or eighth pair, is no more *indispensable* to the integrity of the *respiratory function* than it is to the act of *digestion*; and however necessary the motor influence of the various cerebro-spinal nerves supplied to the respiratory muscles, as they are termed, may be, and is, to their normal action, yet does it appear, for various reasons, that the alternate contraction and dilatation of the thoracic cavity, the effect as it is of muscular power, exerted on its parietes, may be, under certain circumstances, continued independently of the cerebrum and spinal cord. The act of respiration, then, is, *strictly speaking*, an organic function; else, during *sleep*, and in cases of disease affecting the entire brain and cord, as in the peculiar paralysis of the insane combined with idiocy, wherein the cerebro-spinal functions are one and all obliterated, the lungs must cease to act. I cannot doubt that there are times, even in man, when the ganglia of the sympathetic are called on to perform functions hitherto regarded as purely cerebral or spinal. Sensation and motion, and even acts apparently mental, are enjoyed by animals so low in the scale of being as to be without either a brain or a cord, and why, therefore, should not man partake of a modified advantage. Inasmuch as *insects* receive the air by points which open externally, the function of respiration belongs to them entirely, and at all times, to the organic life; in man, it constitutes, *as a general rule*, one of his many relations or *adaptations* (COMBE) to the external world. The cerebro-spinal system of nerves is, then, neither '*directly*' nor '*indirectly*' indispensably necessary to life—a conclusion supported by many modern experimenters."

MR. SYME ON STRICTURE OF THE URETHRA.

[LETTER FROM MR. GAY.]

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the last number of your journal, your readers were favoured with a note from Mr. Syme, accompanied with the first of a series of cases intended to illustrate the advantages of the "perineal section," to "satisfy every mind open to conviction, and to silence the cavils of ignorance and malice."

I was not a little amused, on looking somewhat narrowly into this production, and contrasting its propositions with those to be found in Mr. Syme's former works, to observe indisputable evidences of abated confidence, on Mr. Syme's part, in the merits of his operation; whilst, on the other hand, I was somewhat astonished that, after the publication of the deaths, accidents, and failures which have followed its performance, the distinguished professor had not, in common with his "London brethren," abandoned it altogether. If Mr. Syme requires more than has already appeared in print, to convince him of the unsoundness of his views, I would bid him make inquiries in Bath or its neighbourhood as to the present condition of the gentleman whose case figures as No. 1 in his work on Stricture. Of this case we are told, that when the wound made in the operation closed, the patient "felt quite well, and he continues to do so, though several years have now elapsed. He has never required the bougie, and in every respect enjoys the most perfect health." I am very much mistaken if this gentleman is not at the present moment—or was not, a short time since—almost, if not quite, as bad as before the operation. Well might Mr. Syme alter his tone; and the somewhat dogmatical assertion, that the perineal section "is the complete remedy of the disease in its most inveterate and obstinate forms," relapse into the modest assurance of the note before me, "that the relief thus afforded is *more permanent* (the italics are mine) than that which can be obtained in any other way." Besides this, we are now told that by the section "strictures may be speedily removed so as to allow instruments of the largest size to be introduced without difficulty or inconvenience." If Mr. Syme contends in this passage that by slitting up the urethra, or any portion of it, an instrument may be passed into the bladder, which could not have been made to traverse it prior to the operation, I most willingly grant it, and am apt to think there is nothing novel or particularly striking in the fact; but if he means that by cutting through a stricture in one part, the constricting tissues, or causes of stricture, are thereby removed, I beg most distinctly to question the truth or probability of such a proposition. Beside, if the speedy removal of strictures, "so as to allow instruments of the largest size to be introduced" be the main feature in Mr. Syme's treatment, I believe that this can be effected, without the risks attendant upon the perineal section, by the instrument which was laid before the Medical Society at its last meeting.

But, Sir, we are now to have another lot of cases in support

of the professor's views. Where, I would ask, is the necessity for this? There are seventeen already before the profession, and surely (if what is stated of them be true) they alone would be sufficient "to satisfy every mind open to conviction;" but the real truth is, they are a bad lot, spoiled by age, and those that are to supersede them (if we take the first as a sample) are to be bran new ones, "as fair as morn, as fresh as May," against which even "ignorance and malice" will not be able successfully to contend. The one given is after the following fashion:—A farmer, on the 18th November, submits to the perineal section for three strictures, and on the 17th Dec. (a month afterwards) the patient is dismissed, "declaring that he is completely relieved from all the distressing symptoms under which he had previously laboured." And this is *paraded as a cure for stricture* by the *perineal section*; and upon such trashy evidence we are called upon to cut open the urethra in any part from without, on account of a permeable stricture!!

Permit me, Sir, in conclusion, to ask Mr. Syme one question, and I venture to think that his professional character is staked upon the reply. He says, in proof of the assertion, that his operation is free from "all ordinary sources of danger;" that he has performed it "in thirty-five cases," *without a single fatal result*. Pray, Mr. Syme, if of your thirty-five patients, the operation has not killed one, *how many to your knowledge* has it cured?

I am, Sir, yours obediently,

Finsbury-place South, Jan. 29, 1851.

JOHN GAY.

N.B.—Mr. Syme complains of the treatment he has received at the hands of his "London brethren;" will you allow me to add to this note the following passage from the *Monthly Journal of Medicine* for December, in reference to a case of stricture treated by myself; and then ask who has the most right to complain of "falsehood or calumny"?

"Instead of accepting this proposal as a fair subject of trial, they [the London surgeons] have ridiculed and reviled it in every possible way, not declining the worthless testimony even of persons who, by their systems of advertising, and other disreputable proceedings, have placed themselves beyond the pale of professional respect. They have professed to practise it, with utter disregard of the principles upon which it is founded, and have not scorned to publish the results of this spurious experience as confirmatory of their objections. In short, they have spurned no means which promised to aid them in the vain attempt to resist an improvement, merely because it did not emanate from one of their own fraternity."

"But, while publishing from week to week the sad results of their *own* method, they must not be allowed to forget that, instead of resorting to a mode of treatment so discreditable to surgery, so painful—we are bound to suppose—to their *own* feelings, and so dangerous, or rather certainly destructive, to the patient, they have it in their own power to send him, free of expense, to Edinburgh, with the certainty of either obtaining relief, or protecting themselves for the future from the repetition of an offer apparently not very agreeable."

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AND ASSURANCE OFFICES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Again on Saturday last I was applied to for a medical certificate. The string of questions are fourteen in number, and seven or eight too absurd to answer, whether *paid or unpaid*.

My reply is, therefore, "I shall recommend my patient to one of those offices which pay for the medical certificate."

I believe that if our medical brethren adopt this simple answer, even the old offices will be obliged to bend.

Yours, &c.

Farringdon-street, Jan. 27, 1851.

FRANCIS BULLIN.

N.B. There can no possible doubt but that your publication of the paying offices will effect great and important good, both to the profession and the offices.

MR. R. A. STAFFORD.—We regret to inform our readers that this gentleman, upon whom the duty devolved this year of delivering the Hunterian Oration at the College of Surgeons, is unable to do so, as his health is greatly impaired by his constant attendance on two old and attached friends, and their death has been so severe a shock as totally to incapacitate him from the completion of an Oration, which we have reason to know was thoroughly *Hunterian*; a compliment we have not been able to pay to all Orations delivered in the theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons.