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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 meningovascular 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 tabes 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 Grimmshausen, 1669, Mother Courage
At the very moment when the earth was adorning 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'-Women
“‘Tention’, sez the docthor; an’ Love-o'-Women stud so. ‘Now shut your eyes’, sez the docthor. ‘No, ye must not hould by your comrade.’ ‘‘Tis all up,’ sez Love-o'-Women, thyring to smile. ‘I’d fall, docthor, an’ you know ut.’ ...‘But fwat 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 fwat that manes. An’ ut comes,’ sez he, lookin’ at me, ‘ut comes from bein’ called Love-o'-Women.’ ...‘You’re jokin’, docthor,’ I sez ...‘Jokin’!’ sez he. ‘If iver you feel that you’ve got a felt sole in your boot instid av a Governmint 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, Remembrance 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 general paralysis who himself is perhaps unaware of his malady but has made some mistake in pronunciation 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 Dottyville 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 scourges, like on pale Venus, the spirochaeta pallida, that is the true sort....To be short, the meta-spirochaetose, that is the meningeal 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 meninges, 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 furtive venereal meningitis 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 Leverkühn. After all, the word “dementia”, originally meant nothing else than the aberration from self, self-alienation.

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