ART. XI.—*Observations on a peculiar nervous Affection incidental to Travellers in Sicily and Southern Italy.* By J. HUNGERFORD SEALY, ESQ., M.D., A.B., late Resident Physician at Florence, Messina, &c.

THE peculiar disease which I am about to describe I had frequent opportunities of witnessing during my residence in Sicily and Southern Italy.

It is characterized by an excessive irritability, attended with extraordinary mental and muscular activity, and seldom attacks the new comer, but more frequently those who have been resident between two and three years, and not yet acclimatized, and just beginning to suffer from *nostalgia*. In it, a consciousness of disease exists, which is incapable of being expressed, and the mind is disturbed by visions, which the sufferer is almost ashamed to avow; the imagination is morbidly awakened, yet the mind of the patient is still under the control of judgment, yet with scarce a capability of obeying its dictates.

Having suffered much from it myself, and witnessed it in all its stages in others, varying, indeed, from the sublime of fearful, as I saw it in the case of an English clergyman at Messina, to the ridiculous of absurd nervous fancies, in those not previously subject to such hallucinations, I consider myself peculiarly qualified to offer a few remarks on it, which I hope may prove serviceable to travellers in the countries of which I shall treat.

That it is a disease of climate I am well convinced, and that all are more or less liable to it in visiting those countries, my experience has assured me. The modifications of it are, however, great, and the grades various, from slight excitability to serious and formidable disease, affecting the mind and body; it consequently behoves every traveller to be particularly cautious of his diet and general health, and to observe carefully his impressions and sensations, to guard against this insidious and formidable enemy, and, by attacking it at the commencement, overcome it effectually.

To the travellers in Rome, Naples, and Sicily these observations will peculiarly apply.

That it has not hitherto been sufficiently noticed and described, my acquaintance with the literature referring to Italy and Sicily assures me. In fact, little or no notice is taken of it by any of the writers on climate with which I am acquainted, such as Clarke, Johnson, &c.

It seems a hyper-elimination of the nervous principle, a peculiar elastic evaporation, if I may so express it, of a spiritual consciousness and capability, aroused by electrical agency or invisible atmospheric influence.

The imaginative and the sanguineo-nervous temperaments are peculiarly liable to it, and suffer much during the prevalence of the Scirocco wind, particularly at Rome and Palermo, and at Naples and Sicily, when the atmosphere is charged with electricity, or when thunder is brewing, as the vulgar phrase is, and particularly during earthquakes in Sicily.

That all should experience excitement in that elastic atmosphere is little to be wondered at. It forms a considerable part of the charm of travel and climate; it is, however, when that excitement becomes excessive and permanent that it requires consideration and control. No one, I believe, has ever crossed the Alps without finding in himself a sense of elasticity on the Italian side different from the more cloudy atmosphere of the Swiss mountains; and how much more is that experienced on first landing in Naples or Sicily, supposing that the traveller has come by sea. He must be indeed a dull clod of unimpassioned clay who would not feel excited beside the tombs of Tasso or of Virgil, or seated on the rock of *Scilla* contemplating Sicily. In fact, the impression of vigour is so great, as a plain, unimaginative London gentleman expressed himself to me, as we strolled in the *Marina*, at Messina, together, that he felt as if "he wished to knock down every one he met," and although a man of a sobered time of life, and, I have reason to believe, quiet habits in England, he became so excited to mirth, as to

be almost unbearable, and this without the smallest assistance from internal stimulants. The extraordinary rarity of the atmosphere contributes much to this, the force with which impressions are conveyed to the senses; in fact, in Sicily the air is so attenuated and transparent that distance seems almost annihilated, and sounds come on the ear with appalling force; the perpetual ringing of their church bells, and the firing of their *gioco di fuoco* on fete days, is enough to startle the best strung nerves; and the perpetual roaring of their criers about the fish-stalls is truly horrifying. The noises both at Naples and Messina, where the slightest sound is audible, from the tenuity of the atmosphere, is appalling; and yet, curious to say, the natives do not appear to mind it, although they all seem much alive to nervous impressions, which the restlessness of their motions indicates: you never see a Neapolitan or a Sicilian at perfect rest, he is always either twisting his cane or shaking his leg, or contorting himself in some way or other, but absolute rest seems incompatible with his existence. This same excitability the English traveller feels more or less, according to the character of his nervous system.

Some portions of Italy, however, possess this influence much more than others. The difference between Rome and Naples, in that respect, is very striking, and the locality it is, doubtless, which so influences the appearance and habits of the inhabitants. The difference between the two cities may be thus summed up, as regards the stranger. At Rome you are pleased, at Naples you are amused; the hypochondriac is rendered worse at Rome, at Naples he is debarred from gloomy thoughts by the multitude of animated objects around him: the Toledo at Naples is a perpetual Roman Carnival. At Rome you derive your gratification from inanimate objects, and from your own reflections. At Naples you have no time to reflect, your mind is amused and engaged by others; it is a varied and amusing panorama; the gait of the Roman differs from that of the Neapolitan, it is

more slow and solemn. The Corso at Rome and the Toledo at Naples, may be compared to St. James and the Strand in London.

