THE ROYAL FREE HOSPITAL.

THE Annual General Meeting of Governors took place on Tuesday, January 31st, in the anatomical theatre of the Hospital,

The Right Hon. the LORD MAYOR in the chair.

The attendance of governors was numerous and most influential; upwards of two hundred and thirty were present in the course of the proceedings.

The Secretary having read the advertisements duly convening the meeting, the twenty-sixth annual report of the Committee of Management was then read.

Attention was directed to the important fact of a *steady increase* in the funds of the Hospital. The total income received had been £6560 14s. 9d., being an excess over that of the preceding year of no less than £893 14s. 8d. The efficiency of the Hospital had proportionally advanced, the number of patients this year having risen to 36,214, showing a total increase of 3400 over the number in the preceding year. Allusion was then made, with deep regret, to a late attempt, as previously made at some other hospitals, by parties altogether unconnected with the institution, to influence and overrule the judgment of the Committee by an appeal to professional feeling. It was remarked that, in protecting the Hospital from the pernicious effects of empirical puffing, the Committee had at the same time upheld the interests and honour of the medical profession.

On a motion for a vote of thanks being proposed to the Committee for the past year,

Mr. SHEPHERD objected to it on the ground that the dismissed officer had not been fairly treated, and that he ought not to have been removed.

The motion having been seconded, it was put to the vote, when it was carried by the support of nearly the whole body of governors present. The number of hands raised *against* the motion amounted to *seven*! Carried amidst the loudest acclamations.

The statement of receipts and expenditure for the past year was then read, to which was annexed the following:—

“Examined, compared with the vouchers, and found correct, this 24th day of January, 1854.

“SAMUEL SADLER, } Auditors.”
“GEORGE BIGGS, }

At the conclusion of the business, the Lord Mayor passed a high eulogium on the character, the management, and usefulness of the Hospital.

Correspondence.

“Audi alteram partem.”

THE ROYAL MATERNITY CHARITY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I should not have thought it at all necessary to intrude again upon your attention, had not a second letter appeared from Dr. Thomas Leigh Blundell in your columns of the 7th inst., although he impugned indirectly, in his first letter, the veracity of my statement, to some extent, which I made in a letter addressed to THE LANCET, and inserted in your journal of the 1st October. Dr. Blundell says, in his reply to your correspondent “M.D.” of Dec. 3, “I as boldly deny this grave charge of my secret accuser that I made an offer to the chairman of the committee to supplant my colleagues for an increase of salary;” and in the latter part of this letter he says—“The affair in question has been discussed both *in* and *out* of the Committee, and *satisfactorily explained*.” I deny that anything of the kind has taken place. In his subsequent letter he in substance admits the offer was made.

Dr. Blundell has hit very opportunely upon the fact of Dr. Ramsbotham's retirement, and stated some things correctly connected with it, but he has omitted the *main* facts, because, on Dr. Ramsbotham's retirement from the Eastern district, and the subsequent appointment of Dr. Blundell, the surgeon-accoucheurs communicated to the committee that they would not condescend to meet him in consultation, or pay any attention to his communications. This forms the principal ground of difficulty to which allusion is made. If a *direct visit* to the residence of the chairman of the committee, to make the offer to which “M.D.” refers can be termed “a *casual conversation*,” I leave your readers to determine. The grave question is, Sir, is it possible to place the slightest reliance

in the specious representations made by Dr. Blundell—as I have the direct personal authority of the chairman to whom the communication was made, and afterwards mentioned to the committee at one of their monthly meetings, to say, that he is *fully prepared to corroborate the fact*, that Dr. Blundell did *unreservedly*, and without any *qualification whatever*, voluntarily make the offer to take the whole professional responsibility connected with the Charity upon himself for £100 per annum. In conclusion, I beg to say, that the qualification now sought to be given to the matter at the eleventh hour, is a *mere assumption, totally devoid of truth*. The words “in this district” were never used by Dr. Blundell in his communication to the chairman. I have now only to add, that the committee *never gave* Dr. Blundell *any order* to provide professional assistance *in his district, and pay them*.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Jan. 1854.

JAMES BAMFORD.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In your impression of the 3rd December, 1853, you did me the honour to insert a few remarks of mine, embodying suggestions for the better management of the Royal Maternity Charity with respect to its medical officers, to which I was led by a careful consideration of its present rules, and the curious anomaly which exists in the fact of the governors sanctioning the payment of inordinately high salaries to the physicians, whose services it has been proved are so seldom required, whilst they withhold all pecuniary recognition of those of the surgeons, who are in truth the working officers of the Charity.

Amongst other propositions, I adverted to the desirability of at once abolishing the system of midwives. To this exception has been taken by a governor of the Charity, using the signature of “Justitia,” in a letter addressed to you on the 24th December, who demurs to the immediate dismissal of these functionaries upon the ground that such a course would have the appearance of injustice, “because they have been appointed long ago by the governors themselves.” “Justitia” will, I hope, accept my assurance, that I never contemplated removing the old ladies without offering them a sufficient compensation in proportion to their length of service.

Time does not hallow an abuse, and I apprehend that if it can be fairly shown that the old system of employing midwives is unsuited to the requirements of modern obstetric practice, the governors, as guardians of the poor, as men of talent, principle, and natural feeling, will seek more competent aid. How this may be best accomplished I have expressed in my letter of Dec. 3rd last.

In no single branch of the science of medicine or of surgery has such rapid progress been made as in that under consideration. Within the memory of the living generation it has been raised from the lowest depths of ignorance and charlatanism to a standard of perfection and certitude, which promises yet to reach the highest excellence,—an achievement which has been effected by the patient researches of physiologists of this and other countries who have adorned our medical knowledge. Popular prejudices have been conquered by reason, and the whole practice of midwifery rescued from the hands of illiterate and too often incompetent midwives. The immediate result has been, a vast decrease in the per-centage of mortality in those diseases incidental to child-bearing, the equally-marked diminution in the number of still-born children, and the comparative immunity from those frightful epidemics which formerly appeared, paralyzing the energies of the attendants, and dealing out unsparing death.

I commend these facts most earnestly to the consideration of the governors generally, and to “Justitia” in particular, who is evidently sincere in the desire to profit by the hints you have given for the remodelling of the Charity. I trust that “Justitia's” coadjutors will evince the same disposition to “effect such reforms as by lapse of time may be needed to carry out the essential principle of humanity towards the poor.”

Although these observations are not strictly relevant to the subject of this letter, I venture to hope you will find room for them, addressed as they are to the governors of the Royal Maternity Charity, and supplying, as I conceive, the “very important reason” demanded by “Justitia” for the speedy abrogation of an ancient and barbarous custom.

With your permission I will now proceed to reply to a communication signed “Thomas Leigh Blundell, M.D.,” which appeared in your journal of the 17th ultimo.

In so calling the attention of the profession to the singular charge against Dr. T. L. Blundell, which has been *twice pub-*