

Swift and Ménière's disease / [J. Wickham Legg].

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SWIFT AND MENIÈRE'S DISEASE.

From the *Academy*, June 25. 1881. Vol. XIX. p. 475.

47. Green St. w. June 1881.

Those who have looked over the letters of Swift to Stella and other correspondents must have been struck with his many complaints of giddiness and "fits." In the journal to Stella, January 13. 1710-11. he says: "Oh faith I had an ugly giddy fit last night;" and on October 31. 1710 again "I had a fit of giddiness; the room turned round for about a minute, and then it went off, leaving me sickish, but not very." Later on in life, he writes: (letter to Mr. Blashford, December 17. 1734.) "I was seized with so cruel a fit of that giddiness which at times hath pursued me from my youth that I was forced to lie down on a bed in the empty house for two hours." With this giddiness there was a deafness of the left ear; (journal to Stella, September 7. 1711.) and on September 21. 1710 he promises to see Dr. Cockburn about his ears. This "giddiness and weakness and sickness in my stomach" are spoken of almost to the last, with "being extremely deaf."

This giddiness and sickness Swift himself attributed to a surfeit of fruit; and we find him careful not to eat fruit, nor drink "bohea tea," and he takes abundant exercise to keep his troubles under. I have only met with one explanation of this set of symptoms, that in Dr. Beddoes' *Hygeia*, towards the end of the ninth essay, an explanation which need not be further pursued here; but I would venture to suggest, if it have not been already suggested, that these symptoms of Swift's are amply explained by a supposition of his having been the subject of Menière's disease, or Menière's vertigo. This group of symptoms has only been recognised by physicians for about twenty years; giddiness or vertigo, followed by sickness with some disease of the ear, or deafness, forming its notes. It was believed by Menière to be due to some disease of the semi-

circular canals of the ear, and this view is strengthened by the fact that like symptoms follow the injury of the semicircular canals in the brutes.

J. WICKHAM LEGG.

From the *Academy*, July 28. 1883. Vol. XXIV. p. 64.

London, July 23. 1883.

In the *Academy* for June 25. 1881. p. 475. I pointed out, in a short letter, that the "giddy fits" with which Swift was troubled for the greater part of his life, and which have been such a puzzle to his biographers, were, in all likelihood, due to the disease named after Ménière. The symptoms are deafness and sickness, as well as giddiness, from all three of which there will be found good evidence that Swift suffered, if the journal to Stella and the letters to other correspondents be turned over.

Now in the following year, six months after this publication, there appeared in the January number for 1882. of *Brain* an article which opens with these words: "During the past autumn I received a letter from a gentleman engaged in literary work, requesting my opinion of the 'mysterious disease' of the great author and wit." The article then goes over the same ground that I had done, proving in the same way, by quotations, the existence of the three symptoms of giddiness, deafness, and sickness, the only difference being that in the one case as many pages are devoted to the subject as in the other were given lines.

Directly after the publication of the article, I wrote to Dr. Bucknill, who was at once the author of the communication, and the editor of the journal in which the communication appeared, pointing out to him that I had anticipated all that he had said as to Swift and Ménière's disease. In reply, he assured me that he had not seen my letter to the *Academy*. Since February, 1882. therefore, I have been waiting for some public sign from Dr. Bucknill. I can find nothing in *Brain* since that date. Something, it is true, may have been published elsewhere; but it is not unreasonable to have thought that, in that case, my attention would have been drawn to it.

In the mean time, we have all been praising Dr. Bucknill for the great skill which he has shown in detecting the disease under which Swift laboured for so long, as well as for freeing Swift's memory from an absurd imputation. Mr. Craik quotes Dr. Bucknill, and decrees him a vote of thanks; while in the current number of the *Quarterly* the reviewer tells us that Dr. Bucknill has come to our assistance, and shown us the true cause of Swift's symptoms. None has given a word to the earlier publication in the *Academy* which would seem in all likelihood to have been the force which first set this ball rolling.

J. WICKHAM LEGG.