Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

[We regret that the following communications arrived last week, too late for publication.]—ED. L.

THE JOHN-HUNTER CLUB.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Finding doubts are entertained as to the correctness of my statements regarding the regulations of the John-Hunter Club, I think it right to forward you a copy of the last circular addressed to its members. You will observe there is neither date nor signature to it.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Bedford-row, June, 1849. THOMAS WORMALD.

"To

THE JOHN-HUNTER CLUB.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 13th, at the Freemasons' Tavern.

Dinner on the table at half-past six precisely.

This will be the last meeting previous to the annual election at the College of Surgeons."

"Law 8.—The decision of any meeting of the club, shown by a majority of two-thirds of the votes of the members present, taken by ballot, shall be considered as the expression of the club. The opinion of the club, thus expressed, shall be considered as binding in honour on the minority with regard to their conduct in relation to other fellows of the College of Surgeons."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I should feel extremely obliged if you would kindly insert the following letter in your valuable journal. The subject, as you know, is one of vital importance, and the appeal coming from a fellow of the college, may possibly awake the dormant energies of others, and produce a good effect.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,
F.R.C.S.

To the Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons.

GENTLEMEN,—I consider it almost an imperative duty to address you upon the present occasion, respecting the subject of the ensuing election for the members of our council, because no fellow has as yet taken the matter up, though it has been repeatedly mentioned of late, both in the medical journals and in private conversation. It appears that a certain secret society, denominated the "John-Hunter Club," has been recently called into existence, with a view of despotically ruling these elections, and rendering our privileges (though still nominally existing) totally null and void. The nature of this club has been so clearly and ably set forth by more competent persons than myself, that I need not dwell upon it; it is well known to us all; what I wish to call attention to is our duty, under existing circumstances. Upon our admission into the college, as members, we each took a solemn oath that we would demean ourselves honourably in the practice of our profession, and to the utmost of our power maintain the dignity and welfare of the college; and upon our becoming fellows, we made a solemn declaration, in lieu of an oath, to the same effect. Such being the case, every man of proper feeling and honour is bound to act accordingly, not only in his own person, but, as far as he is able, to prevent unfair dealing on the part of others. All hospitals have their clique, some more, some less than others; this is a private affair, confined to each particular place; and unfair though the system may be, it is one which cannot well be publicly interfered with. But when we meet with a combination of these various cliques, forming a cabal for the express purpose of forwarding their own views, of electing such men only as they approve of, and of interfering with the legitimate rights of the fellows at large, I say that such conduct does require, not only public notice, but public opposition. This is not an affair affecting the fellows alone, it equally affects the members of the College, and indirectly the members of other legally instituted licensing bodies. The whole profession is interested in this matter; the eyes of the whole profession are turned upon us, and look to us, and us alone, for redress. The "John-Hunter Club,"—what a sacrilege! Is it not enough to make the very marble bust of that bright luminary blush, to hear his name applied to such a society, and to know that that

society is formed by some of those whose rank and standing in the profession should inspire confidence and respect instead of suspicion and disgust. Arouse, then, and shake off all sloth; the present state of affairs requires the utmost activity; the blow must be struck at once, and this incipient cabal nipped in the bud; rise as one man, and oppose this secret society, and depend upon it, that right, opposed to injustice and contemptible meanness, must prosper.

I remain, gentlemen,
A STAUNCH UPHOLDER OF THE DIGNITY OF THE
PROFESSION, AND A FELLOW OF THE ROYAL
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, BY EXAMINATION.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have received two letters, one from Mr. Pilcher and the other from Mr. Wormald, both complaining of a secret society, formed for the purpose of controlling the election of fellows to fill the vacancies which may occur from time to time in the council of the College of Surgeons. Now, Sir, to my mind, all secret societies are especially hateful; their very secrecy denoting something base and malignant in their object; they are opposed to the best feelings of Englishmen, and are especially disgraceful to the members of a liberal profession.

It has been said by high authority, "When bad men conspire, it is the duty of good men to unite to oppose them." Let then the fellows of the college not connected with public hospitals band together, for the purpose of crushing these embryo Thugs in the egg. If we wait until their period of incubation is fully accomplished, the whole profession may become tainted, and the destruction of the pest may be a work of difficulty. I ask, then, emphatically, who are the men who have dared to profane the name of Hunter by calling themselves the "John-Hunter Club"?

