weather, the general opinion is that whether used moderately or in excessive quantities, they diminish the strength of the body, relax the muscles, render men more susceptible of disease, and unfit them for any service in which great vigour or activity is required."

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,
JAMES BRACE NEILSON.
Regent's-park, Jan. 1856.

MEDICAL EDUCATION.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have read with much pleasure the last letter of your correspondent "A London Graduate in Arts and Medicine," and quite agree in his view of the studies calculated as a preparation for the pursuit of medicine.

The examination for M.A., Branch III., seems to supply just what your correspondent desires, and it would be none the worse for having been preceded by the B.A. degree.

It is much to be hoped that all those restrictions will be removed which now tend so much to prevent medical students from graduating in Arts. There is no shadow of reason against admitting any candidate to the B.A. examination, no matter where or how he may have studied.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,
X.
London Hospital, Feb. 1856.

PLURAL BIRTHS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Permit me, through the medium of your journal, to record the following somewhat rare cases of plural births:—

On October 31st, 1855, my assistant delivered the wife of a plasterer of three living full-grown children, two girls and a boy. The mother and children are all doing well up to this time, January, 1856. The first presented by the feet; the second, by the head; and the third, by the arm and shoulder, and required turning. There was but one placenta, and this not at all a large one, with three distinct cords.

On January 11th, 1849, I delivered the wife of a painter of twins; again, on January 7th, 1852, of twins; and again, on the 26th of November, 1855, of twins. Three consecutive births of twins I believe are very rare.

I will at the same time record a case of three mammae, unfortunately not in the mother of the triplets. I attended a young woman in her first confinement, and in about three days after, my attention was called to the fact. On the right side, about three inches below the natural mamma, was a second mamma about the size of the half of an orange, with a distinct nipple with dark areola; it was the cause of great inconvenience in consequence of the milk flowing from it when the draught came into the natural mamma. She informed me that she has always had great pain in it at the menstrual periods ever since they first came on.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.,
JOSEPH CHAPMAN, M.R.C.S., L.S.A.
Hounslow, Jan. 1856.

NECESSITY FOR A CORONER'S COURT IN SCOTLAND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your remarks (THE LANCET, January 12th, p. 48) on the obstacles to the discharge of the duties of coroner in some parts of England, and the nature of those obstacles themselves, apply with singular felicity to Scotland. Here, it is true, we possess no coroner's inquest, but the "practice of our courts is by lawyers said to be superior to that of England." Yet is this good practice but seldom exercised, and the number of cases that escape investigation is positively frightful. For example, "in a small parish containing barely 2000 inhabitants, fourteen bodies found dead were buried uninvestigated in the short space of five years." I myself have had the ill-fortune to meet with a few cases whose manner of death I would gladly have seen cleared up, and so doubtless have most of my professional brethren; but if we examine a body without a warrant from the sheriff, censure is our only thanks, blame our certain reward; while, if we demand a warrant, precious time is lost, and the warrant often also, because, forsooth, the constable thinks it unnecessary. For, Mr. Editor, in our enlightened land, such is the degree of wisdom possessed by the body corporate of the law, that its extreme digits possess an amount of legal lore, medical experience, and scientific knowledge sufficient to enable them to conduct the preliminary

investigation, and to decide from their own extensive experience whether or no proof of foul play is likely to be obtained by a more extended and minute examination. Constables, forsooth, they ought to be professors! Yet their opinion has ere now quashed many a case, and the system is said to work well! Doubtless it does. How, under such a system, can any but the most self-evident cases be ever brought to further investigation? It was hoped that the recent Registration Act might prove a useful substitute for the coroner's inquest; but, alas! "it forms no part of the registrars' duty to ascertain the correctness of the reported cause of death," and "found dead" is as good an explanation of the cause of death as ever.

Not very long since, you, Mr. Editor, commented on the numbers dying in Scotland without medical attendance; but if my professional brethren have acted as I have done, a portion at least of this seeming neglect is removed from our shoulders to that of the lawyers, for in all cases of sudden death in which I am unable to obtain a post-mortem examination, I decline to certify the cause of death, the case is entered as "without medical attendant," and the registrar adds what he supposes to be the most probable cause of death.

Last year there was published in Edinburgh a short pamphlet* on the foregoing subject, and perhaps the best commentary on its truthfulness and the felt necessity of some such institution as a coroner's inquest for Scotland is to be found in the fact that it was noticed approvingly by almost all the Scotch papers, and of those few who did attempt to pick holes in its arguments, not one was bold enough to deny the need of change. I have already quoted several of its facts, but there are others still more striking, and which call, if possible, still more loudly for the alteration of a system so faulty.

To conclude, it seems to me that even in England, sufficient prominence is not given to the medical element, and that the coroner's inquests are particularly faulty in leaving non-scientific men to judge of and draw conclusions from evidence often of an imperfect and untrustworthy character; imperfect, because post-mortems are not always insisted on; untrustworthy, because even when they are, their performance is often entrusted to men who, from their habits and education, must certainly be good observers, but who are not always equally skilful at interpreting their observations; these may be true and yet their assigned value utterly false, and calculated to mislead an unscientific jury. Most of the discrepancies in medical evidence, so largely dwelt on by skilful lawyers, arise from this circumstance. With an expert as an interpreter of seeming contradictions, and assigner of its true value to each separate fact, the case would be widely different; medical evidence would then be duly appreciated, and the verdict of any jury so assisted, if reasonably given, would stand the test of any criticism. In this country, no encouragement has hitherto been given to any branch of medical knowledge not immediately available in practice; medical jurisprudence has been accordingly much neglected, and, if we except cases of poisoning, which possess chiefly a chemical interest, we rarely meet with any investigation possessing a scientific character. Abroad the case is widely different; there, cases which are here slurred over are made the means of elucidating problems of the highest importance. Their medico-legal reports contain also often ample proof of the use and necessity of an expert. To these reports, scattered through the German journals, particularly such as are devoted to medico-legal enquiries, I would refer the enquiring reader. A translation of a most interesting trial for murder will be found in the *Edinburgh Monthly Journal* for September 1852, p. 304, in which medical evidence alone identified a headless corpse, proved the cause of death, and convicted the murderer, after a trial extending over three years. The expert in this case was the celebrated Carper, of Berlin.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
SCOTUS.
January, 1856.

THE SURGERY OF THE WAR.

THE SANITARY CONDITION OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE CRIMEA DURING THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 19TH.

THE Inspector-General of Hospitals serving with the army in the Crimea, in forwarding his return of sick, states:—The sanitary condition of the army continues very satisfactory. A slight decrease in both the admissions and deaths has taken

* On the Law of the Coroner, &c., by James Craig, Esq., F.R.C.S.M. Sutherland and Knox.