

CORRESPONDENCE.

MR. EDMONDS: COLLEGE LIFE.

To the Editor of the Assurance Magazine.

MY DEAR SIR,—In your last Number (p. 334) Mr. Edmonds has made some statements which, he says, it is “of importance that the reader should know.” Unless he intend to insinuate that my exposure of his unfair treatment of Mr. Gompertz is the result of an old grudge, I cannot imagine how the matters he brings forward can concern any reader. But be the importance what it may, it is just as necessary that the reader should have it correctly as that he should have it at all. I therefore rectify mis-statements, destroy insinuations, and fill up suppressions.

1. That we were “not strangers” to one another at college—that we were of the same college, class-room, &c. *Not strangers* may mean anything: the fact is that we had not the slightest acquaintance, and that my full conviction is that we never exchanged a word during our joint college life (1823–1826). I cannot swear that no single word ever passed, but I have not the slightest recollection of it, nor belief in it.

2. That, in the third year, the (now) Astronomer-Royal was our lecturer; and that, towards the end of the course, the class was reduced to our two selves. The first statement is correct; my memory did not agree with the second: but as my old friend the Astronomer-Royal is well known for a preserver of documents, I wrote to him, and, begging he would excuse my saying why I wanted to know, I asked him what he could tell me about the attendance on his class of 1824–25, towards the end of the academical year. He replied that his *side* of the college had 20 students in the third year—that the attendance at the end was about $4\pm$; and he gave me the names of *eight* students (myself and Mr. Edmonds being two of them) from whom this average of four was recruited. Among these were three old friends of my own, whose attendance my memory tells me was tolerably regular.

3. That at a personal interview (in 1832) I expressed general approbation of Mr. Edmonds’s work, but objected to one sentence, which I recommended him to cancel. That I did express such general approbation is perfectly true; but it is of importance the reader should know that I then had no knowledge of what Mr. Gompertz had done, except from Mr. Edmonds’s “suppressive mention.” The matter to which I objected, which should have been produced, since it is of at least as much importance to the reader as the fact that the Astronomer-Royal was our lecturer, is as follows:—Mr. Edmonds, finding that Mr. Finlaison’s observations did not suit his theory, explained the discrepancy by saying (p. xiv.) that Mr. Finlaison was “a person whose qualifications for the task undertaken are unknown to the public.” I thought this sentence, from a young gentleman then first appearing in the subject, savoured not a little of presumption; and, out of kindness to Mr. Edmonds, I endeavoured to induce him to cancel it: this he declined, as he says. He adds that on a subsequent occasion of communication with me he found that my favourable disposition towards him had ceased. I do not remember this second communication: if it took place after I had seen Mr. Gompertz’s paper, I have no doubt that I made Mr. Edmonds feel the change of disposition which he describes.

4. That I have been, for 28 years, "secretly writing and speaking" against Mr. Edmonds. Private conversation is not "secret speaking" unless express means be used to make it so. I have never spoken about Mr. Edmonds in any but the usual way. As to the writing, the article "Mortality" in the *Penny Cyclopædia*, and also its authorship, were neither secret nor secrets.

One or two sentences have reference to the subject-matter of my accusation, about which I hold it needless to say any more. Should Mr. Edmonds favour you with any more college life, or other "secret" matter, I have no doubt you will insist on his making it appear what the reader's concern with it is before you insert it. One thing, however, I must particularly beg of you, namely, that if Mr. Edmonds should dare to make any definite assertion of the existence of any private grudge on my part, supported by any pretence of proof, no matter how trivial, you will print it all at once. Such publication will be due to me and due to the subject. Both of us have a right to any exposure of this kind which Mr. Edmonds may choose to make of himself.

Yours very truly,

A. DE MORGAN.

August 6th, 1861.

P.S.—If you read Cooper's novels, you may remember that once, when somebody's Indian assailants were dispersed by the arrival of assistance, the party assailed did not think it worth while to send a shot after his enemies until he happened to see two of them in a line, when he could not resist the temptation of finishing them both with one barrel, merely from love of practice. I make a sort of imitation of this proceeding: there are two similar fallacies in one page, if not in one line, which both go down by one bullet. The form of logic under which they both come is as follows:—A is B, or rather it would have been if it had not been C. The first is, 'We attended the same mathematical class for three years—or, rather, we should have done so if I had not omitted to read mathematics during the whole of the second year.' The second is contained in the last sentence of the page: speaking of the explanation of 1860, Mr. Edmonds proceeds, "which explanation, as Mr. De Morgan himself admits, would have exonerated me from the charge of 'unfair suppression' if it had been given in the year 1832." That is, I have admitted that the suppression of 1832 would not have existed if the statement made in 1860 had been made in 1832. Mr. Edmonds is correct—I did admit it; certainly if the proceeding of 1832 had been *description*, it would not have been *suppression*. But even here Mr. Edmonds suppresses something, and alters the grammar of the rest. Once more I have recourse to parallel columns.

The original (Jan. 1861,
p. 214).

"If Mr. Edmonds had given all the description he has now given, weak as it is, there would have been foolish and unfounded self-assertion, but at least there would not have been suppression."

The misquotation (July, 1861,
p. 333).

"If Mr. Edmonds had given all the description which he has now given . . . there would have been no suppression."