It is your duty, Sir, to ascertain their names, and at once to hold them up to the ridicule of the public. Let a general list at first be published, and afterwards a weekly account of their individual merits; show what they have contributed to the promotion of science, or the improvement of the practice of our profession. A battery of this kind once opened upon them, and well served, would soon cause them to shrink into insignificance, and to hide their diminished heads. What schools do they belong to? What are their peculiar merits, their blunders, their accomplishments, &c.? Recollect, Sir, this is not a party formed to carry out some great and legitimate principle, but a set of selfish pettifoggers, acting together to promote their low, narrow-minded views. It is on private grounds that they associate, and to attack the private interests of those to whom they are opposed. Such men are not, then, I contend, entitled to the forbearance which a public opponent has a right to expect. As the principle of their association is professional assassination, it is perfectly justifiable to knock them on the head in self-defence.

I am, Sir, yours,
FAIR PLAY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As much ill feeling has been engendered among many of the fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons, in consequence of its having come to their knowledge that a secret club, styling itself the "John-Hunter Club," has been formed for the avowed object of controlling the election of fellows into the council, I may perhaps be permitted to state some particulars respecting an application which was made to myself to join this club. It will be seen from this statement, that the motives of its members are laudable, however questionable the propriety of the means they have adopted to carry out their intentions. My friend stated his case, as far as I remember, somewhat in this fashion. That there was an opinion prevalent amongst many of the fellows, in which several members of the council participated, that as this body was now powerless to select its own members, and as the number of fellows was on the increase, many of whom resided in the country, and therefore had not the means of judging of the qualifications of candidates, it seemed expedient that some steps should be taken to ensure a return of proper individuals to the council, with the object of keeping up its high character, and preventing it being swamped by an influx of inferior men. With this end in view, it was proposed to establish a club, for the express purpose of making a selection from the fellows, of such as, in the opinion of its members, were worthy of the honour of sitting on the council, and giving them the united support of the club. By this means it was hoped that the return of good men would be insured, while the same machinery would be equally effectual in excluding the bad. I at once

declined joining this association, and gave the following reasons for doing so, though urged by my friend to reconsider the matter, and let him know my determination in a day or two.

1st. I considered the scheme impracticable, from the impossibility of keeping the existence of such a club a secret, and the certainty that its discovery would give rise to a counter-movement, and so defeat the objects it had in view.

2nd. I doubted whether every member of the club considered each of his colleagues fit for the honour of sitting on the council; and if not, jealousies and disagreements would inevitably arise, fatal to the existence of the club.

3rd. I questioned the possibility of getting so large a body of fellows as was necessary to give efficacy to the measures of the club to vote together,—the minority, in a vote being taken in their club, would not always vote with their majority at the college.

4th. I objected to its formation on principle, as an engine calculated to excite much angry feeling and ill blood among the fellows, which would more than counterbalance any good that the association was likely to accomplish by its formation; and that while I believed no really good men would be excluded from the council, I considered that the admission of a few men into their body, of inferior stamp, was a minor evil, in comparison with the results which I had every reason to anticipate would ensue if the proposed scheme were carried into operation.

Whether some of these anticipations have not been already realized, I leave to my readers to determine.

AN F.R.C.S., BUT NOT A MEMBER OF THE
JOHN-HUNTER CLUB.

* * Do the members of the club consider their associates "who reside in the country" a set of ignorant Fellows, or children, that they must be directed how to know "the good men" from the "bad"? If they are so, why were such men selected to form the batch of fellows under the odious college charter? The "motives of its members are laudable," are they? Such is not our opinion. The vicious system of nomination by councils, and cliques, and clubs, which prevails, not only in medical, but in many other colleges and associations we shall spare no pains to endeavour to root up.—ED. L.

THE ELECTION OF COUNCILLORS AND THE JOHN-HUNTER CLUB.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I sincerely thank you, on behalf of the profession, for the warm way in which you have taken up the case of the senior fellows, who are attempted to be ousted from the council by a clique of young hospital surgeons, arrogating to themselves the title of the John-Hunter Club. If ever there was a case calling for a strong expression of public opinion, it is this arrogant attempt at dictation on the part of these Borough Hospital gentlemen, and their *confrères* of the John-Hunter Club. And although, doubtless, you will be overwhelmed with letters, I cannot resist, as an old correspondent upon the subject of the election to the council, forwarding you my mite towards crushing what I do not hesitate to denounce as a most insolent and barefaced attempt, on the part of a contemptible minority,—contemptible whether as regarded numerically or in an intellectual point of view,—to suppress the independent suffrages of the fellows.

