nothing when he is dissatisfied with his club medical officer, but I fail to see the advantage of either pauperising or bribing him. So far as boycotting is concerned let us leave it to trade unions. We profess to be an honourable learned profession, let us not plant our dig so low as we do when we condescend to such vulgar methods as boycotting. Let us have a central representative body; if it endorses our methods loyalty to our profession will ensure general adhesion to them. But when a mere handful of medical men in a provincial town make punitive regulations without supervision by a superior authority there must be a serious danger of injuring the honour and interests of the profession and the respect we aspire to in the eyes of the general public. I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

JAMES RYLEY, M.D. Lond.

Great Yarmouth, August 20th, 1900.

"THE COVENTRY DISPENSARY."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I notice in THE LANCET of August 18th Dr. Saundby challenges the veracity of your special correspondent, Mr. Adolphe Smith, and as far as Coventry is concerned I should like to call Dr. Saundby's attention to Mr. Smith's investigations into the abuses of the Coventry Dispensary which were printed in THE LANCET some three or four years ago. If Dr. Saundby had taken the trouble to have read these reports, culled from the local press and the practitioners in Coventry, those on the dispensary staff included, he would have recognised that the statements bore the imprint of truth and that the reports in question were masterly *résumés* of the whole situation.

Dr. Saundby says "that he had never been asked to support the profession in Coventry," and "no request had been brought before any of the medical societies for assistance." In reply to this I would remind him that some five years ago I called upon him and laid the whole question of the Coventry Dispensary before him, and he promised to help in whatever way he could. I would also remind him that within a few weeks of this interview Mr. Faulder White and Dr. Callaghan of Coventry called upon him and again explained the situation and asked for his assistance. Of course, these are very small matters and perhaps do not affect the points at issue, but I thought it better to refresh Dr. Saundby's mind upon them. Then again, as regards the request to the medical societies, Dr. Saundby has again forgotten that this question has been referred to the Ethical Branch of the Birmingham District, which condemned the dispensary in the strongest terms. Surely this fact should not be lost sight of. Then as to whether these dispensary medical officers are ostracised in Coventry I can only tell you that some of us will not meet them in consultation at all, and others only upon exceptional cases. I might state here that a rule exists at this dispensary that if a consultation be required one of the members of the staff must be called in or a practitioner from another town, but not a practitioner in Coventry.

In 1892 this dispensary, according to published reports, had 25,000 people on its books out of a population of 52,000. I mention this because I have always maintained that if these medical men refused to meet us in consultation upon dispensary cases—i.e., half the population of the town—we should in like manner refuse to meet them in consultation upon the other half, and to this understanding many of us have adhered. I have instances, and can mention names, where dispensary patients from this town have paid 10, 15, and 25 guineas to Birmingham consultants. Surely it is time that a wage-limit at this institution should be insisted upon.

Your readers no doubt will understand from these remarks that this Coventry Dispensary question is far too wide for the intelligence of men who receive consultation fees from the medical men upon its staff, but it should be sufficient for these consultants to understand that an institution should not be countenanced which had been condemned at two annual meetings of the British Medical Association, by the Ethical Branch, and more perhaps by the condemnation of the medical press (THE LANCET, the *British Medical Journal*, and the *General Practitioner*), all of which refuse advertisements for vacancies upon its staff. If after these condemnations men in neighbouring towns would have sufficient *esprit de corps* to refuse to meet these medical men in

