now beautiful, comfortable, and almost perfect machines. Yet although these men have ridden nearly every day for the last thirty or forty years and have often covered long distances in a single day, even on the "bone-shaker" with its hard saddle and rigid spring, they are now living examples of the value of cycling, and are in the enjoyment of remarkably good health, both of mind and body—instance Viscount Sherbrooke, one of the oldest bicycle riders. That the pressure on the perineum, from causing congestion of the prostate, &c., will lead to masturbation and early sexual indulgence is a statement which I am inclined flatly to deny. I maintain that the healthy out-door exercise, the exhilarating movement, the pleasures of companionship, the constant change of scene in bicycle-touring, as well as the healthy rivalry of the race-track, have a tendency to take a young man out of himself, and to induce that condition of mental and physical equilibrium antagonistic to the state of nervous weakness and irritability which leads to sexual abuses. Let anyone look at the members of the various clubs from all parts of the country assembled at some great "meet," and he will at once admit that a finer, healthier-looking, jolly set of young fellows are seldom seen together. Rarely will one detect amongst them the peculiar physiognomy of the masturbator or the sensuous aspect of the indulger in early sexual pleasures. Such individuals usually seek other resorts or avoid the gaze of the crowd.

I have been tempted to write the above remarks, as I think it is a pity that statements should be made which are only theoretical, and which are entirely unsupported by facts, and which are calculated to deter many from taking to the health-giving pleasures of the wheel, and, besides that, to injure an industry which is giving employment to thousands. Trusting you will favour me by the insertion of this letter,

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

H. A. ALLBUTT, M.R.C.P.E., &c.,
Representative Councillor, Cyclists' Touring Club; Hon.
Medical Officer, Leeds Harehills Cycling Club.
Park-square, Leeds, Sept. 23rd, 1884.

OVER-PRESSURE IN SCHOOLS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the instructions to inspectors of schools in England and Wales, issued from the Educational Department of the Government, Sir F. R. Sandford, secretary of the Educational Department, communicates the following official information:—"Many well-founded complaints have been made of undue pressure on backward scholars by keeping them in after school, by long home lessons, or by an injudicious use of emulation." These words have acquired additional significance since the date of their issue, August 9th, 1882, and in the face of the criticisms of this subject in the chief daily journal of the past week. When the secretary of a Government Department makes such an assertion as is here quoted, and this receives confirmation from a consensus of opinion in the medical profession, the subject cannot be readily dismissed in its medical aspect. Either Sir F. R. Sandford must be giving needless instructions to the inspectors of his department and making an exaggerated statement in justification of these instructions, in saying that "*many well-founded complaints have been made of undue pressure*," or Mr. J. G. Fitch, one of the inspectors of schools, must be in error in throwing doubt on this subject, and must differ greatly in opinion from the secretary of his department, who, presumably in his official capacity, expresses the conjoint opinion of a large majority of inspectors, and the matured conclusions of the chief officers of the Educational Department, as embodied in the words quoted. A general uneasiness is displaying itself in the public mind, which is not likely to be set at rest till some further reassurance is given that over-pressure is not converting our schools into intellectual forcing houses, to the detriment of the physical and mental constitution of the scholars.

Nor can the bearing of this question be confined to the elementary schools of the country. Private schools, grammar schools, and the higher grade public schools, are all engaged in a great educational struggle, necessitated by the prevailing system of competitive examination for entrance into every intellectual sphere of life. It is quite contrary to the nature of things that such competition should be entered into without the risk of undue effort on the part of some

emulous students, and undue pressure on the part of ambitious teachers. While in such a struggle it is only a minority, and perhaps a very small minority, who suffer so much in health as to increase the numbers in our lunatic asylums, or to add to the death-rate from cerebral diseases directly referable to mental strain in early life, yet there may be a very great impairment of mental and physical vigour such as only can be cognisant to and duly estimated by the medical practitioners of the country. Such knowledge scarcely admits of a statistical classification or proof, but the opinion in the profession is weighty enough to justify the belief that there is danger ahead unless some modification of the existing system is adopted having a greater regard for health at the educational period of life. Some impatience will in all probability be manifested by both the managers and the inspectors of elementary schools at the prospect of the introduction of some medical direction and authority on matters of education beyond what has hitherto prevailed; and a still greater impatience on the part of the authorities of the higher institutions of the country may be expected. But in these days of educational struggle some restraining influence is necessary here and there to advise when the more emulous should be checked, to guard against over-pressure of the less intellectual in their struggle for distinction, and to weed out that residuum on which it is a waste of power to attempt to do more than to teach the most elementary subjects in the most elementary way. The general acquiescence by parents and school-masters alike in the existence of a necessity for the great educational struggle which prevails to meet the requirements of the modern competitive system places almost beyond the sphere of controversy the question of "over-pressure," voluntary or imposed, in the educational system of the day in every grade of school. Scarcely a practitioner in the country can be devoid of experience of the evil; but the problem remains to be solved how it can be judiciously, yet successfully, met and rectified with no more interference with our national educational system than is absolutely necessary. It is an anomaly in our laws that while the regulation of the physical labour of the young in our factories is subjected to medical supervision, the mental labour at an earlier period of life is not so. The mental strain of the one should have the same protection and regulation as the physical strain of the other.

