

Adventiser 5th Dec 1895

MR. HOMBURG AND THE MEDICAL STUDENTS.

Mr. SOLOMON moved—"That the House at its rising adjourn until next day at 1.30 p.m." His reason was to draw attention to Mr. Homburg's remarks on Friday last regarding the conduct of medical students at the lying-in department of the Destitute Asylum. On that occasion Mr. Homburg commenced by stating that when a confinement occurred one of the officials of the Hospital was rung up, and that the doctors then came down to the Destitute Asylum and tried experiments. This was not reported in "Hansard," but he appealed to hon. members as to whether that was not the first statement made by Mr. Homburg. Then came the statement about students standing around the bed, and jeering or making rude remarks about the women who were being confined. Mr. Homburg was a member of the Hospital Commission which sat to consider principally the chatter and scandal of some of the hospital nurses. He had no positive means of judging what might be in the hon. member's mind, but he knew that other accusations which he made on the floor of the House had been disproved. Even although these young students were the sons of men in good positions—"fat men"—the accusations had been made, and he asked the Government to enquire into it. The only reply he had received from the Government was that they did not believe there was any truth in the accusation. This was at least as important a matter as was the enquiry in which Mr. Homburg had taken such a peculiar interest in reference to the nurses at the Adelaide Hospital. Here they had young men who were engaged in a profession which was at least as honorable, and perhaps more so, as the profession to which Mr. Homburg belonged, deliberately slandered in the House, and statements made which could not be proved. It was all very well for Mr. Homburg to endeavor to alter the statements he had made the other day. If the statements made had been anything like the statements contained in a letter to the press under the signature of "R. Homburg," he would not have risen to demand that the Government should enquire into them. They had had enough of this tittle-tattle and seeking after cheap notoriety, and it was nearly time the House insisted that some consideration should be given to the character of these young medical students. Certainly a member who had been in the House some years should at least have obtained proof before making such statements in reference to a respectable, and he hoped a respected, class of our own community. He had seen letters in the daily newspapers signed by the fathers of some of these "boys"—who, in spite of the term applied by Mr. Homburg, were young students of a fairly mature age—in which the writers defended the students from the accusations made against them. He asked Mr. Homburg if he was prepared to substantiate the statements he had made. He did not wish to imply that Mr. Homburg had wilfully brought accusations against young men who had hitherto held a blameless character which he was not prepared to substantiate, but this was not the first, second, or third instance in which members had got up and repeated absolutely useless gossip and vicious statements calculated to injure men who had no right to be injured without the accusers were prepared to stand their ground and bring proof. Mr. Homburg had started

and bring proof. Mr. Homburg had started with a slur on the house surgeons of the hospital by saying that when there was a confinement in the Destitute Asylum these officers went down and tried their experiments. Such a statement was absolutely unjustified. Then the same member had cast a slur on the medical students at the University that should either be absolutely withdrawn or its truth proved. This was a case in which the characters of the sons of some of our most respected citizens were assailed. In the pursuit of knowledge necessary to them it was represented that students in their fourth year were low blackguards, so deficient in heart as to stand round while poor women were suffering the agonies of labor and jeer and make rude remarks in reference to them. Mr. Homburg was largely responsible for the gossip and scandal that had necessitated the appointment of the Hospital Commission which had cost the country nearly £1,000. He sympathised with the other members of the Commission on having such a colleague. The accusations recently made by Mr. Homburg proved that what he had said about that member's appointment to the Hospital Commission were abundantly justified. The man who listened to the falsehoods of others and without careful investigation spread them broadcast throughout the whole colony was just as guilty as the man who told the falsehoods. If Mr. Homburg had been misinformed it was time he told the House who his informants were. To make such statements in committee on the question of voting money to our Destitute Asylums without being prepared to name his authority was cowardly in the extreme. The statement made by Mr. Homburg in the newspaper that day was absolutely incorrect and against the facts as they occurred. Although our boys were perhaps a bit rowdy, our medical students were not likely to be guilty of jeering or sneering at anyone in agony, much less at women in that travail which they were likely to see for the benefit of their profession. If the accusation were true no punishment that could be meted out to the offenders would be severe enough. To tie them up to the triangle and give them twice as much as was meted out to the burglar who used his jemmy on the arresting constable would not be too much punishment. He had no friends or relations amongst the medical students of the University, but when he had heard the charges made against them he had felt his blood at fever heat and had deemed it his duty to defend them, just as he would have defended the poorest boy in a school who was accused of doing this sort of thing without proof being forthcoming. This matter needed enquiry and he therefore moved the motion.

