Clinical and other Notes.

THE SOLUTION OF "A CASE FOR DIAGNOSIS."

By CAPTAIN L. BOUSFIELD.
Royal Army Medical Corps.

The case reported in the last number of this journal (p. 282) caused great anxiety on account of it presenting the typical appearance of a malignant pustule, and if this had been the right diagnosis, operation should have been performed as soon as possible, since there would have been no time to procure serum. Although the condition appeared to be a malignant pustule, it was not treated as such, from the fact that no bacilli were found in the fluid from the vesicles, that neither she nor any of her family had run any apparent chance of infection with the anthrax bacillus, and further, there were, as far as one could ascertain, no other cases in Malta at that time.

Suddenly the idea dawned on me that the case might have been caused by auto-vaccination, and on enquiry she stated one of her children had been vaccinated two weeks previously and had "taken beautifully." Though the condition resembled none that I have seen on the arm, yet this was quite a satisfactory explanation, and proved to be the correct diagnosis, for she rapidly recovered and was left with a permanent mottled white mark on her chin.

This case is instructive in showing how one question may be the means of settling the diagnosis in a difficult case. The patient's statement that her children were perfectly healthy, followed by my seeing them in that condition, caused me to omit this all-important question, which would have saved great worry and anxiety, not only to myself, but also to the husband and to the patient, whom I had felt bound to inform that the case might be very serious. I am ashamed to say that my omission of this question went within an ace of causing the patient the loss of a large portion of her face.

Curiously, the very next issue of the British Medical Journal contained a description of such a case, with a photograph showing the vaccination in identically the same position.