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NEUROLOGY IN LITERATURE

Doctors' writing, and writings

The quality of doctors' writing has long been the object of writers' humour. I suspect that doctors, just as novelists, can suffer from writer's block although in the case of the medical profession more perhaps from lack of time rather than from a failure of inspiration. Which explanation applies to Ovid Vere, in *Heart and science*, is not entirely clear. Thomas Mann's encyclopedia is one I have tried to emulate but as yet with no success in finding a willing publisher!

Samuel Johnson, 1779, Lives of the English poets—Dryden

It is a rare kind of giblet porridge, made of the giblets of a couple of young geese, stodged full of meteors, orbs, spheres, track, hideous draughts, dark characters, white forms, and radiant lights, designed not only to please appetite, and indulge luxury; but it is also physical, being an approved medicine to purge cholera: for it is propounded by Morena, as a receipt to cure their fathers of their choleric humours: and were it written in characters as barbarous as the words, might very well pass for a doctor's bill.

Gustave Flaubert, 1856–7, Madam Bovary
Emma looked at him and shrugged her shoulders. Why hadn't she at any rate one of those silent, earnest husbands who work at their books all night—and end

up, by the time that rheumatism sets in at sixty, wearing a string of decorations on their ill-fitting dress-coats! She would have liked this name of Bovary, that was hers, to be famous, on view at the book-shops, always cropping up in the papers, known all over France. But Charles had no ambition.

Wilkie Collins, 1883, Heart and science
His restless hand unlocked a drawer, and took out a manuscript work on medicine of his own writing. "Surely," he thought, "I may finish a chapter, before I go to sea tomorrow?"

Thomas Mann, 1924, The magic mountain
Famous European specialists, physicians, psychologists, and economists will share in the composition of this encyclopedia of suffering, and the general editorial bureau at Lugano will act as the reservoir to collect all the articles which shall flow into it . . . This great work will not neglect the belletrist in so far as he deals with human suffering: a volume is projected which shall contain a compilation and brief analysis of such masterpieces of the world's literature as come into question depicting one or other kind of conflict—for the consolation and instruction of the suffering.

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