

NOTES, LETTERS, ETC.

C. has not enclosed his card.

ERRATUM.—In Dr. Balfour Graham's clinical memorandum at page 617 of the JOURNAL of March 19th, the head of the nail was stated to have been two inches in diameter, instead of in circumference.

PRODROMATA V. PRODROMA.

DR. W. H. O. SANKEY writes: Allow me a line in the JOURNAL to correct a small error in your last number, in which I am reported at p. 556 to have read a paper on the "Prodromata" of Diseases. I beg to say I used the word "prodroma." I have frequently seen and heard the term "prodromata" used, but prodroma is the plural of prodromon, "a runner before." How prodromata has come into use is not evident. There is another word very often used and equally in error. One often meets with the term "calvarium," meaning the skull; the Latin word is "calvaria," and its genitive is calvaria. It is as well to use the correct term if at all.

* * We doubt if the nomenclature of our profession can be altered in the way suggested by Dr. W. H. O. Sankey. Dr. Sankey seems to assume that "prodromon" is the singular of "prodromata," and by the rule that Latin substantives of Greek derivation ending in "on" are generally declined like "regnum" in the second declension, it should make its nominative plural "prodroma." It is quite likely that he is so far correct, but it is also possible that he is not. "Prodromata" is evidently the nominative plural of a neuter noun of the third declension, with its nominative singular "prodroma;" derived from a similar (hypothetical) Greek neuter noun. It is more than likely that some writer mistook the plural "prodroma" of the second declension for a singular "prodroma" of the third. But is it not also barely possible that among the medical authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a coinage of the necessary neuter substantive may have taken place? The only way to settle the question satisfactorily is to trace the word back through medical literature to the first instance of its employment. But even if this were done, and Dr. Sankey's derivation were shown to be correct, this would be no reason for accepting his conclusion.

In coining a new term, grammatical correctness should be sought after; but a word adopted and used by our best authors during a long series of years becomes as much a part of the language of medicine as many Norman-French words have of that of England, even although some of both medical and Anglicised words are of originally faulty construction. A physician of a past age perhaps invented in a Latin treatise a term for some symptom, disease, or circumstance for which he could not find a classical synonym. Occasionally, no doubt, the coinage would smack of the monkish custom of endowing a good English word with a Latin termination; but generally our ancestors, being necessarily better Latinists than we, were correct in their constructions. Correct or not, however, the term has then descended to us through the works of Lettsom, of Graves, of Stokes, of Roberts, of Fagge, and of many more equally distinguished men, until it has become not an inflection of a Latin noun, but a technical English word itself. Purism in one case of a Latin noun should mean purism in all; yet we do not suppose that Dr. Sankey, who sticksles for the accurate nominative plural, would wish to see the genitive plural used. "Prodromon" without a preposition in the middle of an English sentence would shock even him. The fact is, a word like "prodromata" must be taken in English medical works to be an irregular plural noun, and the only way to improve it, if improvement be necessary, is not to clothe it in more correct Latin, but to form from it a more regular English word (as has already been done by our American cousins, who have "prodromes and prodromal"), or otherwise to use instead of it the words "premonitory symptoms."

For our part, we are quite satisfied for the present to follow such an excellent Latinist as Dr. Fagge (who uses "prodromata" six or seven times in his *Practise of Medicine*). Against "prodroma," however, we set our face as a needless alteration in a wrong direction. "Are we," said Dr. Graves in 1843, "to be perpetually called upon to learn new names? Must an artificial system of forgetting become even more necessary than a 'memoria technica'?" We should come forward boldly, and declare that we will not be made the slave of names."

HOMOEOPATHY: A DISCLAIMER.

DR. EDWARD HAUGHTON writes: I did not expect to be obliged to correct any further misstatements respecting my medical views; but, in consequence of recent reports which have reached my ears, I am obliged to protest against the statement that I am a disciple of Hahnemann, or a believer in infinitesimal physic. As a matter of fact, I have always regarded the latter as an absurd superstition; and as for "the doctrine of similars," I regard it as of so indefinite a character, as to be quite unfit to form a rule of action in medicine, much less to form the basis of therapeutics.

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Griffith's Materia Medica and Pharmacy. Third Edition. Edited by A. S. Gubb, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. London: Bailliere, Tindall and Co. 1887.
On Overwork and Premature Mental Decay: Its Treatment. By C. H. F. Routh, M.D., M.R.C.P. Fourth Edition. London: Bailliere, Tindall and Cox. 1887.
The Practitioner's Handbook of Treatment, or the Principles of Therapeutics. By J. Milner Fothergill, M.D. Third Edition. London: Macmillan and Co. 1887.

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