

recommends." I can fully bear testimony to this statement, as I had on several occasions administered chloroform when Dr. Deane was operating. I have administered chloroform in a very large number of cases. I have always held the theory that chloroform stops the respiration before it interferes with the circulation. During the administration of chloroform I never feel the pulse, but keep a careful eye on the respiration and condition of lips, &c.; but, during the last four years, I had on two occasions to abandon the contemplated operation, and on three others to postpone it, for the danger that stared me in the face after the administration of only a few whiffs of chloroform. By the time this letter will reach you, English surgeons will no doubt have given their opinions on the question. The Hyderabad Commission deserve the highest credit, and it is not too much to say that it is one of the greatest scientific events of the nineteenth century; but, at the same time, it must be observed that the last paragraph of its report has hardly the chance of being universally admitted, and is calculated to be positively dangerous medico-legally, as Dr. Deane has pointed out.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Kashmir, March 5th, 1890. A. MITRA, L.R.C.P., L.R.C.S.

ROYAL MEDICAL BENEVOLENT COLLEGE.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Allow me to direct the attention of your readers to the advertisement of the biennial festival of the Royal Medical Benevolent College on April 17th, to which you have so kindly given a prominent position. Sir James Paget has consented to take the chair in the hope of aiding the fund for the support of the pensioners and foundationers of the College. The Council have each year to find not less than £4000 to support fifty pensioners, and to clothe, feed, and educate fifty foundation scholars. Towards this amount they have but a certain income of £600 a year. Can there be any cause more directly appealing to the medical profession, and through them to the public, than the soothing the declining years of the necessitous aged and giving a sound and thorough education to the young? We ask for no money help for the school generally, apart from the foundation. It is doing good work, which is steadily bearing fruit. The numbers are rising, but at present there is accommodation for more pupils. It is with no little pride that we can point at this moment to as many as six Epsomians upon the teaching staff of our great metropolitan hospitals. This will sufficiently stamp the excellence of our scientific teaching. We offer immense benefits to the sons of medical men, but we do away with the evils of a class school by the admixture of the sons of laymen—sons of parents outside the medical profession. Each boy is under the special care of a house-master, who is in close relation to him at all times; and he receives an education which will fit him in due course to go direct from the school to Oxford or Cambridge, to the London hospitals, or to enter the army or go into a merchant's office. It is the desire of the Council to extend the usefulness of the school, and to increase the benefits it confers, by attracting a larger number of pupils. They now appeal with confidence to the members of the medical profession for funds to carry on the benevolent side of their great work.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

C. HOLMAN,

Reigate, March 31st.

Treasurer of Epsom College.

URIC-ACID EXCRETION: BIRDS *v.* BEARS.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Although it fortunately happens that in the majority of instances the reader is able from the context to discover for himself the nature of a typographical error, every now and again the substitution of one word for another not only renders the author's meaning obscure, but makes the purport of his remark so unintelligible that it demands correction. Unluckily for me this has been the case in the report in THE LANCET of to-day (March 29th) of the discussion following upon the reading of Sir Wm. Roberts' paper on the History of Uric Acid at the Royal Medico-

Chirurgical Society. The substitution of the two letters "e" and "a" for "i" and "d" having sufficed to transform a bird into a bear, and thereby not only completely nip off the point of my argument, but by bringing into juxtaposition similar instead of dissimilarly feeding animals render the cogency of the illustration totally indiscernible. I crave therefore that you will give me sufficient space, not only to direct attention to the misprint, but at the same time give a brief explanation of the important significance of the substitution of the one animal for the other in a discussion on the respective influences of diet and constitutional peculiarities in the production of uric acid in the human system. For strange to say, insignificant though the daily production of uric acid is, this substance is nevertheless the parent of more constitutional as well as local discomforts than that of all the other effete urinary excrementitious products put together. As not only is it the main source of all the sand, gravel, and calculi that afflict us, and plays an important part in gout and diabetes, but it is at the same time one of the chief products of liver derangements and febrile disturbances. Consequently, the more fully the medical practitioner understands its physiology the better will he be able to successfully cope with its pathological eccentricities.

In order, then, that there may be no ambiguity as regards the purport of my observations, I may remark that I endeavoured to show that it was a fallacy to suppose that diet had a greater influence on the amount of uric acid formed in and excreted by the human body than constitutional peculiarity. For, although it is incontestable that herbivorous animals pass hippuric acid in their urine, while carnivorous and omnivorous animals excrete uric acid, it is likewise thought that a healthy man passes a third more uric acid on an animal diet than on a vegetable one, and double as much on a mixed diet, as when living on a non-nitrogenous one. The following facts materially militate against the unconditional acceptance of the theory that diet is the ruling factor in uric-acid formation. For, firstly, while within the first month after its birth the human infant excretes a proportionally larger amount of hippuric than of uric acid, the sucking calf's urine contains no hippuric acid at all. Yet both are milk-fed, and the slight difference existing in the composition of their mothers' milk cannot be said to be sufficient to account for this disagreement in the nature of their urinary crystallisable excrementitious acid products. Secondly, notwithstanding its being a widespread and deeply rooted theory that sugar augments the formation of uric acid in the human body, and is consequently bad for gouty subjects, no urologist I have consulted has ever been able either to tell me how the idea originated, or adduce one single demonstrable fact in its support. My son Vaughan, while working last year in the Physiological Laboratory of the Sorbonne at Paris, not only gave dogs as much as half a pound of sugar a day, but himself took 400 grammes, equal to nearly thirteen ounces, in the twenty-four hours, without being able to obtain any evidence of an increase of uric acid taking place in the urine until the digestive functions had become seriously deranged. Thirdly, under certain pathological conditions, men have been known, even when for many days on spare diet, to eliminate enormous quantities of uric acid. Fourthly, while active muscular exercise increases, hot weather diminishes the excretion of uric acid by the urine. Nevertheless, the following biological facts totally upset the validity of the theory based on these data. For not only do the slow-breathing, sluggish-moving, carnivorous serpent, and the quick-breathing, muscularly active, grain-eating bird, and the still more strictly vegetarian insect, in the shape of the bee and the butterfly, all pass uric acid in their solid urines—and that, too, in, as far as has yet been ascertained, much about the same relative proportions to their bodily weight. Hence my argument that constitutional peculiarity, both as regards species and individuals, is a much more important factor in the production of uric acid in the animal economy than mere diet.

It is seen, then, that I never alluded to bears at all, and that the word bird ought to be substituted for that of bear in the report of my speech. My fear is that many more may have noticed the mistake than will peruse its correction.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

GEORGE HARLEY, M.D., F.R.S.

Harley-street, W., March 29th, 1890.