Correspondence

DERMATOLOGIC ETYMOLOGY

To the Editor.—I was much interested in the article which appeared in the April number on "Dermatologic Etymology" by Dr. George Henry Fox, and I hope that it will be published in pamphlet form so that it may be easily accessible. Most of the present-day textbooks on dermatology omit this information, which perhaps does not properly belong in them. Many of the medical dictionaries do not contain it, and the oversupply and depreciated price of secondhand Greek dictionaries indicate that the medical student does not search for it in such books. Some knowledge of the meaning of the names used in dermatology is of great assistance to the beginner, and Dr. Fox has furnished it in an interesting form and so compactly that it would be a pity not to have it separately obtainable.

I was amused at the slightly apologetic ending of the article. First because the name of Fox has so long held such a position in the dermatologic world that any apology for any dermatologic writings by any Fox is unnecessary. Second, because I surmise that he was apologizing to himself for writing on the *genealogy* of dermatologic terminology instead of confining himself to *dermatology*.

I may be mistaken in this, but in any case, had he desired to do so, he might have cited an excellent dermatologic precedent for his article in Robert Willan. Willan, though not a genealogist, was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and read before that Society, and later published, "A List of the Antient Words at Present Used in the Mountaneous District of the West Riding of Yorkshire."¹ In this list are a number of old popular medical terms, but there is no need of referring to them.

It is surprising that Dr. Fox was able to restrain himself from wandering beyond the limits he had planned for his article, when so excellent an opportunity for a genealogic (sic) excursus was presented by the word *syphilis*, the origin of which has been the subject of considerable speculation. Fracastor, who first used it in his poem, admitted the paternity, sixteen years after the birth of the child, in his book, "De Contagionibus et Contagiosis Morbis," saying "It was I who, in my poetical writings, first gave it the name of Syphilis."² But he never revealed the maternity of his child, and after his death Fallopius began to investigate the question and came to the conclusion that the mother was the Greek *σύν-φιλέω*, the companion of love. Dr. Fox accepts Fallopius' account of the maternity, and I, not being a genealogist, would not think of disputing it. Some derive it from another Greek origin, some from Hebrew, some from Arabic, and Pflug, the latest writer on the subject I have run across, derives it from the Sanskrit.

1. Archaeologia 17:138-167, 1811; reprinted in English Dialect Society; reprinted Glossaries, London 2:76-98, 1873.

2. Fournier's edition of Fracastor, Paris, 1869, p. 154.

I had at one time thought of summarizing the different views in a brief article, but gave up the idea as I knew I could only make it as dry as dust. Dr. Fox, dermatologist, syphilographer, genealogist and etymologist, can do it and make it interesting, and in order to stimulate and assist him, I append a few references on this subject:

- Buret, F.: Syphilis in Ancient and Prehistoric Times. Translated by Ohmann-Dumesnil, Philadelphia, F. A. Davis Co., 1891.
 Downing, A. F.: Syphilis: The Story of Its Treatment, Old and New, Boston M. & S. J. **177**: 715-720, 1912.
 Pflug, W.: Syphilis oder Morbus Gallicus? Eine etymologische Betrachtung. Trübner, Strassburg, 1907.
 Turner, E.: L'etymologie du mot syphilis; les premiers livres publies sur cette maladie jusqu'a l'apparition du poeme de Fracastor, Ann. de dermat. et syph. **3**: 423, 489, 564 and 665, 1882.
 Späth: Einige Worte über die Etymologie des Worts Syphilis, Med. Cor.-Bl. d. Würtemb. aerzt. Ver. Stuttg. **11**: 49, 1841.
 Timmermans, A.: De l'Etymologie du mot syphilis, J. d. mal. cutan et syph. **10**: 410-420, 1898.

I am sure that Dr. Fox will not be able to resist the title, "Eine etymologische Betrachtung," which Pflug gave his monograph.

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