MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS IN POOR-LAW UNIONS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—For your information I insert the following facts:—Only yesterday, (August 21st,) I received an answer from Mr. Chadwick to a question—viz., “Will the Poor-law Commissioners sanction the appointment of one to the office of medical officer to the Keighley Union, who, contrary to their order of the 12th of March, 1842, is not a licensed practitioner, and under thirty years of age, when at the same time there are no less than five duly qualified ones on the spot, and all within three miles and a half of the vacancy, who would willingly accept the office at a remuneration, and less?”

The following is a copy of the answer of the Poor-law Commissioners:—

“Poor-law Commission Office,
Somerset-house, August 18, 1846.

“SIR,—I am directed by the Poor-law Commissioners to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th instant, and in reference thereto, I am to state, that, after considering the circumstances connected with the appointment of the medical officer for the Haworth district of the Keighley Union, the Commissioners have not considered it expedient to disturb the appointment of Mr. Armstrong to the office, which has been made by the Board of Guardians.—I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

“E. CHADWICK, Secretary.

“To Edward South Hall, Esq., Surgeon,
Haworth, near Bradford, Yorkshire.”

The person alluded to, whose name is William Armstrong, is a member of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, and nothing more, he having served his time with a druggist, and afterwards matriculated in Scotland. The Apothecaries' Company have cautioned him against practising in England or Wales some time since; but he still persists, in spite of all, and told me the other day, that he should continue to do so unless legally prevented, and of this he had no fear, as he had received the opinion of the crown lawyers, which was to the effect, that he is eligible to practise by the diploma he has obtained in Edinburgh School of Surgery and Medicine.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,

Haworth, Aug. 21st, 1846.

EDW. SOUTH HALL.

EXAMINATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The communication I addressed to you on the evil tendencies of the present treatment of rejected candidates in the University of London, has elicited a reply from a fellow-member, to which I am tempted to rejoin. It is not my object, as “Discipulus” seems to imagine, to complain of the nature of the examinations, or of the mode of determining their issue; and it will be found that the severity of the ordeal has, in fact, but little to do, and even this indirectly, with the essence of my complaint,—the rigor of the test only exposing a candidate to a greater chance of suffering the protracted period of remission, which I have denounced as the substantial grievance.

Again, it behoves us to disclaim the notion conveyed by the remarks of “Discipulus,” that the University degrees, being essentially honorary, were designed to embellish such only as are of a “superior caste.”

Though their operation may have been, in some instances, too stringent and over-fastidious, the regulations of the University were not framed with the intention of excluding any man from its precincts, who employs a respectable share of zeal in his application, and has no unusual defect of an ordinary intellect. I protest, that the conception of robbing the institution of its general adaptation to the members of a liberal profession—the thousands of “good men and true” among whom, it is said, the rejected University candidates are to pass current—is neither compatible with the designs of its founders, nor consonant with the statutes they have enacted; and I affirm that it was considerably fashioned with just and comprehensive relations to the many qualities of its applicants for degrees, (as is proved by the separation of its examinations, their varied characters, and other conditions,) and that any insinuation to the contrary, either direct or implied, is not founded on fact, and is calculated to impair the usefulness of the University by creating an unfavourable and incorrect impression on the minds of future aspirants for its distinctions.

The alleged severity of the treatment of unsuccessful candidates is, no doubt, a mere matter of opinion. But I entreat “Discipulus” to reconsider the loss of time necessarily involved

and to reflect, that one who is rejected at an elementary examination has not merely to acquire the information he desiderates, but also to burthen himself throughout the year with those rudimentary superfluities which avowedly antagonize more practical pursuits, and the cumbersome inconvenience of which it is intended to relieve by separating the examinations. The event, indeed, arrests his progress for no small fraction of a long life. It must be confessed, however, that your correspondent, notwithstanding the tendency of his argument, has evidently an impression of the term of remission being unduly protracted; for he attempts to palliate the error, by informing us, in the first place, that passing is not compulsory, (yet he has previously related circumstances which render it imperative on every individual desirous of obtaining a respectable status in society to obtain the degree;) and, in the second place, that entrance upon practice, or (I infer) upon practical studies, even under the circumstances just alluded to, is not interdicted by delay. But what a conclusive argument has he here unconsciously supplied, to confirm the condemnation I have pronounced! It is admitted, forsooth, that the rejected candidate need not exclusively apply himself throughout this period to the studies on which he was declared deficient; but that he may proceed, (as, in fact, he does, or attempts to do,) to initiate and improve himself in subjects foreign to the examination to which he is remanded. If it be needless, then, to recommit the candidate for the entire period to instruction in those departments which constituted the source of his disappointment, what is the object sought for in upholding a term too prolonged to be occupied by them solely, and productive of much mischief in other respects? I have ever been taught, that the period of rejection is intended to be devoted entirely to the subjects, a knowledge of which has been found imperfect; but in the University of London, we are told, it is not necessarily so, and we are left to guess that the arrangement, being only vexatious to the candidate, is enforced as a punishment, or selected as a matter of convenience to others. When viewed in the former light, it is sadly unjust; in the latter, it is most iniquitous. It is not for me to assist “Discipulus” in choosing the least painful horn of this dilemma. But I may be told, that he seeks to avoid them both, inasmuch as he has discovered a test, by which he supposes this lengthened duration may be justified. It appears, that he compares the nature of the examinations, the course of study, and the value of the diploma in the University, with their analogues elsewhere; he receives the period of remission at other institutions as a standard; and, apportioning this term, not to the demerits of the candidate, but to the relative magnitude of the object contended for, he concludes, that in the former it is lenient and moderate enough. Now, setting aside the absurdity of this rule, it will be found, with the greatest reason, that any such comparison as is proposed must result in the very opposite conclusion to that on which he has managed to stumble. It is acknowledged, that in the University of London, where the exercises are searching, and the degree difficult of attainment, a deficiency, which, in mere oral examinations, would not be detected, or, if detected, would not prove fatal to the object of the candidate, suffices to negative his pretensions to pass the examination. Surely, then, it follows, according to every known principle of justice, that a person of this comparatively superior merit ought not to be remitted for so long a time as one whose ignorance disables him from overcoming a lower style of examination, in which a corresponding defect would not be destructive to his claims. “Discipulus,” however, with his test, would have us enforce a heavier punishment where the deficiency is slight, and may lead to an “honourable retreat,” than where it is glaring and really productive of dishonour. I think, Sir, his remarks alone, independently of any effort of mine, are sufficiently demonstrative of the undue severity complained of. *Jugulo hunc suo sibi gladio.*

With regard to the second of my lamentations, its burden has been misunderstood by “Discipulus.” It does not form a distinct grievance in itself, but is simply secondary to the great source of complaint, and is adduced as a further illustration of its evil effects. It should be distinctly understood, that I do not deprecate the privilege to reject, possessed by each examiner, neither do I charge, as a result of this power, that rejections frequently take place on trivial grounds; for if “Discipulus” will peruse my statements more carefully, he will find that I lament solely the consequent and necessary delay of one year for deficiency in an isolated subject. I do not complain of the severity of the examinations, but I reprobate the year's delay which follows a want of success. I may have stated, with a view of showing this injustice in a more glaring light, that rejections have occurred on slight grounds,