consultation the reforms asked for at the dispensary would follow as a natural sequence.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Coventry, August 21st, 1900. EDWARD PHILLIPS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I regret very much that you have replied to my letter by such a harsh note. It is as easy as it is futile to seek to evade responsibility for the statements made by your Commissioner by complaining that the protest is not made in courteous terms. I must remind you that three years ago in reply to my letter you did me the honour of devoting a whole article to abusing me, but utterly failed to substantiate the injurious and inaccurate statements which your Special Commissioner had made respecting the medical profession in Birmingham, and against which I had protested somewhat hotly. This was replied to not only by myself but by Dr. Carter, who wrote under date August 10th, 1897, "I venture to think that you will do well to repudiate and withdraw without delay the statements of which Dr. Saundby and I complain," and I should also like to quote the final passage of my own letter, under date August 9th, 1897, where I say, "With respect to your accusation of want of courtesy, I have only to add that if in rebutting accusations which are false and injurious I have been wanting in the courtesy due to those who make such accusations I apologise, but I leave it to the judgment of the profession to say whether such charges should ever have been published and defended in the editorial columns of THE LANCET." To those letters you vouchsafed no reply, and it is wholly inadequate to say now that you did not reply because the challenge was "rude." I do not think it can fairly be said that my present request to have the statements made by Mr. Adolphe Smith in Paris either substantiated or withdrawn is rude or unfair, and I think I was fully justified in referring to the events of three years ago, where his accuracy was most distinctly challenged and he failed to adduce any facts in support of such injurious allegations as that "a spirit of selfish money-grabbing" animated the medical profession in Birmingham, and that it had been "particularly difficult to group the medical men together and get them to put their personal interest in the background so as to defend the position of the profession as a whole"; or that "instead of inquiring what good cause is to be promoted they (the medical profession in Birmingham) will strive to find out that some personal interest is to be served." Now, we are told on the authority of Mr. Adolphe Smith that owing to the conduct of Birmingham consultants combinations of the local profession in the towns of Coventry and Wolverhampton against certain ostracised practitioners have failed, and I ask whether he has been correctly reported and if so for the ground upon which this statement is based, or for any evidence that the assistance or coöperation of the medical profession in Birmingham has ever been officially sought to help such a movement in either Wolverhampton or Coventry. If you refuse to substantiate these charges or to withdraw them I leave the profession to judge of their value.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Birmingham, August 21st, 1900. ROBERT SAUNDBY.

*** Our readers will find the article "abusing" Dr. Saundby on page 317 of our issue of August 7th, 1897; and on page 331 of the same issue they will find the letter in which Dr. Saundby "protested somewhat hotly." We have no desire to be harsh or to evade any responsibilities. Our aims are to obtain a decrease in hospital abuse and a cessation of the sweating tactics employed in the management of many medical aid associations. Our Special Commissioner's work in carrying out our aims commands our complete confidence.—ED. L.

A BIRTH BY THE ROADSIDE.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Perhaps such a case as the following is sufficiently rare to deserve a record. I was called late in the evening of Saturday last to the young mother of two children born after natural labours. She was returning from the village to her home a mile or two distant when she was suddenly taken in labour (which she had not expected for several weeks). After "about two pains" she was delivered

by the roadside of a fine, strong boy who was crying lustily on my arrival.

I found my bicycle lamp of much use in enabling me to pay the needful attention to the hasty newcomer. Mother and child are doing as well as if the event had occurred in more conventional surroundings.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

St. Mary Bourne, Hants., August 13th, 1900. WM. A. S. ROYDS.

"THE CAUSE OF CARIES OF THE TEETH."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In THE LANCET of July 14th (p. 134), to hand by this last mail, I notice a letter from Dr. Harry Campbell in which he supports the theory of Dr. J. Sim Wallace that "the great prevalence of dental caries among civilised people is due to their eating soft and pappy foods requiring little mastication." Would either of these gentlemen kindly explain how they reconcile this theory with the following fact. The great majority of South African natives live on nothing but soft pappy food, which consists of a very soft porridge made from ground mealies or Indian corn; their only method of cleansing their teeth is to fill the mouth with water and rub the teeth with the finger—and yet carious teeth among natives are the exception rather than the rule; on the contrary, they possess beautiful, sound, strong, milky white teeth, of perfect shape and formation, absolutely free from any taint of tartar or other discolouration, and seldom if ever malformed or irregular.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

A. BERLYN, L.D.S. F.P.S. Glasg.

Cape Town, August 1st, 1900.

A RIDE FROM LONDON TO EDINBURGH AND BACK ON A TRICYCLE BY A VEGETARIAN IN HIS SEVENTY-EIGHTH YEAR.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I am much interested in advancing the cause of total abstinence from meat, alcohol, and tobacco, and I have practised it on myself for more than four years. I have just returned from riding to Edinburgh and back on my tricycle and I am desirous of ascertaining whether anyone of my age—78 years next April—has accomplished a similar journey either on flesh or vegetarian diet. If you can kindly help me in this matter I shall esteem it a favour.

I left London on July 11th and my sleeping places during my ride were—July 11th, Dunstable; 12th, Northampton; 13th, Leicester; 14th and 15th, Matlock Bath; 16th, Buxton; 17th, Altrincham; 18th, Preston; 19th, Milnthorpe; 20th, Grasmere; 21st and 22nd, Keswick; 23rd, Longtown; 24th, Hawick; 25th, Edinburgh; 26th, Dunbar; 27th, Belford; 28th and 29th, Alnwick; 30th, Durham; 31st, Northallerton; August 1st, Ferrybridge; 2nd, Retford; 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th, Newark, detained by the rain; 8th, Stamford; 9th, Normon Cross; 10th, Hitchin; 11th, home in London.

