

THE HYDROMANIA.

BY MRS. BUSK.

THE Hydrophobia has of late years been the subject of much, though unluckily not very successful, investigation; but there is a disorder of an opposite description, that has not as yet, to the best of my knowledge and belief, attracted the observation of either physician or philosopher: I mean the sort of *Hydromania* (if I may be permitted so to christen it) which has long periodically afflicted the inhabitants of this country in particular, and seems to be gradually spreading upon the continent. The malady, though not very pernicious in its effects, except perhaps to the purses of the patients, is of so uncommon a nature that it will deserve some notice; and, in the hope of directing towards it the attention of either the faculty or the Royal Society, I will endeavour to point out its principal symptoms, as far as that may be done by a mere Tyro Naturalist, wholly uninitiated in the *arcana* of Pathology.

In the first place, the Hydromania seems to be rather epidemic than contagious; for although a year never passes without its visiting the British dominions, it so completely disappears during the spring months, that I apprehend there cannot then remain a single infected individual, to preserve and communicate the virus.

The malady, as I have said, returns periodically, but the period of return is marked by one peculiarity, to wit, a small, but regular excess, which has accumulated, within the memory of persons now living, to the amount of some weeks. Whether this may be connected with the precession of the equinoxes; whether it may be regarded simply as an additional proof that the seasons themselves are later than they used to be, as several very shrewd old ladies of my acquaintance assure me is the case, I will not take upon myself to determine; but with respect to the Hydromania, the fact does not admit of a doubt. Thirty or forty years ago the disorder invariably broke out in the month of June, subsided in October, and in November not a trace of it would be discovered. Now, July scarcely produces a stray Hydromania; the complaint becomes gradually prevalent in August, but does not attain to its greatest height until September and October; and whether it can be justly said to begin to subside in November, may be matter of dispute; for although its ravages be far less extensive in the winter than in the autumn, must we

not suppose the intensity of the disease to be proportionably augmented, since its virulence is then such as to draw the most self-indulgent persons from their own warm and comfortable homes, to the wretched houses provided in various convenient places for the reception of Hydromaniac patients, but which afford little shelter from the wind and rain, the frost and snow, of December and January? Yet in such discomfort is the inclemency of winter voluntarily endured, until the genial breath of spring effectually, although but temporarily, conquers this strange influenza.

There is another circumstance connected with these annual returns, which, though not actually peculiar to the Hydromania, deserves mention; I mean the manner of the distemper's manifesting itself, when the period arrives. It uniformly selects in the first instance its humblest victims.

“On dogs and mules th' infection first began,
And last the vengeful arrows fixed in man.”

Far be it from me, in these march of intellect days, to insinuate that the gradation of the different classes of society bears any resemblance to that of the classes of the animal kingdom; yet in this one respect it really does seem as if some sort of analogy must be allowed to exist between these, otherwise dissimilar, ascending series. Upon the authority of Homer we learn that the plague, in the camp before Troy, commenced in dogs and mules before it attacked the human species; the Hydrophobia begins in dogs, and, as I have heard, cats, if not pigs; Typhus indubitably invades the courts and alleys of the metropolis before it meddles with the squares; and it is equally incontestible that when the middle ranks are suffering most from Hydromania, the higher orders are still in the enjoyment of perfect health; and that when the former are returned home thoroughly cured, the latter are actually in the worst stage of the disease. These are the unfortunate sufferers who are only restored by the salutary influence of a London spring, which, in their instance, should seem to have a precursive action on the human frame, somewhat in the manner of an impending thunder storm.

Contemporaneous with the gradual change of the period at which the disorder makes its appearance, has been the equally gradual increase of its malignity, and of the extent of its prevalence, from which scarcely a

family in the kingdom can now hope to escape. Of this fact, did it not speak for itself, abundant proof might be supplied by the prodigious enlargement of all those places that have long been the established and especial resort of persons labouring under this malady, as well as by the frequent discovery of new points of Hydromaniac affinity, that start up on all sides like coral reefs or volcanic islands. Till within the last few years, who had ever heard of Sandgate, Herne Bay, Aberystwith, Redcar, Leamington, Beulah, or many others, too numerous to be recorded by any writer unskilled in bestowing interest upon a mere catalogue of names.

And it is not a little remarkable, that this increased demand for Hydromaniac accommodation has gone on progressively through a period, during which one might have supposed that it would be checked by the effects of the newer influenza, that broke out with such unexampled and sudden violence some years ago, I might say upon the conclusion of the peace of Paris. This disease, which I will venture to denominate the *Epeiromania*, or Continental sickness, though it occasionally blends with the Hydromania, as witness the throngs of patients that flock to Boulogne, Spa, &c., I take to be, unlike the Hydromania, rather contagious than epidemic; and so extensive have its ravages already been, that amongst the new buildings upon the site of Carlton House, a spacious Hospital has recently been completed, and appropriated solely to the accommodation of Epeiromaniacs. It is a handsome edifice, but proving, nevertheless, inadequate to the immense number of patients seeking admission, has been restricted to the use of the incurables, none being received, I understand, whose fit has not been of sufficient length and severity to carry him a thousand miles from home.

I have hitherto, I observe, given rather a general history, than a description, of the Hydromania, and stated its concomitant circumstances, instead of detailing its more essential symptoms; having been tempted so to do, as much by the extreme peculiarity of many of those extraneous characteristics, as by the temperament of my own mind and the nature of my pursuits; being, as I have already hinted, a dabbler in natural philosophy, but utterly ignorant of the science of Galen and Hippocrates. I will now, however, do my best to give a pathognomic account of the malady itself.