Mr. HOMBURG said that Mr. Solomon had concluded his remarks by saying that he had no interest in this motion because he had no relations and no friends amongst the medical students or amongst the house surgeons at the Adelaide Hospital. Therefore it was urged that this long attack upon himself was free from all personal interests. Well, he too had no relations or friends amongst the medical students and therefore he could not have made any statement with a view of injuring any of the medical students, with whom he was unacquainted and whose names he had seen for the first time in connection with an article which appeared in one of the newspapers. The idea of doing any of the students an act of injustice had never occurred to him. Mr. Solomon appeared to be somewhat sore over his connection with the Hospital Commission. (Mr. Solomon —

"Justifiably so.") He was no more justified in making that accusation than he was in charging him with a desire to slander the medical students of the University. His action in connection with the Hospital Commission he did not intend referring to at any length, because members knew how utterly unfounded Mr. Solomon's statements were that he had listened to tittle-tattle, or made charges against any member of the Hospital Board, or against any member of the medical profession connected with the hospital, and had accepted a seat on the Commission for the purpose of proving them. Those statements were utterly unwarranted and utterly unfounded. (The Attorney-General—"Hear, hear;" and Mr. Solomon—"You have only one cheer, and that is from the Attorney-General.") He did not think that Mr. Solomon had many. He did not court the cheers of any member, and if he had done a wrong to any person or any class he would be the first to withdraw it. Mr. Solomon put it to the House that he, having made charges, went on the Hospital Commission with a view of proving them. The Attorney-General would bear him out when he said that the Attorney-General made efforts to secure several other members for the Commission before he asked him. (The Attorney-General—"Hear, hear.") There was no communication between himself and any member of the Government from the day the House went into recess until he accidentally ran against the Attorney-General in Pirie-street. (Mr. Solomon—"Was there no communication by telephone?") No. (The Attorney-General—"I telegraphed to you at Gumeracha the previous day.") But he did not answer it. (The Attorney-General—"Hear, hear," and Mr. Griffiths—"We have had enough about the hospital.") The hon. member's colleague introduced it. (Mr. Solomon—"You introduced it five months ago.") On the occasion to which he referred the Attorney-General asked him to become a member of the Commission, but he suggested that Mr. Catt should be invited to accept a seat. The Attorney-General replied that he had asked him but he had refused, and as there was some difficulty in making up the Commission he (Mr. Homburg) promised to act provided one gentleman, a Civil servant, were not appointed. From that time till he was appointed he had no further communication with the Government. He took it for granted that he was justified in acting. He denied that he exhibited any partiality, nor could anyone say from the report that any member of the Commission made any attempt to substantiate any charges which were made. Reports had been circulated to the effect that he had acted as solicitor for the nurses, but they were absolutely without the shadow of foundation. That was a charge which Mr. Solomon had also inferentially made, but he had previously and again challenged any person to prove that he directly or indirectly, through his office or by means of any friend, acted for the nurses legally or in any other capacity. Mr. Solomon had accused him of wishing to gain a little cheap notoriety over the matter, but if he had wished that would he have raised the matter in committee where the reports of speeches were abbreviated? Would he not rather have done as Mr. Solomon had done and raised the question conspicuously on a motion for adjournment? He denied