While resident in Florence several cases of this nervous affection presented themselves to me, affording curious, and some of them most amusing traits; but the severest form I ever witnessed of it was in Messina in Sicily, which I shall here relate, omitting merely the name, as the exceeding peculiarity of the mental symptoms of the patient, a talented and most respected clergyman, may render it painful to him to have revived those recollections of the awful times in which I attended him, should this ever meet his eye.

Having arrived at Messina, by steam packet, from Naples, and aware that there was no resident English physician in the island, I was shortly after my arrival waited on by a gentleman, saying, that their resident clergyman was dangerously ill, and requested my immediate attendance, that they had written to Malta for one, the English merchants of the town being in the greatest state of alarm about him, and that they had been most anxiously expecting the arrival of some ship containing one; that the town was quite in a ferment about him, the Church of England Service having been suspended for some weeks. In as short a time as possible I made my call. I found the gentleman in bed, his countenance was haggard and wretched, his eyes glaring out of his head, and deeply suffused and bilious; his skin was dry and parched, and almost verging on the icteroid tint; his tongue was dry, and red at the edges, and covered with a brown fur in the centre and back portion; his pulse was small and quick; and his general expression denoted the deepest misery and suffering, although his mind was perfectly clear. On inquiry, I found he had been ill three weeks, during which time he was under the care of a Sicilian physician, and was gradually getting worse. On inquiring what medicine he had taken, he said very little, and that not of a purgative character, although

he was aware that he wanted it, as his bowels had not been moved for some days. He attributed the attack to an incautious exposure to the sun, that his Sicilian doctor had declared his complaint to be March fever, and was treating him accordingly with large doses of quinine, which he did not fancy agreed with him. He was certainly not getting better, and was very glad I had arrived, as he thought an English physician would see his case in a different point of view from an ignorant Sicilian, and he hoped would be able to do him some good. On further inquiry I found that the only other medicine, beside the quinine, he had taken was infusion of taraxacum, that panacea for all Sicilian maladies.

In a short time I met my Sicilian *confrere* in consultation, and asked him his view of the case; he said it was a simple case of March fever, and would quickly subside under the continued use of quinine and taraxacum, that he had never known them fail. I begged to differ from him, and said it struck me that with such a tongue, and such a gorged state of the chylo-poitic viscera, accompanied with such high nervous excitement, *quinine* was inadmissible, and suggested the use of a smart dose of blue pill, and compound colocynth pill, to excite the biliary secretion. The latter formula he had never heard of; the blue pill he had heard of, but did not believe that there was any in the island, unless I had some, if so, he had no objection to try it. I fortunately had, having been supplied at Naples by my friend, Mr. Jessop, resident English apothecary at that city, with all medicines necessary in general practice in Sicily; and on mentioning the subject to the gentleman, he was delighted at the idea, and said it was, he was sure, the very thing he wanted, that he was poisoned by the Sicilian drugs, which did him no good. I accordingly administered to him a smart dose of each, to the Sicilian's great horror, who thought six grains of each a dose sufficient to kill a buffalo. I ordered, at the same time, leeches to his head, which was hot and throbbing, mustard sinapisms to his feet, the pills to be followed up by a bitter saline mixture

to full purging, and the most perfect quiet to be preserved in the palace where he resided; this is, however, a difficult matter to obtain at Messina, although his residence was not in the Marina, for between the braying of donkeys and crowing of cocks, beside the ringing of bells and roaring of provision venders of every description, from the exquisite *pesche spada*, or sword fish, to the humble lettuce, Messina is one long continued uproar, deafening, maddening, confusing.

On seeing my patient within twelve hours, I found a considerable improvement; the medicine had acted copiously, producing several highly bilious stools, attended with such fœtor that the gentleman assured me that he could scarcely endure it, that it literally made him ashamed, the effluvia appearing to poison the atmosphere of the whole palace. His countenance was much improved, and his skin had assumed something of a more healthy aspect; his mind was also much more composed, and his nervous system quieted; there was no longer that fearful twitching of the muscles, nor consciousness of mental horrors. The case was now clear to me. Mr. — was naturally of a highly excitable and nervo-sanguineous temperament, a benefited clergyman in England, and educated at Oxford, where he had taken a high degree, led away by the enthusiasm of a highly gifted and ardent imagination, he deserted his snug rectory to tread the fields of classical romance and historic renown. On his return from Greece he was induced, by the solicitations of the British merchants at Messina, a numerous and wealthy body, to establish himself there, more with the Christian hope of founding an English episcopacy in the island, where one had never before existed, than with any expectation of pecuniary reward; and for many months before my arrival in the island he laboured hard in his vocation, admired and loved by a respectable congregation; nor did I ever, indeed, see in any part of the world a more sincere and deep sympathy exhibited, than was expressed for his miserable situation,—for most miserable it was when I first saw him, and that of his amiable and dis-

tracted lady, whose hands were one moment raised in prayer, at another clasped in silent agony at beholding her beloved husband in such a situation—insanity struggling with reason.