As a family practitioner my experience is that the school vacation time and the return of pupils to their homes never come round without bringing me some school boys as patients with debility and cachexia, for whom I advise *less work*. During the twenty-four years I was medical officer at Wellington College (sixteen years of which I taught the experimental sciences there, and therefore had some personal insight into the effect of school work on pupils and teachers), I do not remember a term passing in which both boys and masters were not *jaded* by the work of the term, and the examination at the end of it. Boys grow wan and intolerant of discipline, and masters (even the best of men) become irritable and querulous among themselves. What can this be but over-pressure? The vacation passes and both return invigorated. What other duty in life so jades as to make three or four months' rest out of the twelve a necessity? The question naturally arises to the medical mind, can the human brain be subjected to such an educational *over-pressure* and rally sufficiently to leave no permanent traces behind?

I am, Sir, yours truly,

Wokingham, September 25th, 1884.

J. G. BARFORD.

LUNACY LAW AGITATION AND SUICIDE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Agitation against existing lunacy laws, without the present possibility of substituting any other method of procedure in dealing with persons of unsound mind, is producing its natural results. Members of the medical profession, who do not wish to encounter the possibility of being subjected to harassing and vexatious litigation by complying with the requirements of these laws on behalf of their patients, have in many cases, with the writer of a recent letter in a medical contemporary, made their resolution "they will not sign any certificate for anyone, rich or poor." As a consequence of this resolution the public has, much sooner than could have been anticipated, realised how much greater an evil it is to

have numerous persons of unsound mind left at large than for one error in procedure to take place.

On June 28th last you did me the honour to insert a letter, in which I discussed this evil from a social, statistical, medical, and legal point of view, with particular reference to suicidal deaths, and your leading article of the 20th inst. once more directs attention pointedly to the alarmingly increasing number of suicides. These do not appear to be confined to any particular class of society, as reference to the following cases taken from *The Times* of the last few days will show, and some of them seem all the more deplorable because the exercise of unfettered medical skill, combined with prudent care and forethought, would assuredly have prevented such distressing consequences:—Sept. 11th, C. C. drowned himself in the Thames; Sept. 11th, M. A. A. cut his throat with a razor; Sept. 13th, H. W. poisoned himself; Sept. 15th, G. D. drowned himself in a duck pond; Sept. 16th, A. W. C. strangled himself with a leather strap; Sept. 17th, F. W. drowned himself in Hampstead Ponds; Sept. 17th, M. A. M. drowned himself in a tank at the rear of a house; Sept. 18th, P. C. smashed his skull by springing over a staircase; Sept. 18th, P. M. shot himself; Sept. 20th, F. S. cut his throat.

There is little doubt that in the majority of these, and other cases of suicide, the fatal act was induced by an existing condition of melancholia or other form of brain disturbance, the manifestations of which may have been active or passive, accompanied by delusion or hallucination, or otherwise; but still the well-recognised mentally diseased but easily curable condition in the early stages, "melancholia," in which the aspect of everything to the unfortunate sufferer becomes as it never was to him before—completely changed—and life under this infliction becoming "flat, stale, and unprofitable," he hastens, it may be with his diseased condition only as yet imperfectly realised by his relatives, and while still without proper care or treatment, successfully to shake off its trammels.

Compare those results of everyday experience with regard to unsoundness of mind in persons at large, under care at home, or under care as single patients with or without certificates, with the results obtained under recognised and properly constituted care and treatment. Out of a total number of 78,528 persons registered as of unsound mind during the past year, only fourteen succeeded in committing suicide while under such care.

Apologising for the length in which I have already intruded on your valuable space, I would ask you to allow me to conclude this letter in the words of your reviewer of the last report of the Commissioners in Lunacy: "It would be desirable that some record should be made of suicides by insane persons not under certificates. If such cases were reported by the coroners to the commissioners, the latter, it may be predicted, would by investigation obtain some valuable information in regard to the action of the present law of certification in preventing insane persons being placed under proper care."

