

dumps of ammunition and enemy ordnance had to be destroyed, as well as thousands of aircraft, and when thousands of airmen and many war-meteorologists were waiting for demobilisation.<sup>1</sup> Is it not a pity that all these forces have been left unemployed? There still may be enough of them left to attempt to execute at least part of such a programme. But there is no time to lose, for every step that brings us nearer complete demobilisation diminishes the facilities and enhances the cost of the undertaking.

V. SCHAFFERS, S.J.

Louvain, January 28.

### The Designation of Vitamines.

THE opinion now appears to be general that the bodies known as accessory foodstuffs should not be termed "vitamines," as they have not been proved to be amines, and, in fact, nothing appears to be known of their constitution. Recently the name has been written "vitamin," but this is not sufficiently distinctive for the spoken word unless the termination be pronounced as "mīn," i.e. with the "i" short.

If American authors cut off the final "e" from "amine," as some do from chloride, iodide, sulphide, sulphate, etc., the dropping of the "e" from "vitamine" will not help matters so far as such authors and their readers are concerned. I hope that the practice of dropping the final "e" will not spread to English writers; for, although we should probably soon get used to the appearance of chlorid, sulphid, sulphit, sulphat, phosphat, etc., there may be a tendency for some to pronounce these words with the "i" short as in "fit" and the "a" short as in "fat," while others would naturally retain the present pronunciation; it is most undesirable to have two different pronunciations for one and the same substance. The method of spelling sulphur and its derivatives as sulfur, sulfates, etc., cannot affect the pronunciation, and, moreover, the "ph" has crept in in error.

The "vitamines" might have been appropriately called "vitallines," which would indicate the vital part they play in nutrition, but that is, perhaps, too near to "vitelline" in sound and unnecessarily long; if they were termed "vitams," "vitans," "vitines" ("vitines" is probably more euphonious than "vitams"), or "vitins," all possible chance of confusion with other bodies would be avoided. The different varieties could be distinguished by A, B, etc., as has been proposed, or by  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , etc., in accordance with the usual practice of so indicating closely related chemical substances; or the water-soluble varieties might be written as w.s., or simply w., vitams, and the fat-soluble ones as f.s. or f. vitams; the letters w.s. or w. and f.s. or f. would at once be recognised as indicating their solubilities in water or fat, and there would not be the same difficulty to the reader of recollecting what A, B, etc., stand for.

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### Scientific Names for Commercial Timbers.

In the notice of "A Manual of the Timbers of the World" in NATURE of September 16, 1920, the reviewer's final paragraph reads as follows:—"Endless embarrassment to the landowning class resulted during the war from the confusion between the names 'silver spruce' and 'silver fir.'"

Now, from my experience in the use of both

<sup>1</sup> [This suggestion was put forward by Prof. de Quervain in January, 1910, and is referred to in NATURE, vol. cii., p. 371, and vol. ciii., p. 31.—EDITOR.]

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scientific and common names, I feel sure all this confusion could have been obviated by using scientific names only, for in this case the timbers referred to are both generically and specifically different, viz. *Picea sitchensis* and *Abies pectinata* respectively, and, naturally, differently textured timbers. Although it is a long way from "down under," I make this appeal to the scientific man in the homeland, hoping that he may prevail on the commercial man to use scientific names exclusively, and to show him how by his following a scientific lead it will be to the latter's financial advantage.

Much confusion existed in the nomenclature of the product produced by eucalyptus-oil distillers when the Sydney Technological Museum first undertook research in this field of economics in 1897, for then it was only with the greatest difficulty that oils true to name could be obtained, all and sundry leaves being put in the still. By using scientific names only from the start, the pharmaceutical, perfumery, and other industrial enterprises have in this direction been so much assisted that the industry is placed on such a scientific basis that all orders for Australian oils are given under scientific names, the common names being absolutely discarded, and so putting a stop to endless confusion such as one finds in the timber trade.

If this can be accomplished throughout the whole essential oil trade, from oil distillers in the bush to the city merchants, and finally to the chemist and pharmacist, surely the timber trades and foresters are not to be regarded as having a *personnel* on a lower intellectual plane than, say, the bush distiller.

This confusing of common names in Australia also gives great trouble to the various trades using timbers; to give one instance only, there are five distinct species of Proteaceous timbers placed on the Sydney market under the name of "silky oak." In order to assist the trades, I was moved to write a paper on the subject, which was read before the Royal Society of New South Wales. As a result, several firms are now specifying scientific names when placing orders for "silky oak," as they know that by so doing they will obtain the exact kind of timber they want for their requirements, and insist on having that particular timber; so in the end there is satisfaction all round.

RICHARD T. BAKER.

Technological Museum, Sydney, N.S.W.,

January 6.

### "Elementary Practical Biochemistry."

IN the otherwise discriminating and useful review of my little book, "Elementary Practical Biochemistry," which appeared in NATURE of November 25 last, there are certain statements due to a misunderstanding which I should like to correct, as they might lead to an unjust estimate of the standards in the medical school with which I have the honour to be associated. The reviewer regrets that insufficient attention is paid to preparative and quantitative work, whilst the absence of treatment of hydrogen-ion determination constitutes a "serious defect."

As the preface indicates, this volume is one of three. Of the other two, one is to be devoted to clinical applications, and the remaining one to preparative and quantitative procedures. There is already in the press a detailed description of hydrogen-ion determination by the indicator method, and also by the electrical method, using the Leeds-Northrup potentiometer and a special electrode which is the outcome of some years of patient investigation by Dr. J. M. Lewis, a research student in my laboratory.

W. A. OSBORNE.

University of Melbourne, January 24.