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