My limits in this Paper will not allow me fully to detail the entire case of Mr. ——. During my six weeks' attendance on him, much curious details of the progress and character of his malady were imparted to me, as he progressed to recovery, for such did take place in my hands, affording me the sincerest gratification of any act of my professional life, and most sincerely did I then, and ever shall, thank God for having been the means of saving the life of this accomplished and truly Christian clergyman, by my accidental arrival in the island.

During the progress of his disease, his mental hallucinations were extraordinary, almost amounting to what the French *mesmerisers* denominate *clairvoyance*, and his visions frightful; his pervading wish, as he expressed it to me, was to tear every thing near him, to shout, to sing, and *curse*; he fancied he saw his limbs leaving his body, and occupying, disintegrated, separate portions of the large apartment where he lay; he was convinced of the unreality of the vision, and of its being the result of a diseased imagination, yet so palpable was the delusive vision that he could scarcely correct the delusion by the utmost effort of reason, or disbelieve the apparently so palpable evidence of his senses.

The bodily disease, separated from the mental hallucination, evidently had its origin in the biliary and chylo-poietic viscera; the turgescence of the hepatic viscus, and engorgement of the *prima via*, as well as the nature of the alvine discharge, indicated this; the relief also afforded by the evacuation of the most foul contents, and the subsidence of the nervous and phantasmagoric hallucinations subsequent to it, fully establish it.

The case was, however, a protracted and critical one, requiring an immensity of care and medicine, to the astonishment and horror of my Sicilian fellow-labourer, who gave me up the case altogether, and retired in disgust at my disregard of the

virtues of the *lion-toothed* taraxacum, shrugging his shoulders at the "dura ilia" of the British.

This case is interesting from the well-marked character of the symptoms, and exceeding severity of the disease; it was, in fact, the disease in its severest type, and attended with its most appalling symptoms, almost, in appearance, at one time resembling *delirium tremens*, and affording all the symptoms of that fearful malady. The minor modifications of the disease, met elsewhere, were not attended with such severe constitutional symptoms, and, in fact, in many cases where severe and distressing mental hallucinations existed, were unaccompanied by morbid appearances. In fact in many the tongue was clean, although generally white and flabby, retaining the impressions of the teeth for a long time after the mouth was opened, as in hysteria. A Mr. H., who called on me in Florence, had some of the most curious hallucinations it is possible to conceive; his great dread was to meet the human eye; he had also an extraordinary inclination for grinning and contorting his countenance, and an utter dread of taking medicine, fearing, as he said, the impossibility of cleansing himself after it. He said it came on at Rome, where he had spent a winter. He was an accomplished and highly educated gentleman, and was fearfully alive to the horrors of his nervous affliction.

A poor woman, whom I also attended at Florence, had an almost uncontrollable desire to murder her children, of whom, she admitted, she was doatingly fond; it came on her gradually, she said, having been five years in Florence, and that she had not felt it until the two last years. She was, when I first saw her, a picture of suffering and misery. She was seated in her own apartment, on a high wooden chair, with her legs drawn tight into the back rung, and her back bolt upright, not resting against the back of the chair, but seeming almost as if in emprostotanic spasm; she was trembling violently, and her face and hands bathed with cold perspiration. Her mind was clear, although labouring under a sensation of some impending horror

or apprehension, for which she could not account, and had not the slightest reason. Her habits had been always temperate, and her circumstances comfortable; her husband being a respectable English groom.

In all these cases, and several others I have met, I could always trace the disease to some engorgement of the *chylo-poietic viscera*, and, in fact, I always considered the disease as a modification of hypochondriasis, aggravated by peculiar circumstances, the nervous system being over-exerted by atmospheric influence, while the biliary and digestive was deranged at the same time.

The treatment I have generally found to succeed best is a modification of mercurial and vegetable purgatives, with a modified anodyne and stimulating system of treatment. Under this plan I have generally found my patients recover, or at least obtain relief. Some miserable cases of self-destruction and insanity have, however, come under my notice, which I may detail in my next, with notice of the Medical Institutions of Tuscany and the Papal States.

ART. XII.—*On the dark abdominal Line, and the Formation of an umbilical Areola, as Signs of Delivery; in a Letter to the Editor of the Dublin Medical Journal.* By W. F. MONTGOMERY, M. D., Professor of Midwifery in the King and Queen's College of Physicians in Ireland.

SIR,—My attention was, within the last few days, called by a well-informed pupil, at present attending my lectures, to a very useful Paper, by Dr. Rose Cormack, in the London and Edinburgh Medical Journal for last February, on the dark line occasionally observable on the abdomen of pregnant and puerperal women, extending from the pubes to the umbilicus, and, sometimes, thence to the ensiform cartilage, “showing that it often depends on other causes than recent delivery;” in which, after