I am, Sir, yours obediently,

Harley-street, W., Sept. 20th, 1884.

JAMES ADAM, M.D.

"CHOLERA IN MARSEILLES."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I notice a letter in your issue of the 20th inst. from Dr. Drysdale, an *officier de santé* of Mentone, in which he tells us that "there were cases of cholera in Marseilles last autumn"; and he at the same time throws some side-light on the system of *suppressio veri*, which appears to have been in vogue to prevent the fact of the existence of Asiatic cholera leaking out. This tendency, perhaps, is not the sole privilege of Marseilles. However that may be, the following information, gleaned from a conversation I had the other day with a French naval officer who was a fellow-traveller with me on the Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles Railway, might, I venture to think, tend to prove suggestive. He told me, and very frankly, that there were cases of undoubted cholera on board his man-of-war, lying in the harbour of Toulon early this year, at a time, I might recall attention to the fact, when the French press was seized with a sudden frenzy for the imposition of rigorous and irksome, but futile, quarantine on all arrivals from the far East, on account of the prevalence of cholera in Bombay and Egypt. This French war-ship had, albeit, come from Tonquin, where she

had been actively engaged in operations, but this, and other unwelcome facts or items of intelligence, were carefully kept in the dark from eagerly inquiring "special" and "own" correspondents of the English press.

Now, whether the comma bacillus of Koch and others be, forsooth, a common or garden bacillus, pure and simple, or a myth, it is but fair to Dr. Koch that the medical press should hold over its verdict till the other side of the question is also before the profession in its present phase. It can scarcely be gainsaid that the sanitary arrangements of Marseilles were, and even are, anything but *sans reproche*, and the same may likewise be pronounced of many of the Italian ports. The obvious indication, therefore, is that the sooner the authorities on the Continent set to work in this direction and discard *in toto* the futile and absurd *fiasco* of quarantine the better would it prove in the interests of the public. Your pictorial contemporary, the *Graphic*, not long since favoured us with some amusing and humorous but telling sketches of how quarantine, fumigation, &c., are carried out; and, I think, it would do good if medical artists like Mr. P. Teale ("Dangers to Health: a Pictorial Guide to Domestic Sanitary Defects," J. and A. Churchill, London) were to delineate in like manner all insanitary places as well as the sanitary ones, and exhibit them in some Health Exhibition like the one now open in South Kensington.

I am, Sir, yours very truly,

JOHN C. LUCAS.

London, Sept. 22nd, 1884.

MANCHESTER.

(From our own Correspondent.)

THE WATER-SUPPLY AND THE REMOVAL OF NIGHT-SOIL.

As a result of the dry warm summer we have had two important matters connected with public health come prominently into public notice. First, the water-supply appeared to be getting within measurable distance of real scarcity, several of the reservoirs approaching a dangerously low condition, and a great outcry was for a time raised, especially in some parts of the city, as to the quality of the supply. It was stated by numerous correspondents in the newspapers that the water was turbid and ill-smelling, particularly after being boiled, and there certainly seems to have been some foundation for these complaints; but it was apparently the water from one reservoir in particular that was chiefly at fault, the cause of it being, not any unusual contamination, but the low state of the reservoir, and this with a hot sun pouring steadily down on an almost stagnant shallow layer of water had given rise to the conditions complained of. Since the heavy rains of the last two or three weeks all complaints have ceased, and our water-supply is now in its usual satisfactory condition. Another public grievance has, however, called forth loud and bitter complaints. Manchester, as many of your readers are aware, has, during the past ten years, adopted to a very large extent the dry system of earth-closets, removing regularly the night-soil and other refuse of the city to a large dépôt situate on the outskirts of the town, where elaborate works and machinery are in operation for converting it into a marketable manure, which has been attended with a very large measure of success. But to remove the enormous mass of material constantly and quickly from so large a population as this necessitates the employment of a large number of waggons to convey the contents of the closets &c. to the above works. Specially constructed pans, with tightly fitting lids, and waggons specially built for the purpose of holding these, are in use, and hitherto have not given rise to much annoyance, but lately the papers have teemed with complaints of the nuisance arising from these carts in passing through the streets and from the removal of the pans during the daytime, and it has been suggested that the work should be done at night instead of being carried on all through the day. At one time it was done at night, but the greatly increased cost and the difficulty of efficiently supervising the men engaged in it, led to the nightwork being abandoned. Probably now that the hot weather has passed by for the present season, we shall hear less of any nuisance being caused. If it be chiefly a matter of cost, this ought not to stand in the way, for although the Health Committee, upon whom this work devolves, is always being reproached as the spending depart-