

was endeavouring to take the house over his neighbour's head. Those who were best capable of judging said, without reserve, in the amphitheatre, that the odds on every *épreuve* were hollow in his favour as a man of science. This, however, availed him but little, as the majority voted for Pelletan. The judges furnished by the Royal Academy of Sciences all voted for Person, and were quite enraged because he was not elected. Many were afraid, at the time, that the jarring which took place between two such important institutions would bring discredit upon the *concour*, and lead, in the end, to its suppression.

The omission made by your able correspondent is now to be noticed. He has said nothing about the way in which the judges vote, or about the kind of majority that a candidate must have to be successful.

By the regulations in this respect, you will find that where there are more than two candidates, and especially where they are numerous, the most worthy has the best chance of the chair.

An *absolute* majority of the suffrages is necessary for the successful candidate, and no one can be declared duly elected without it. Thus it may happen that the man who at the first ballot gets a relative majority may not finally get a single vote. A, B, C, D, and E, are competitors. There are twelve voters; at the first ballot A gets four votes, the others two each. The judges draw a second time. A has again his four votes; B has also four votes, D and E but one vote each, and C two votes. The judges draw a third time: D and E are blanks, C turns up four votes. The judges ballot a fourth time; A's friends seeing that three ballots have taken place without adding to their number, begin to think that all is up with their favourite, and knowing that B is most worthy of the chair, may, in part or in a body, vote for B, to keep C out, who is not so worthy. There may be, again, a relative majority, A or one of the others having lost but one or two votes; and then and so often as a relative majority is the result, the judges must reballet. If the votes be equally divided between two candidates the president has the casting voice; courtesy requires that he draw by lot, but he may vote as he pleases.

By the organization of the jury, and by the manner in which they are bound to vote to come to an absolute majority, it is plain that great pains were taken by the authors of this admirable test of professional competency, to guard against abuses and the baneful results of intrigue. How far they have succeeded in guarding against these evils is a question hard to

be determined, but there are those who fearlessly say that they exist to a disgraceful extent, and have more or less to do in every choice that is made.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

BALLOT.

London, Oct. 5, 1834.

PRESERVATION OF THE MEDICAL COMMITTEE PAPERS

FROM THE FIRE AT WESTMINSTER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The fate of the medical documents which were deposited in the House of Commons when the late conflagration took place, will, of course, be a subject of interest to most of your readers.

A little before seven o'clock, on Thursday evening, I reached Westminster Hall, when I found the whole of that part of the House of Commons which is contiguous to it, one entire furnace of flame. I assisted some firemen in breaking down and taking away the large wooden doors in the communication between the two last-named places, in order that the flames might be more completely played on with the water. Streams from the engines were also steadily directed against the south-eastern and south-western corners of the roof of the Hall adjoining the House of Commons; and the preservation of the former was, I think, in a great measure attributable to the constant manner in which those engines were kept at work. Some noblemen were on the spot superintending the proceedings. I think they were Lords Hill and Althorp.

Seeing that the interior of the House of Commons was perfectly inaccessible from this quarter, and that I could not render any further essential service there, I went round the western (the Abbey) side of the House of Commons, to the southern end, opposite the House of Lords. Persons were then busily engaged in carrying out the books from this part of the House of Commons, through the members' waiting-room. I assisted in carrying down a great many of those books, and placing them in coaches hired for that purpose. They were all deposited in St. Margaret's Church. At this time our situation was perilous, as we had to get the books, which were very large and numerous, from the rooms at the top of the House, which were every moment threatened by the flames. The staircase was also by this time in

an extremely dangerous state, and we were drenched with torrents of hot water which had come from the pipes of the engines through the burning materials. I carried down the last of those books, and afterwards went up to ascertain that none remained. A detachment of soldiers in this part of the House rendered essential service at this period.

All the books being removed from this quarter, the flames having got possession of it, and observing that they were rapidly extending towards Mr. Warburton's committee-rooms, I hastened thither. On my arrival at, I believe, No. 15 (the apartment over the Medical Committee-room), I found the door already open, and three or four persons in the room, which was literally filled with documents. These they told me were Mr. Warburton's papers. I instantly proposed that they should be removed, and urged that we had probably only a few minutes to transfer them to another place before their present place of deposit would be destroyed. The persons said that although the papers would be burnt if left, still they had no authority to move them. I hastily argued the point with a gentleman who came into the room, whose name I think was Cooper, and who seemed to possess some influence with the party. I told him my name and address, and that I would be responsible for the safety of any papers which I removed. I think he said that he lived in Pall-mall or Piccadilly (perhaps this was Mr. Cooper of the Record Office), but there was little time for recollecting names or addresses. He, however, agreed to go and get the coaches for their removal, whilst we above threw them out of the window. I stripped down the large green window-curtains, and with the assistance of a few others tied up the papers in them, and threw them out. These curtains were only sufficient to hold a small portion of the documents, and therefore the rest were thrown by handfuls into the street, picked up, and conveyed across to St. Margaret's Church.