altogether that he had attempted to set class against class, as if there was one thing of which he had not been guilty it was that. Mr. Solomon was also not quite accurate in saying that he had stated that the hospital surgeons had gone to the Destitute Asylum for the purpose of trying experiments. What he did complain of was that the students were permitted to go to the Destitute Asylum and practice on the destitute women. (Mr. Moule—"You said more than that.") He did not say anything inconsistent with that. (Mr. Moule—"You said they went there to enjoy the fun.") He did not deny having said that. The hon. member must be aware that not half what he said was contained in the report, which, for instance, did not include his enquiry to the Treasurer as to the truth of the report and to have the whole matter enquired into. His statement that the students were allowed to practice on the unfortunate women was perfectly true. The evidence stated that the students were telephoned for in the first instance by the midwife, and if they found they could not accomplish the confinement a second ring brought a medical man. In spite of all differences of opinion on the subject he still maintained that this was not a desirable practice. The midwife, who had had 20 years' experience, was the proper person to attend such cases. (Mr. Catt—"You are perfectly right.") He did not intend it offensively, but would Mr. Solomon allow medical students to attend his wife in such cases? (Mr. Solomon—"Undoubtedly, and with perfect confidence.") He was surprised to hear it then. (Mr. Solomon—"You are carrying on the same slur that you cast on them the other night.") He denied the slur which Mr. Solomon imputed to him. If he would read the official evidence he would find that the students took the cases out of the hands of the midwife, who had to stand by while the students were responsible. (Mr. Butler—"That is so.") Was the hon. member on the Destitute Board? (Mr. Butler—"Yes," and Mr. Solomon—"The point is that you stated that the students stood by and laughed and made rude remarks while the women were in their agony.") In spite of what Mr. Solomon said and in spite of those who protested publicly he did not think that they would permit students to attend the confinements of their own wives, and since he would not tolerate such a thing himself he inferred that no one else would except in a case of extreme emergency. (Mr. Solomon—"That is were the fat man comes in.") He could not understand that, as he did not think that there was a laboring man who would permit it. (Mr. Solomon—"That is exactly the little game you are playing.") He was playing no little game. (Mr. Solomon—"You are speaking to a class.") He absolutely denied it. As to the report in "Hansard," it was a condensed statement of what he said, and it contained two mistakes. First of all it said that he stated that one of the medical students made the post mortem. The word autopsy, however, was used, and although it meant the same thing he never used the word. What he said was that one of the hospital surgeons made the medical examination after death, and in that respect he made the correction. The subsequent statement of Mr. Solomon that afternoon that the house surgeons with the students jeered at the women in their agony was not used. The word "jeered" was not used; he said "that they enjoyed the fun." (Mr. Solomon—"Is

