from past events, that the guardians will not feel disposed to carry into effect the order of the commissioners, unless compelled to do so, before the expiration of another year. Should such a proceeding be sanctioned, I need hardly observe that upwards of 200 illegal practitioners will be again employed for another year. I do not mean to say that this was so managed by the commissioners as to defeat their own order for that period; but, unless they do interfere, I am quite sure such will be the result.

I am induced to call your attention to these matters, from observing what is going on in this county, and I will mention a few facts connected with my own union. Three years ago I had the charge of a moderate sized district, the population being about 4,000, possessing, I should observe, the double qualification with nearly twenty years' experience, and at the end of the year, a full board unanimously passed a vote of thanks for the very efficient manner in which I had discharged my duty; but, at the same time, I was told that some of my parishes were to be taken from me, for the purpose of making another district for a person who has no qualification of any sort or kind, save the qualification of being related to two or three of the guardians, and who, until a short time before, had only acted as a dispenser and assistant, and who, I have reason to believe, had never served an apprenticeship, and to this piece of injustice I was compelled to submit, or suffer in various ways which you will readily understand. This person had the charge of several more parishes than I had, and has ever since continued to hold the appointment; and was re-appointed for the ensuing year, ending March 25, 1843, a few days before the order of the commissioners was received. I ask, will this election be approved of and sanctioned by the commissioners, or will they compel the guardians to forthwith carry their order into effect? Can the present board of guardians consider the election of such a person, however respectable his general character may be, as binding upon them?

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

A MEDICAL OFFICER.

Dorsetshire, April 16, 1842.

* * This letter is authenticated by the signature of the writer.—EDS.

PROVINCIAL LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—As the custody as well as the treatment of insane persons is daily becoming of more importance to the medical profession, and as some misapprehension still exists respecting the bill introduced into Parliament by Lord Granville Somerset for the better inspection of the above institutions, it seems desirable that provincial practitioners should be made acquainted with the description of asylums to which the measure applies; and a few remarks on those to which the bill has no reference may, perhaps, tend to elucidate the subject. It is generally, although not universally, known, that all houses in London, Westminster, and seven miles thereof, and in the county of Middlesex, for the reception of two or more

insane persons, are under the control and inspection of from fifteen to twenty commissioners, who are annually appointed by the Lord Chancellor. Five, at least, of these commissioners are to be physicians, and two barristers. It is a singular fact, that there are as many patients collected together within the metropolitan district as are contained in all the other private asylums in the country. With reference to the proposed bill, no alteration is made within the commissioners' range.

What are strictly denominated *county lunatic asylums*, are regulated by 9 Geo. IV., c. 40. They are erected by the county, with the consent and under the jurisdiction of the justices at quarter sessions, and they are chiefly for paupers and criminal lunatics. Of these, I believe there are not more than eight or nine in number, and with their present management Lord G. Somerset does not intend to interfere.

His lordship's bill provides for the more effectual inspection of private houses, licensed by the magistrates at quarter sessions, for the reception of lunatics, without the commissioners' range. There are in England between sixty and seventy retreats of this description. In conformity with the existing law, they are visited by three or more magistrates, assisted by a physician, surgeon, or apothecary, four times a year. The medical officer accompanies the visiting justices; he cannot be expected to make many private inspections at the salary he receives; and, by-the-bye, he is not unfrequently elected on account of family connections.

The infrequency of these magisterial and medical inspections—their short duration, at long intervals—render it impossible for the visitors to ascertain the sanity of each inmate's mind; nor do they, in very few, if any instances, profess to enter into any such responsible and protracted investigations, with the view to authorise a patient's discharge. But his lordship said, "he had no intention whatever to decline the aid of the magistrates, or to induce them to discontinue the practice of visiting, as they had hitherto been in the habit of doing with great benefit to the inmates, the licensed houses throughout the several districts. Indeed, he was inclined to imagine that the regularity of those visits by the paid members of the commission would have the effect of rendering the magistrates more attentive in future to the performance of their duties." Notwithstanding this doubtful compliment to the visiting justices, it is more than probable whether the proposed measure will act as a stimulus to increased exertions. The ultimate effect will more likely be (if it is not the intention) to supersede the present medical and justicial inspection altogether. Is it not, therefore, absolutely necessary that these legal commissioners should have the assistance of one or more experienced persons, who have devoted no inconsiderable period of their lives to the study of mental diseases, in all their varied and complicated forms, before such responsible duties are conferred upon and undertaken by men who "neither traditionally nor by their writings" have shown any inherent qualifications to practice a branch of the medical profession? This part of the subject, however, has been so ably discussed in your last week's editorial remarks, that I conclude with an apology for the length of this communication, and remain,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

G. W. DYKE, M.D.

Corsham, Wilts, April, 1842.