TUNBRIDGE WELLS DISPENSARY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—On public grounds alone I am induced to request your powerful aid in exposing a system lately adopted in the election of house-surgeon to the Tunbridge Wells Dispensary, which appears to me at least detrimental to the interests of the poor as well as to lower the respectability of the profession. I am aware, however, that in adopting this course I may be viewed in the ungraceful position of a disappointed candidate; but my friends will readily acquit me of any feeling in the matter, save a sincere desire, by unveiling an abuse, to lead to its correction.

I hope to escape the common error of colouring one's own case too highly; but confining myself to truth, it is necessary, in order to be understood, that I should explain the facts which gave me a much stronger claim upon the support of the governors of the institution than any of the other candidates. I had performed gratuitously the duties of the office, in the spring, for a short time, it is true, but long enough to elicit an expression of the most perfect satisfaction from every one concerned; and being, therefore, a tried man, I was considered as having a prior title to notice on that account. In addition to this I was assured by more than one governor that my testimonials (of which several had been awarded to me at the London University) were of a much higher stamp than those of my successful opponent; and they added, that unless foiled by hole-and-corner work in the committee, the day must be my own.

If this were the case, why, after spending much time and money, and suffering considerable anxiety in the pursuit of my aim, did I fail in its attainment? This mystery is quickly dispelled, when I explain that, before the advertisement appeared in one of your recent numbers, a Mr. Way, one of the surgeons to the dispensary, and perhaps one or two others, had been exerting all their sophistry in order to bias certain members of the committee in favour of his assistant. The reasons of this conduct (however artfully the parties to whom I allude may dress them up for the inspection of their friends) I will now expose.

The candidate whose cause was thus espoused had been required and had consented to enter into an agreement not to practise at or within five miles of Tunbridge Wells, for a period of three years after his resignation of the office, a mea-

sure solely originating from an interested source, and not sanctioned by any law of the institution. It is needless to say, that no proposition of this kind was made to myself. I was considered as *hors de combat*.

Verily these gentlemen must feel extremely sensible of the weak tenure by which they enjoy the public confidence, or they would not afford us such lamentable evidence of their fear of meeting another of their professional brethren in the fair and open field of honourable competition. I know that it will be said, "we have done this to avoid the evil of frequent changes of our house-surgeons;" but this is a very hollow disguise to screen the fact. If that were the object, it might be effected in a much better way, and without injustice, by simply pledging each gentleman, when elected to the office, to perform its duties for a certain number of years; after which, if he resigned, let him exert his energies and talents wherever his judgment led him.

It must be obvious, that the odious system to which I have taken the liberty of drawing your attention, is calculated to injure the dispensary, by deterring men of character and respectability from offering their services to it. It must, in short, tend to sacrifice the interests of the sick poor at the shrine of selfishness and illiberality. I hope that, however, I am not understood as wishing to reflect injuriously upon the present house-surgeon; he may be, and doubtless is, well qualified to perform his duties. It is merely against the *badness of the principle* that I protest. Still less can my remarks apply to those independent gentlemen, who so kindly interested themselves in my favour, that in spite of the influence of jobbing, my opponent had a majority of only three votes, and those were given against me by the three surgeons to the institution.

We may then draw this conclusion, that the whole facts prove incontestably (what you, Sir, have so frequently and so well shown), that there is an urgent necessity for reform in the method of conducting medical elections. It now remains my duty to apologize for the length of this communication, which, if you deem of public interest, you are at liberty to use as you please. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ROBT. ROMLEY CHEYNE.

Frances Street, Tunbridge Wells,
July 31st, 1834.