After the principal portion of Mr. Warburton's papers had been thus secured, I hastily rode to his residence in Cadogan-place, but as he was out of town I left a note informing him where I had temporarily deposited his papers. It was then, I think, about ten o'clock at night. I subsequently rode back again to the House of Commons and entered Mr. Warburton's committee-room, No. 13, by means of a fire-ladder. A detachment of the Blues were there (under the command of Captain Hill, I think) directing the pipes of the fire-engines against the flames, which had then taken full possession of the whole

of the building over the passage immediately leading to the room. A breach was made in the ceiling of the passage; the burning rafters were copiously falling upon it, and it seemed every moment as though it were about to fall. Knowing that the Railway-road Committee sat next to Mr. Warburton's, I proposed to two of the Blues (one of whom was named Steen or Steer) to go through this passage under the burning ruins, and burst open the door of the last-named room with the hope of being able to save something: unfortunately before we had completely wrenched it open the hatchet broke, but we could see sufficient to observe that everything there, ceiling and all, was reduced to ashes. A strong party-wall separated this last room from Mr. Warburton's, which was evidently a barrier against the extension of the flames in this direction, and on applying our hands to it we found it quite hot. Another means of checking the progress of the flames in the upper rooms of this division of the House of Commons was the unroofing of it.

It was now, as near as I can guess, about twelve o'clock, or perhaps one in the morning. I found a few more loose papers of Mr. Warburton's on the committee-room floor, descended the ladder to take them across the way to the Church, when a policeman in the crowd arrested me, because I had in my possession the said papers, and took me to the station-house. I told the superintendent my name, and argued that my black face, my wet, muddy, and rent clothes, were almost sufficient to prove that I had worked in rescuing property. Upon giving my address a policeman asserted that I was not Mr. Dermott, for he well knew him personally. I again protested my identity, upon which the superintendent had the good sense to grant my acquittal. I returned to the flames, and worked at the pipes until about four in the morning, when the fire was evidently subdued; they came down the ladder, I followed; burnt, bruised, drenched with wet, as black as Diabolus, and persecuted withal, I got home at half-past four in the morning, but slept soundly, knowing that I had rendered a reforming government and the cause of reform "some service."

The next morning I took Dr. Somerville to show him where the papers were deposited in the church, and to assist him in dividing the medical from other papers. They were taken, during that day and the day following, in vans and coaches to his own house, where he has subjected them with great care to the very necessary process of drying, and in his custody I sup-

pose they will remain until the arrival of Mr. Warburton. Many medical returns, together with other papers which had been scattered in the confusion and hurry of the previous night, were found in the street by Dr. Somerville the next morning damming up the gutters.

The frequent occurrence of "I" in the above detail, to some may appear egotistical, but professing only to give a narrative of what came under my own personal observation, I offer the necessity of the case as my excuse.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

G. D. DERMOTT.

Theatre of Anatomy, Gerrard-st., Soho,
October 19th, 1834.

THE LANCET.

London, Saturday, Oct. 25, 1834.

No sooner was the catastrophe of Thursday week announced, than the medical jobbers, schemers, and corruptionists, of every class, stamp, and grade, exulted in the charitable hope that the fruit of all the extraordinary labours and exertions of Mr. WARBURTON had been for ever destroyed. Exposed, defeated, and degraded as the medical monopolists have been by the exertions of the Parliamentary Committee, scouted as they are by all the enlightened members of the community, derided as they are by their victorious opponents the medical reformers, these avaricious charity-mongers have been instructed by a painful course of events that it is impossible for them to regain their once-elevated position, unless it be by the operation of some convulsion which is capable of defying the mind and will of man. In design, these hoary sinners have become as weak and puerile as children. At one period, when they were ever insisting on the purity of their motives,—on the "high-moral feeling" which regulated all their proceedings,—

many were deceived by the ingenious veil which they wove and threw with industrious energy over the injuries which in midday they unceasingly inflicted on the medical practitioners of England. According to their treacherous statements, the University of Edinburgh, although it was long the first school of medicine in Europe, was "a mere pauperized grinding seminary," without reputation, and destitute of hospitals. At the same time, Oxford and Cambridge were eulogized as medical Universities, although they had no schools of medicine, and the words "medical science" could scarcely be heard during any term within the walls of one of their colleges.

But the fraudulent designs of the propagators of these scandalous misrepresentations were practised with a degree of success on which it is really painful to reflect. Still, the principle of reaction having been brought into operation, from the very circumstance that the parents and agents of monopoly could carry their nefarious practices no farther, the public will benefit by the institution of a new system of medical government, founded under all those advantageous circumstances which a full knowledge of the vilest practices of the most odious system that ever existed can by any possibility afford. The hauteur and insolence which characterized the collegiate and hospital factions when the question of medical reform was first mooted, have given place to a signally altered demeanour. The "Royal - Commission" scheme having utterly failed, and Mr. WARBURTON's plan of inquiry having proved thoroughly searching and successful, the outcast, crest-fallen monopolists listened with joy on Thursday seennight to the report that the committee rooms wherein had been deposited a great number of documents pertaining to the business of the medical committee, formed part and parcel of the