that not equivalent?") If Mr. Solomon persisted in piling on something which he did not say he was bound to protest. He said that "they enjoyed the fun." (Mr. Howe—"What fun?") The fun of seeing the women confined. (Mr. Grainger—"I don't see any fun in that.") Those were the words he used. (Mr. Solomon—"Did you say they made rude remarks?") Undoubtedly, and when he said that he gave his authority. Mr. Solomon was not putting the case fairly, for he knew that he prefaced his remarks with an enquiry to the Treasurer whether, when he, the Treasurer, and others were on the Hospital Commission, they did not hear that the medical students who had gone down to attend confinements had been guilty of making rude remarks during the confinement, and he also asked him to say whether he had made an enquiry into the matter. The Treasurer did not say distinctly whether he made the enquiry or not, but in substance he repudiated the statement. (The Treasurer—"Absolutely.") The Treasurer knew the matter had been discussed at meetings of the Hospital Board, but though he could not lay his finger on the reference the Treasurer and Mr. Brooker would bear him out that it was discussed. (The Treasurer—"It was discussed.") The statement did not therefore originate with him. He said it was discussed in May, but it was towards the end of June, and the thing slipped his memory till the line on the Estimates was under discussion, and then he asked the Treasurer if he had made any enquiry into the matter. (The Treasurer—"It was discussed and hence a telephone was put up;" and Mr. Solomon—"Putting up this telephone has nothing to do with making out the students to be blackguards.") He did not say they were blackguards. (Mr. Moule—"You forget they had fathers and mothers.") Was Mr. Moule referring to himself? (Mr. Moule—"No.") He did not mean to offend Mr. Moule, nor had he any idea that Dr. Campbell or anyone else would be annoyed at what he said. The Minister of Education was to some extent responsible for the warmth imported into last Friday's discussion by his interjection. (The Minister of Education—"I should think so, and every honest man would be.") He did not want to repeat it, but he resented what the Minister of Education had said. (The Minister of Education—"You did not hear what I said. You misunderstood me.") He said that if the Minister of Education used the words he believed he did he protested against it. Mr. Solomon asked him to make an unqualified withdrawal of the statement. He could not do that, but he must adhere to the statement he made Friday evening, that on the Hospital Commission they had information before them, though he could not at that moment say where it originated, that the medical students had been guilty of rude remarks at confinements. They had nothing before them that would justify him in saying last Friday that the medical students stood by and enjoyed the fun. It was an inference he drew and he admitted that it was erroneous. (Mr. Solomon—"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for not first making enquiry into it.") That was a mistake, because he asked the Treasurer to make some enquiry, and he had never previously heard that the telephone recommendations were the result of it. He had corrected the report of "Hansard" in this morning's paper, and the altered paragraph was substantially a correct statement of what he said. Except as to the erroneous inference he adhered to what he said and had nothing to add.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL said no one regretted more than the Government did that any suggestion should have been made improperly reflecting on the humanity—nothing more or less—of the medical students who attended accouchement cases. The Government in the position they had taken in connection with the matter said that they were satisfied that there was no ground whatever for the suggestion, and under those circumstances they did not propose to make any enquiries. They expected those who made the suggestion to establish the case. It seemed to him that Mr. Solomon by his action had seized the occasion more for glorifying himself, abusing Mr. Homburg, and slandering the Hospital Commission, rather than for doing justice to the medical students who happened to be involved in that particular case. Mr. Homburg said rightly enough that "Hansard" did not fully report proceedings in committee—it was not part of their duty—and very probably the report did not contain all that was said, but he had a lively recollection of what took place, and he was sure Mr. Homburg referred to the medical students as coming down to see the fun, and also stated that rude remarks were made by them in connection with the sufferings of the patients. It was a very great pity, indeed, that Mr. Homburg used expressions of that description. He was away from his place at the time, and the Minister of Education interjected angrily and most properly. He remembered he interjected—"What do you mean by fun?" He came into his place alongside the Minister of Education, and speaking very warmly and feeling very warmly he said as regarded the medical students, and he was pleased that it was reported in "Hansard," "that if they misconducted themselves they would be kicked out of the place altogether," and he had no doubt that if such a disgraceful thing happened that would be done. He attached greater importance to it because the education the students had should increase their finer instincts, though the Government did not consider it a question of fine instincts but of humanity under circumstances of that sort. For educated people called in the exercise of their professional duties to attend an unfortunate woman in the greatest time of peril and trouble in her life, who could be guilty of conduct of the character suggested there was no punishment too severe. Not only should they be turned out of the institution with which they were connected but also from all decent society and be held up once and for all as people whom it was a shame and disgrace to have anything to do with. Under circumstances of that sort he was sorry, indeed, that Mr. Homburg had said what he did. The Government had taken the right position in the matter. There was no need for an enquiry when they believed the suggestion was unfounded. They went in for an enquiry when they believed there was ground for the suggestion, or some foundation for a charge; but they took it that there was no foundation for any such charge as suggested. They said and believed that the students were gentlemen possessed of humane feelings, and there was no evidence whatever to the contrary. Long might they retain their positions if they conducted themselves as the Government believed they did in accordance with the dictates of humanity, and with some regard for the noble profession which they aspired to enter. The Government

