even the most promising adventure on sight of a jackal or other unpropitious object. But the Thugs did, or rather do not, stand alone in these respects; other religionists have not hesitated to supplicate the Deity to sanction wrong or consecrate a crime; and, as Sleeman says elsewhere ("A Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude," vol. ii., p. 250), "the facility with which men and women persuade themselves of a religious sanction for what they wish to do is not, unhappily, confined to any class or any creed."