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NEUROLOGY IN LITERATURE

Some strokes

Bennett was some 70 years early in his dating of the onset of the declining incidence of stroke. The combination of ptosis and contralateral hemiplegia (or Weber's syndrome) was, according to Kinnier Wilson, a not uncommon manifestation of cerebral syphilis. Glossolabiolaryngeal paralysis was first described under a slightly different title, by Duchenne as a progressive disorder of uncertain aetiology. Sophie's symptoms begin abruptly, almost certainly as a consequence of cerebrovascular disease. They have some resemblance to the bulbar features of the lateral medullary syndrome, although tongue paresis would imply medial medullary involvement.

Vidal's mother, in the Kipling short story, is locked-in, a condition which has received considerable attention in literature, most notably by Zola in *Thérèse Raquin* and Dumas in the *Count of Monte Cristo*.

Gustave Flaubert, 1856-7, Madame Bovary

Monsieur Bovary senior had indeed met his end, quite suddenly, two days ago. He had been seized with a stroke after dinner.

George Eliot, 1859, Adam Bede

"Satchell's got a paralytic stroke. I found it out from the lad they sent to Treddleston for the doctor, before seven o'clock this morning. He's a good way beyond sixty, you know; it's much if he gets over it."

George Eliot, 1866, Felix Holt

But he had now the unevenness of gait and feebleness of gesture which tell of a past paralytic seizure.

Rudyard Kipling, undated, Dayspring mishandled

Manallace made a reputation, and, more important, money for Vidal's mother after her husband ran away, and the first symptoms of her paralysis showed. . . .

Vidal's mother was then wholly paralysed. Only her eyes could move, and those always looked for the husband who had left her.

Arnold Bennett, 1908, The old wives' tale

She was aged four when John Baines had suddenly been seized with giddiness on the steps of his shop, and had fallen, and, without losing consciousness, had been transformed from John Baines into a curious and pathetic survival of John Baines. She had no notion of the thrill which ran through the town on that night when it was known that John Baines had had a stroke, and that his left arm and left leg and his right eyelid were paralysed. . . . She knew him simply as an organism on a bed, whose left side was wasted, whose eyes were often inflamed, whose mouth was crooked, who had no creases from the nose to the

corners of the mouth like other people, who experienced difficulty in eating because the food would somehow get between his gums and his cheek. . . .

Arnold Bennett, 1908, The old wives' tale

"Fossett!" She tried to call out; but no sound issued from her lips. She could not move her tongue. She tried to protrude it, and could not. . . .

Suddenly she began to hiccough, and she had no control over the hiccough. . . .

Sophie began to feel better. She could get into a sitting posture, though the movement made her dizzy. By working to the foot of the bed she could see herself in the glass of the wardrobe. And she saw that the lower part of her face was twisted out of shape.

The doctor, who knew her, and who earned a lot of money in her house, told her frankly what had happened. Paralysis glosso-labiolaryngee was the phrase he used.

Arnold Bennett, 1911, Hilda Lessways

A paralytic stroke had not been drastic enough to mar Mr Skellorn's most precious reputation for probity and reliability. . . .

Although paralytic strokes were more prevalent at that period than now, they constituted even then a striking dramatic event. Moreover, they were considered as direct visitations of God. Also there was something mysteriously and agreeably impressive in the word "paralytic", which people would repeat for the pleasure of repeating it. . . .

"Yes," she said, "They came and fetched me out of my bed at three o'clock this morning; and would you believe me, though he couldn't hardly speak, the money and this here book was all waiting in his desk, and he would have me come with it! . . .

And I do believe if he'd been paralysed on both sides instead of only all down his right side, and speechless too, he'd ha' made me understand as I must come here at two o'clock."

Edith Wharton, 1920, The age of innocence

. . . . had found their mistress sitting up against her pillows with a crooked smile on her face and one little hand hanging limp from its huge arm.

The stroke had clearly been a slight one, for she was able to articulate and to make her wishes known; and soon after the doctor's first visit she had begun to regain control of her facial muscles.

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