During the 31 days I was away I slept in 24 beds. I experienced the greatest kindness everywhere and I had little or no trouble with my tricycle. My weight on my return was the same as when I started—116 lb. net. My tricycle weighed 45 lb. without luggage, and with what I carried about 60 lb. It was geared up to 72 and my cranks were seven inches in length. I am open to be examined by any medical man as to my bodily health.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Kilburn Priory, N.W. C. J. HARRIS, M.R.C.S. Eng., &c.

THE PREVENTION OF INSANITY.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In the leading article in THE LANCET of August 11th, entitled "The Prevention of Insanity at its Sources," it is remarked: "It would appear that in the province of psychiatric medicine the importance of the principle [of prevention] has not yet been sufficiently realised." And again: "With his hands filled [in ways described] he [the alienist] has not had as much leisure as is desirable for considering the prevention of insanity." The

writer of the article does not surely suggest that it is the alienist who fails sufficiently to realise the importance of the prevention of insanity and to consider the methods of prevention? If any alienist so fails he must be unaccountably incapable of learning the chief lesson of his daily work, and he may with propriety be advised to employ his abilities in some more appropriate sphere. I venture to suggest that the average alienist is fully aware that prevention "is the first and most practical aim of medicine" in all its branches. He is ready with his message anent prevention what time public opinion and the legislature are prepared to listen to him, albeit his task is harder and his facilities for inculcating knowledge less than in the case of the general physician, who has to enlighten the public upon matters, such as the prevention of tuberculosis and of specific fevers, as to which it is largely anxious to receive information.

It appears from Dr. Percy Smith's remarks that in Finland and in Norway (to these countries I believe one, at least, of the States of the American Union may be added; there, according to a leading American organ on insanity, the marriage of "epileptics, imbeciles, and feeble-minded" was in 1895 made illegal, under certain conditions) public opinion is riper for legislation on some of the vital points in question than it is here. So much the better for the people of those countries and the worse for the British taxpayer. His foreign compeers make probably a humbler, a less ambitious effort to house and provide for their insane, but they and those authorised to act for them are, on the other hand, blessed with a greater receptivity towards the teachings of the experts in the matter of prevention.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

EDWIN GOODALL.

Joint Counties Asylum, Carmarthen, August 13th, 1900.

THE SOUND VALUE OF LETTERS IN READING.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In THE LANCET of May 26th, p. 1506, Professor James Hinshelwood of Glasgow in the course of a paper on Congenital Word-blindness, says: "The memory of words is first registered in our auditory memory—i.e., we are able to spell a word before we are able to recognise the word by sight alone. When the individual has acquired in his visual memory a knowledge of the individual letters he is able to read words by spelling out aloud each letter, and thus by appealing to his auditory memory he gets the proper word." Professor Hinshelwood does not exactly say so, but I infer that he means that by spelling a word such as "cat" the pupil judges from the *sound value* of each letter that combined they produce the sound *cat*. I do not doubt that this is generally so and as exceptions may be of interest I send you the following case.

Over ten years ago I saw a Borneo Dyak woman, about 17 years of age, who had begun to learn to read English, although she could only speak a few sentences. She had no previous education but could speak Dyak and Malay, in which latter language the instruction in English was conveyed to her. She had lived partly in her Dyak village and partly with her aunt who was employed in a European family. She had also on two occasions spent several months in hospital for tuberculous ulcers on the legs and arms. So she was not entirely ignorant of European ways and ideas and she was very intelligent, though the perceptive faculties were in advance of the reasoning ones. She learned her alphabet without any difficulty and went on from small words to those of eight or more letters quite readily. Her visual memory was excellent. But it was found that she had no idea of the *sound value* of a letter nor could she be got to understand it. The length of a word within reasonable bounds gave her no extra difficulty. "Elephant" gave her no more trouble to remember than "rat" when once she had mastered its form. She read "dog" because she had been taught to give those letters that sound, but substitute a "t" for the "g" and she knew absolutely nothing about "dot." She recognised the change and learned the new word, but could not see that the difference was caused by the *sound value* of the changed letter. To try her she was told that "c a s e" spelled *horse* and saw nothing unusual about it. Those letters spelled *horse*, that was all. But such experiments were not tried often lest it should destroy her confidence in her teacher. No doubt in time she