Migraine

Descriptions of migraine in the literature have proved remarkably elusive. Even where the term has been used, for example with Mrs Odysntee, doubt arises as to the certainty of the diagnosis. Madame Goesler, in Phineas Redux, feigns an attack to avoid an uncomfortable situation; perhaps a device neurologists should recall when dealing with an intractable case! At least present day sufferers have the consolation of more effective remedies than Hoffman’s drops.

George Elliott, 1858, Scenes of clerical life
Just before the appointed hour of eleven, Caterina came down into the drawing-room, looking so unusually ill as to call forth an anxious inquiry from Lady Cheverel, who, on learning that she had a severe headache insisted that she should not attend service, and at once packed her up comfortably on a sofa near the fire...

“Well, my dear Miss Sarti, and how do you feel now?—a little better, I see. I thought you would be, sitting quietly here. These headaches, now, are all from weakness. You must not overexert yourself, and you must take bitters. I used to have just the same sort of headaches when I was your age, and old Dr Samson used to say to my mother, “Madam, what your daughter suffers from is weakness.”

Fedor Dostoyevsky, 1868, The idiot
Mrs Odystee, I was told, had migraine, was running a temperature, and was delicious.

Leo Tolstoy, 1868–9, War and peace
The countess had a headache brought on by all the noise and turmoil, and was lying down in the new sitting-room with a vinegar compress on her head...

Natasha ran into the house, and went on tiptoe through the half-open door into the sitting-room where there was a smell of vinegar and Hoffman’s drops.

Anthony Trollope, 1874, Phineas Redux
She almost plotted some scheme of a headache, by which she might be enabled not to show herself till after dinner. “I am so blind that I can hardly see out of my eyes,” she said to the maid, actually beginning the scheme.

Saki, 1911, The way to the dairy
They contrived, wherever possible, to excuse themselves from participation in their aunt’s deplored gaieties; the Brimley Bomefield headaches became famous...

“It’s time you went home and had those headaches seen to by a specialist,” was her comment on the situation.

Arnold Bennett, 1918, The pretty lady
“Do not be vexed. I have my migraine—am good for nothing. But I gave the order that thou shouldst be admitted.”

Thomas Mann, 1947, Dr Faustus
Adrian had not asked for a physician, because he wanted to interpret his sufferings as familiar and hereditary, as merely an acute intensification of his father’s migraine. It was Frau Schweigestill who at last insisted on calling in Dr Kürbis, the Waldshut district physician, the same who had once delivered the Fräulein from Bayreuth. The good man would not hear of migraine, since the often excessive pains were not one-sided as is the case with migraine but consisted in a raging torment in and above both eyes, and moreover were considered by the physician to be a secondary symptom.

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