NEUROLOGY IN LITERATURE

Neurosyphilis

Considering the number of syphilitic writers, descriptions of neurosyphilis in the literature are fairly uncommon. As yet I have not encountered a convincing description of meningo-vascular syphilis other than Mann's pathological essay, but thought the description in Mother Courage of secondary syphilis sufficiently charming to merit its inclusion. Kipling is said to have consulted with Ernest Gowers in order to write his description of tabs dorsalis. Thomas Mann is one of the few authors to have described the gradual development of disability in the syphilitic individual. The same book also contains a horrifying description of the terminal stages of untreated meningitis.

Johann von Grimmelhausen, 1669, Mother Courage At the very moment when the earth was adornning itself with its robe of many-coloured flowers my skin erupted in pretty pustules, red as rubies, to grace my fair complexion—the rubies vanished in due course, but my doctor warned me that my blood was still not fully cleansed and advised me to continue my cure at the town of Griesbach with the help of mineral waters, in order to achieve a perfect recovery and be completely restored.

Rudyard Kipling in Many inventions, 1893, Love-o'-Wom

"'Tention', sez the docthor; an' Love-o'-Women stud so. 'No shut your eyes', sez the docthor. 'No, ye must not hould by your conrade.' 'Tis all up, sez Love-o'-Women, thrying to smile. 'Td fall, docthor, an' you know ut.' 'But what ails him, docthor?' I sez. 'They call ut Locomotus Attacks-us', he sez, 'bekaze', sez he, 'ut attacks us like a locomotive, if ye know what that manes. An' ut comes, sez he, lookin' at me, 'ut comes from bein' called Love-o'-Women.' 'You're jokin', docthor, I sez. 'Just jokin' sez he. 'If iver you feel that you've got a feel sole in your boot instid av a Governornt bull's-wool, come to me,' he sez, 'an I'll show you whether 'tis a joke.'"

Marcel Proust, vol 2, translated by CK Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, 1920, 1921, 1922, Rememberance of things past

But on hearing M de Charlus say, in that shrill voice and with that smile and those gestures, "No, I preferred its neighbour, the strawberry-juice," One could say: "Ah, he likes the stronger sex," with the same certainty as enables a judge to sentence a criminal who has not confessed, or a doctor a patient suffering from genito-pudical paralytic who himself is perhaps unaware of his malady but has made some mistake in pronouncement from which it can be deemed that he will be dead in three years.

James Joyce, 1922, Ulysses

That fellow I was with in the Ship last night said Buck Mulligan, says you have g.p.i. He's up in Dottville with Conolly Norman. General paralysis of the insane.

Thomas Mann, 1947, Doctor Faustus

But I mean these flagellates, the invisible tiny ones, the kind that have scourgis, like on pale Venus, the spirochaeta palilda, that is the true sort....To be short, the meta-spirochaete, that is the meningal process, and I assure you, it is just as though certain of the little ones had a passion for the upper storey, a special preference for the head region, the meningis, the dura mater, the tentorium, and the pia, which protect the tender parenchyma inside and from the moment of the first general contagion swarmed passionately hither...You have there the spinal sac with the pulsating column of fluid therein, reaching to the cerebrum, to the meninges, in whose tissues the fugitive venereal menigits is at its soundless stealthy work. That might perhaps alarm me, the more because there was about the widened gaze a fixity—or shall I say it was a stare—the nature of which I puzzled over until it occurred to me that it depended on the unvarying size of the not quite round, rather irregularly lengthened pupils, as though they remained unaffected by any alteration in the lighting....Only certes I should suffer the knives of pain therefore, even in the time, as the little sea-maid suffered them in her legs, which was my sister and sweet bride, and named Hyphialta. ...Reverence forbids me to describe Adrian's condition when he came to himself after the twelve hours' unconsciousness with which the paralytic stroke at the piano had plunged him. No, not to himself did he come; rather he found himself as a stranger, who was only the burnt-out husk of his personality, having at bottom nothing to do with him who had been called Adrian Leverkuhn. After all, the word "dementia", originally meant nothing else than the aberration from self, self-alienation.
Neurosyphilis.

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