Of what use has been the abolition of the self-election of the council if the profession are still to be rough-riden and dictated to by such men? Better far the old state of things, for the council, when self-elective, had some pretensions to be considered the *élite* of the profession, which these dictators certainly have not. Will, however, the fellows calmly look on, and see their rights usurped and their privileges rendered of none effect? Will they allow a club, which Sir Benjamin Brodie and the best men of the profession utterly repudiate, to dictate to them as to their choice? Hitherto, with but one exception, the fellows elected to the council have all been hospital surgeons! How long, I ask, is this close-borough system to endure? Are hospital surgeons alone qualified to sit at the council? Does the holding of such an appointment ensure merit—nay, competence in the individual? All who are acquainted with the intrigues and nepotism connected with the obtainment of these appointments know that it does not. Then what on earth is the peculiar eligibility of these men? Doubtless, to get as many fellows as possible passed over is the good and all-sufficing reason for young hospital

surgeons voting against those not connected with hospitals, because they hasten by so many the advent of their own election. Indeed, the veil that is attempted to be thrown over their conduct is too flimsy and transparent even for the most blinded not to penetrate.

In former years I advocated strongly the claims of Mr. Gossett to a seat in the council—a man who, I do not hesitate to say, has done more for the advancement of the profession than nine-tenths of your hospital surgeons. And why was he not elected? Simply because he was not an hospital surgeon. Why was not Sir Stephen Hammick elected? For the same reason. And so I might continue the list. I appeal, then, to the fellows no longer to endure this. They have the power, if they will only exert it, of crushing this secret, pettifogging conspiracy, which I am surprised at any man of ordinary honesty and independence joining. It can be only with the hope of themselves profiting by it at a future time. And even then, to an independent and honourable mind, where could be the temptation to lend itself to slander a brother fellow by such insinuations as those directed against Mr. Wormald.

And are these, Sir, the gentlemen—Heaven save the mark!—to teach and instruct the rising profession? Must not their cheeks mantle with shame while inculcating a high and honourable course of conduct upon their pupils, when they recollect their stabbing-in-the-dark system by means of the John-Hunter Club.

Verily "we know not to what vile uses we may come," but little did we ever anticipate that the venerated name of John Hunter would have been used as a cloak to such villainies. Little did we anticipate that a name which is symbolical of everything grand in science, simple in honesty, and unswerving in rectitude, would become emblematical of everything dirty in design and base in execution. We call upon them to give up the name of their club, if they will not cease their pettifogging practices; or at least, not to sully the untarnished name of John Hunter by associating it with a conspiracy to crush an honourable aspiration after a well-earned distinction, and which, if it succeed, must dishonour the profession and lower it in the eyes of the public.

I am, Sir, your old correspondent,

July, 1849.

DETUR DIGNIORI.

POOR-LAW MEDICAL RELIEF.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Knowing your pages are open for the exposition of the extensive and aggravated grievances of the medical officers serving under the poor-law, or rather shall I say, slaving, under that execrable mismanagement, for the welfare of their fellow creatures in the humblest walks of life, actuated mainly, it must be, by a zeal for science, and for a scientific development of the resources of the profession for good, let me beg your indulgence in inserting the following, which is only the more goading, and the more painfully felt, in the consciousness of the treatment of the diseases of the poor being administered with a scrupulous regard to the disease, alike uninfluenced by the circumstances and position in life of the sufferers, and the amount of salary received for it.

At the recommendation of some of the members of the board of guardians, a surgeon holding a populous district of a western parish applied for an increase of salary from £70 a year, urging, as his plea, the fact of the district having been greatly enlarged since he entered upon it, by buildings of a description such as the poor would occupy; as a greater fact, that since he was elected, little more than two years ago, the numbers have increased fourfold. The average weekly, for the last eighteen months, has been about fifty-five new cases; it employs a principal, one assistant, two dispensers; its duties are acknowledged, by these considerate guardians, to be double that of the other district officer, who has the same salary; and yet they tell him, "No; he knows what he took it at, and he must be satisfied"—the usual treatment experienced at the hands of these exalted commercials, these (so to speak) despotic democrats.

Other circumstances occurring in the routine of the duties may as well be entered here, if not intruding too much on the size of your journal. They are—

First. The poor, from being continually repulsed in their applications for relief at the board, and to the relieving officer, immediately that they are indisposed in the most trifling degree, obtain an order for medical attendance, which, not involving any direct outlay, is most readily given, without sufficient inquiry into the needs be. They then represent their case to the surgeon, who, from his birth and education, has some of the tender feelings intended to be implanted in