

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

**"CHRISTIAN BURIAL AND CREMATION:
A NOTE AND A QUERY."***To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—With reference to the annotation under the above heading in THE LANCET of Oct. 24th kindly allow me to reproduce in your columns a paragraph from the last will and testament of the saintly Thomas Wilson, D.D., still revered in the Isle of Man as the "Good Bishop Wilson." The will bears date 1746, eight years before his death in 1754, in the ninety-third year of his age and the fifty-eighth of his consecration as bishop. "Secondly, my desire is, and so I have ordered it, that my body be buried in the churchyard of this parish, in which I have lived (viz., Kirk Michael), over against the east window, wishing that my example may prevail, with some at least, to leave of an undecent (*sic*) custom of burying the bodies of their friends in the House of God, very often to the offence of the congregation and always disordering the seats and floors of the church." His example prevailed with his successors, Bishop Hildesley and Bishop Crigan, whose bodies rest in the same churchyard near his simple tomb. But I regret to add that even in the island which was his home for more than half a century the practice he endeavoured to check prevailed for a century after his death. the churches of Peel and Kirk Malen being, to my certain knowledge, rendered unwholesome by it, and probably other insular churches besides.

In eight more years a century and a half will have elapsed since the death of good Bishop Wilson. It seems to me deplorable that there should have been in this year of grace 1896 two burials under St. Paul's Cathedral and a third in Canterbury Cathedral. I am tempted to repeat with Thackeray the question he asked some fifty years ago, "What, gentlemen, can't we even in the Church acknowledge a republic? There, at least, the Herald's College itself might allow that we all of us have the same pedigree and are direct descendants of Eve and Adam, whose inheritance is divided amongst us." It is a perfect marvel to me that fashion has not long since voted burials under churches as "snobbish" and "caddish," for fashion is more powerful and influential than even the examples of such men as good Bishop Wilson. The late Mr. P. H. Holland told me many years ago how the late Lord Palmerston, who may be said to have closed intramural churchyards and burial under churches, when Home Secretary was most anxious to have an exception made in favour of a relative. It was arranged with some difficulty. One Home Secretary permitted the body of a bishop (Ely) to be buried in the cathedral, and another Home Secretary sternly refused to allow the body of another bishop (Ripon) to be so deposited; it found its resting-place in the burial ground adjoining the cathedral.

Surely the time has now come when burial under any church, chapel, or building in which the living assemble for worship ought to be absolutely forbidden by Act of Parliament, and not left to the caprice of any Government official, however highly placed. If cremation has taught us anything it is the wickedness of spending large sums of money in disposing of our dead at the expense of the living, and instead of restoring the poor body to the earth for dissolution to dispose of it in such a manner as to commence an unseemly strife with nature to the danger of the living, it may be, many years hence.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Liverpool, Oct. 26th, 1896. FRED. W. LOWNDES.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The paragraph of your correspondent's, Easton Bavent, M.D., writings on the funeral of the late Archbishop at Canterbury Cathedral contains the following: "It was a little curious to read some newspaper accounts in which it was either inferred or stated directly that the remains of Thomas à Becket still find a resting-place in the Cathedral. A very slight study of Stanley's well-known Memorials of Canterbury would have put them right in that matter." But Dean Stanley has not asserted positively that the bones of Becket were destroyed. Let anybody read page 200

and the footnote 3 and they will see that this is so. Moreover, the facts brought out by the discovery of the skeleton in the crypt of the Cathedral since Dean Stanley's death, have led many to consider that most probably these bones are those of the murdered Archbishop, and amongst the many I would include the late Archbishop and the late Dean of Canterbury and the present Dean of Canterbury. At the time the bones were found a pamphlet was issued by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. This pamphlet is to be re-issued early next year. It will contain a chapter by Canon Scott Robertson, the well-known Kent antiquarian, entering fully into all questions regarding the body proprietorship of these bones. For my own part, and I in 1888 put the bones anatomically together, I would say that the arguments for the bones being those of Thomas à Becket's are far weightier than those against their being the Archbishop's.—I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Canterbury, Oct. 26th, 1896. PUGIN THORNTON.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The letter of Easton Bavent, M.D., in THE LANCET of Oct. 24th on the subject of cremation touches a much deeper feeling than he seems to appreciate. It is not that we who believe in the resurrection of the body have any fear that burning or any other mutilation can even affect God's promise towards us, but burial is a Christian rite as essentially as burning is a Pagan one, and cremation only lacks the dance round the funeral pyre to complete a scene which is so repugnant to Christians. "God's acre" has a hallowed charm for us which we do not wish to lose, and lost it must be if a few cinders is all that we are to place there for the future. Call it sentiment if you will, but religious sentiment is still the strongest power on earth, and at a time when irreligion is flaunting itself before the public gaze, surely it is a Christian duty to shun all forms and ceremonies which in ages past have been associated with godless desecration of the dead. Of course, "Salus populi suprema est lex" holds good; but I have yet to learn that Christian burial of the dead in the earth in a perishable coffin under a sufficient depth of soil has any danger to the living.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
MARTINDALE C. WARD, M.D. Aberd.
Twickenham, Oct. 24th, 1896.

**"ELECTION OF DIRECT REPRESENTATIVES
TO THE GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL."***To the Editors of THE LANCET.*

SIRS,—Mr. Colin Campbell says¹ that he believes this election will be influenced mainly by the attitude of the various candidates towards the vexed question of the legal registration of "midwives," and as he has undertaken the responsibility of dividing the candidates into two parties I will show in a few sentences that he is entirely wrong in his attempt to justify the claims of one set and equally so in his condemnation of those to whom he is opposed. He tells us that Messrs. "Rivington, Rentoul, Dolan, and Brown have expressed themselves with a lucidity which leaves nothing to be desired," and further "that they will have no truckling to the party which aims at the destruction of the unity of medicine—established by the Act of 1886—and promise to firmly resist all attempts to hand over the lives of even the poorest parturient women and their offspring to the legalised control of so-called 'educated midwives.'" Doubtless Mr. Campbell accepts the assurances contained in the addresses of these gentlemen and expressed in a phrase common to all. It reads: "I shall oppose to the utmost the recognition by Parliament of midwives as independent practitioners," or, in the words of Dr. Rentoul, "the formation of an inferior order of midwifery practitioners."

I admit this promise of what they will do is perfectly definite, but it is entirely contrary to what they have already done in this direction; and if the proposals they have made were adopted we should have a large class of inferior and independent practitioners infinitely more dangerous to the public and injurious to the profession than anything yet proposed by lay associations. In the *Medical Times and Hospital Gazette*, of which Mr. George Brown is co-editor with Dr. Bedford Fenwick, in an article under date May 18th, 1895, a scheme is sketched for an elaborate training of obstetric nurses. It proposes three years in a general hospital, at least

¹ Brit. Med. Jour., Oct. 24th.