The first symptom of indisposition is invari-

ably a considerable degree of restlessness, a general *malaise*, attended by a proportionate desire for locomotion. This is quickly followed by an inordinate, irresistible longing either for large draughts of certain water, to be found in distant parts of the kingdom, which, by the foreign substances that they hold in solution, are rendered nauseous to the healthy appetite, or for the entire or partial immersion of the body in hot or cold water. When, in compliance with this morbid inclination, the desired journey has been taken, and the course of external or internal ablution begun, the above mentioned restlessness, far from being relieved by the application, as might have been anticipated, increases to a frightful degree; and this is the stage at which the disorder assumes the most alarming appearance. The Hydromaniac patients are seen at the various watering places at which this unhappy propensity congregates them, walking, driving, and riding upon horses or asses, according to their respective circumstances, incessantly with a sort of insane activity, painful to behold, from the moment they awake in the morning until long after dusk; and even then, exhausted as invalids must needs be by such violent and unintermitting exertions, as if incapable of enduring an instant's repose, they hurry to the theatre, the ball-room, the gaming-tables, provided, somewhat anomalously, in the libraries, until overstrained nature can no longer support the fatigue, and they at length perforce betake themselves to their beds. Nor is this extraordinary impatience of inaction confined to the body; the mind appears to be in a state of similar excitement. These insatiate exercisers have usually a novel in their hands, which, at every interruption of locomotion, they devour—nay, some of them, probably the most disordered, do not even wait for such pauses, but read and walk simultaneously.

The symptoms hitherto enumerated should seem to rank this malady in the class of fevers, as might also perhaps the high colour which, in the great majority of cases, attends it, apparently increasing with the restlessness of the patient. But, on the other hand, this deep flushing may be hectic, and indicate a consumptive character, and there are other diagnostics wholly irreconcilable with the idea of fever. Although some individuals may, upon first sickness, occasionally complain of headach, it is self-evident, that the disorder, at its height, is free from that invariable attendant upon fever, as no human being, suffering under severe cephalalgia,

could support the heat, light, and noise, in which alone the Hydromaniac appears to find relief. Moreover, instead of loss of appetite, the affection of the stomach and digestive organs is more analogous to the *Fames Canina*.

These are the principal characteristics of the distemper. What would be the effect of thwarting these irregular longings must be left to conjecture, until some philosopher, emulating the magnanimity of the physician who inoculated himself with the plague, shall be induced to make the experiment upon either himself or his wife and daughters. No one has yet been known to attempt coercion, or even the gentlest restraint upon the wishes of the Hydromaniac, subsequently to the complaint's assuming a decided form; nor indeed is it probable that aught, save philanthropy, will ever impel any one to do so, for besides that, nine times in ten, every member of a family is alike under the influence of the disease, experience has shown that, when permitted to take its course, it constantly subsides of itself within a given period. Whether this be the consequence of an alteration in the state of the atmosphere, regularly recurring with the change of the season; or whether the morbid appetite becomes fairly saturated with liquid, it is not for one so unlearned in the healing art to pronounce, though I may confess a strong bias to the latter opinion, grounded upon the constant succession of different classes of Hydromaniacs; but, as before said, it is not for me to decide upon causes; my business is simply to point out facts, and invite those, who are better qualified than myself, to investigate them. I must not however omit to observe, that I have noted a milder form of the disorder, in which the patient is satisfied with seeing others drenched and half-drowned, without taking any personal share in the operations.

I have now, to the best of my ability, briefly and distinctly detailed the symptoms and concomitant circumstances, characterising the malady to which it is my object to draw the attention of the scientific inquirer. That any study should produce a remedy of a distemper of such widely-extended prevalence, and such long standing, is, perhaps, hardly to be hoped; but even to ascertain the nature and origin of phenomena, so curious as those here inadequately described, would surely be a result sufficiently satisfactory to repay a long and laborious investigation. For my own part, I should be tolerably contented with the single discovery of the cause that

renders England so much more obnoxious to the ravages of Hydromania than the continent of Europe. There, although the disease is far from unknown, although throughout France and Germany, Hydromaniacs are every year seen scouring the country in search of the waters of Bourbon, Barèges, Bagnières, Spa, Carlsbad, &c., &c., the entire population is never simultaneously affected, as with us; and I am not aware that the particular form of the malady, which may be specified as the *Marine Hydromania*, was ever experienced abroad until very lately. Nay, even now, when symptoms of it are beginning to appear in a neighbouring country, first showing themselves, contrary to all former experience, in the highest ranks, (we heard of no French marine Hydromaniacs until a Princess of the then reigning royal family was seized with the disorder), even now I apprehend that ninety-nine hundredths of the patients at Dieppe and Boulogne are British.

I have disclaimed the presumption of offering any opinion, either upon the causes of this malady, or upon its superior prevalence in Great Britain; but I trust I shall not be thought to transgress the limits I have assigned myself, if, under the modern guise of queries, I throw out some few conjectures, to be approved, qualified, or rejected by the learned. Is it possible that our insular situation should excite in us a peculiar attraction for, or affinity with, the ocean? Can our excessive liability to every modification of this extraordinary, and hitherto neglected epidemic, be a galvanic, magnetic, or magneto-electric effect of the geological formation of the island? Can it depend upon some of those causes which act more immediately upon the mind? and must we ascribe our Hydromaniac susceptibility to our free constitution, (chronology forbids my including the Reform Bill,) to our moral and religious habits? Can this singular infliction be, in some hitherto unsuspected way, a metaphysical result, a sort of compensatory concomitant of those ratiocinative faculties which have entitled us to the honourable designation of "most thinking people?" Or finally, for my powers of conjecture are pretty nearly exhausted, must we seek in the deep, sensitive, impassioned, and vivid imagination, characteristic of a race that has produced Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton, and all our *real* poets of elder or of later times, the solution of this difficult and very interesting problem?

PHILOISTOR.