would be glad if Mr. Homburg would withdraw the observations he made. (Mr. Homburg—"I said in my speech I had heard it, and I can't withdraw that.") When a public man in his place in Parliament took upon himself to repeat statements of that description he gave them a force and authenticity that they did not previously possess when only idle rumor, and he ought to be prepared in some degree to sheet them home; or if not so prepared, and after careful enquiry being unable to sheet them home, it was more consistent with public duty and with a sense of fairplay to the individuals accused, who no doubt acutely felt the aspersions to which they had been subjected, that he should withdraw them. He knew it must be a very difficult thing to withdraw suggestions of that sort when the request for withdrawal was couched in the language employed by Mr. Solomon, which he did not hesitate to stigmatise as unfair to a degree. It would have been much better if a calm and judicial appeal had been made to Mr. Homburg. (Mr. Solomon—"Why did you not take it up at the time?") It was idle for Mr. Solomon to talk like that, for he knew that he (the Attorney-General) spoke on that occasion with warmth that he considered justifiable. If Mr. Solomon strove honestly to secure the vindication of the students, and the withdrawal of the suggestions which had been repeated without due care, it would be much better if he did not make it the occasion for attacks of the description he had made against Mr. Homburg in connection with another matter that had nothing to do with the question before them. He had no hesitation in saying that Mr. Homburg had every reason to be proud for the share he took in connection with the Adelaide Hospital Commission, and he confirmed every word Mr. Homburg had said concerning the circumstances under which he took the appointment. Mr. Solomon said the Government appointed the Hospital Commission, but refused to do so in the matter before them. The two things were quite distinct. In the one there were charges that the Government did not believe and there was no necessity for a Commission, while in the other by the Commission public servants were protected from a course of action that would otherwise have been indulged in on a suggestion of facts which did not exist. Something had been said as to whether the medical students should be allowed to attend to particular cases. The case in which the question arose was that of Annie Lane. The matter was brought under the notice of the Government by the details of the inquest, and the following minute was immediately addressed by the Chief Secretary (Hon. J. H. Gordon) to the chairman of the Destitute Board in May, 1895:—The memorandum was as follows:—"I observe from the evidence given at the inquest on the body of Annie Lane, who died while in childbirth at the Destitute Asylum, that the practice has been instituted of allowing medical students to attend midwifery cases without the immediate supervision of a qualified medical man. It is of course proper that these gentlemen should be afforded opportunities of experience in this branch of their profession, but seeing that in all the hospitals skilled medical attendance is provided for even minor accidents it appears to me highly desirable that similar attendance should be provided, if possible, for destitute females at such a critical time as childbirth. I shall be glad of a report from the Destitute Board upon this matter with any suggestions that may be made."

this matter with any suggestions the board may have to make as to the way in which such attendance can be best provided.— J.H.G., Chief Secretary, May 29, 1895.” The reply was as follows:—“Returned to the Chief Secretary, who is respectfully informed that the Destitute Board at their meeting to-day had the whole circumstances relating to the death of Annie Lane under consideration, and are of opinion that Mrs. Thompson, the midwife, cannot be altogether exonerated from blame, inasmuch as too long a period was allowed to elapse before carrying out the instructions given her to always summon medical aid in any critical case which might arise. The board, however, feel that this was due to an error of judgment on her part in allowing matters to go too far, but it is important to remember that the doctor when ultimately telephoned for did not arrive until three-quarters of an hour had elapsed. Mrs. Thompson has been employed in this department as midwife for a period of 23 years, and during that time has successfully attended to upwards of 1,300 cases of accouchement, and on no previous occasion has a woman died under her care and rarely has the assistance of a qualified medical practitioner been required. The board have every confidence in Mrs. Thompson’s ability as a midwife, and are in every way satisfied with the care and attention she bestows upon her patients. With regard to medical students being permitted to attend at accouchements in this institution this board have no desire to place any obstacle whatever in the way of their so attending, provided a *duly-qualified medical practitioner is also present to take all responsibility* of each case, but the board have a decided objection to allow such responsibility to rest with the students. This board will be willing at any time to receive and carefully consider any suggestions which the hospital authorities may propose in this matter. The board feel that the present arrangement for communicating with the hospital at night time is not so convenient as it should be, the only telephone available being in the office, which is at a considerable distance from the lying-in department, and would therefore recommend that direct telephone communication be at once established between the lying-in department and the Adelaide Hospital, so that a message may be immediately sent at any time during the day or night, the cost of such telephone to be equally borne by each department. In conclusion, this board are also desirous that you should know that the relations existing between the hospital authorities and this department are of a satisfactory character, requiring no amendment, whereas from reading the verdict of the jury one might be led to suppose otherwise.— ARTHUR LINDSAY, chairman Destitute Board. May 30, 1895.” This correspondence had been referred to the Hospital Commission, which recommended the provision of the telephone as desired by the Destitute Board. The telephone had been erected according to the recommendation, and he thought hon. members would agree that what ought to be done had been done.

Mr. BROOKER did not think Mr. Solomon need have spoken in derogatory terms of the Hospital Commission, a position on which was a thankless billet. As to Mr. Solomon accusing Mr. Homburg of making statements contrary to fact, he might have remembered that he had no right to accuse the witnesses before the Commission of falsehood. As acting chairman of the Commission when the matter was spoken of he would say that it came indirectly before them through the verdict on