Dear Editor,

We compliment Dr. De Lima Resende and Dr. Weber with their interesting article entitled: 'Peripheral Facial Palsy in the Past. Contributions from Avicenna, Nicolaus Friedreich and Charles Bell'. In it, they state that "Charles Bell [...] himself had right peripheral facial paralysis".

To support their statement the authors refer to a review on the history of facial nerve surgery by Jongkees (1979), who indeed made the same remark. Jongkees in turn concluded this from a book chapter written by Zülch (1970), who started the chapter with the following quotation by Sir Charles Bell (1774–1842): "...When the paralysis was complete, I began to feel pain in the temple, and there was oedematous swelling in the part. During the course of this complaint I have experienced two circumstances which may lead to the detection of the facial nerve becoming affected...".

Thereafter Zülch wrote: ‘We consider it apt to preface our description of ‘idiopathic’ facial paralysis with this excellent piece of self-observation, quoted by Sir Charles Bell in his well-known publication (1829) of his physiological and pathological research on the nervous system. It was a letter written by Professor Roux of Paris to his colleague Descot, in which he described his own symptoms’. Thus, Zülch did not mention that Bell was affected by facial paralysis. Instead it seems to have been Roux, whose self-observation was reported by Bell in 1827. Neither Bell’s own work nor the extensive biography on Bell written by Gordon Taylor and Walls (1958) gives us indications that Bell himself was affected by facial paralysis.

Unfortunately, Jongkees seems to have introduced the error that Bell himself was affected by facial paralysis. To prevent perpetuation of reporting historical errors in the literature, a critical and scientific attitude regarding the use of historical data is necessary. We should always be aware of secondary literature, and we should always check the primary sources concerned. Already in 1916, Frank Place advised us: ‘Take no reference for granted. Verify the reference that your best friend gives you. Verify the reference that your revered chief gives you. Verify most of all, the reference that you yourself found and jotted down. To err is human, to verify is necessary’.

REFERENCES

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THE AUTHORs’ REPLY
ABOUT THE RIGHT FACIAL PALSY OF CHARLES BELL
Dear Editor,

We acknowledge Korteweg et al. for their interests in our article about peripheral facial palsy. Unfortunately, there are some oversights in their observations.

According to Korteweg et al., our diagnosis of Sir Charles Bell’s right facial palsy is based only on the observations made by Jongkees. This is not correct. In fact, our diagnosis is based on the neurological examination of the photography of Sir Charles Bell (Figure). The au-
thors affirm that Jongkees “introduced the error” that Charles Bell had right facial palsy, influenced by Zülch³. We do not agree, it is possible that Jongkees has studied the patient’s photography, similarly to us. Korteweg et al. did not transcribe a complete translation of Jongkees’s text. According to Jongkees² Charles Bell described that … Wenn die Lähmung vollständig wurde, spürte ich Schmerzen in meiner Schläfe und auch eine oedematöse Schwel lung. Während der Dauer der Beschwerden habe ich zwei Dinge erfahren müssen, die zur Entdeckung der Lähmung des Nervus facialis führen könnten. 1. Das Trommelfell war empfindlich, selbst für leise Töne und 2. der Geschmackssinn an meiner rechten Zungenseite war abnormal, so dass alles metallähnlich schmeckte. Dieses letzte Symptom war vor allen anderen Beschwerden da und wurde bereits 24 h vor Beginn der Lähmung gespürt. Der Schmerz war nicht bedeutend, weder im Stamm noch in den einzelnen Nervenästen. Die Empfindlichkeit war nicht verän dert, die Lähmung des Musc. occipitofrontalis, des orbic ularis palpebrarum und aller Lippenmuskeln auf der rech-