

visual impressions." But Dr. Levillain is careful to point out that he is not writing for healthy persons; and if any further defence is needed he would probably reply with the words of Charcot's favourite maxim, with which he concludes his book, that the first duty of every physician who occupies himself with nervous diseases is to do no harm—*primo non nocere*—and that personal hygiene can never do harm.

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*The Insanity of Genius.* By J. F. NISBET. London: Ward and Downey. 1891.

Mr. Nisbet wishes "to place upon a solid basis of fact the long-suspected relationship of genius and insanity." He tells us that the new light which he thinks he is able to throw on this subject comes firstly from modern researches concerning the localization of cerebral functions, and secondly from "the established kinship of an extensive group of brain and nervous disorders, of which insanity or paralysis is the more obvious expression, and gout, consumption, malformations, etc., the more obscure." He considers that these are the two lines of research which lead to the belief that "genius and insanity are, in reality, but different phases of a morbid susceptibility of, or want of balance in, the cerebro-spinal system." Of the physiological line of investigation, although it is insisted on in the title-page, there is not much in Mr. Nisbet's book. Of pathology, on the other hand, there is much; Mr. Nisbet is able to manipulate large pathological generalizations with enviable facility and assurance. He presents us with a characteristic example in a prominent position at the end of his preface. Napoleon I.'s uncle and grand-uncle suffered from gout; Napoleon himself died of cancer of the stomach, "a near relation of gout;" Jerome died of "a kindred affection"—pneumonia; and in Jerome's son pneumonia "was metamorphosed into diabetes with paralysis." All these disorders are manifestations, according to Mr. Nisbet's somewhat metaphysical pathology, of the gouty diathesis, and gout he considers to be very closely related to genius. Throughout the volume Mr. Nisbet shows a remarkably keen eye for morbid symptoms in connection with genius. He thus unhesitatingly reveals the neurotic strain in Cowper's heredity: "Cowper's father and uncle could both write verses—an ominous gift!—while his mother died at the age of thirty-four, so that there was probably a condi-

tion of nervous unsoundness in both parents." Southey's father was passionately fond of field sports; on this Mr. Nisbet solemnly observes: "Extraordinary physical energy is often found in connection with nerve disorder, the result of an excessive stimulation of the motor centres of the brain." Cromwell died of ague, a malady "obviously of nervous character." The onset of Scott's infantile paralysis is thus quaintly described: "At the age of eighteen months he felt a sudden loss of power in his right leg." Flaubert became epileptic at the age of twenty-eight; Maxime du Camp, who knew him intimately, remarks that his intellect never developed after that age. Mr. Nisbet observes:—"Readers of these pages will hardly be of this opinion. Without his malady and its clarifying effect upon the brain, Flaubert would probably have been an *avocat* at Rouen." Of Alfred de Musset he remarks: "His mother's family appears to have been characterized by nervous instability, his maternal grandfather having a prodigious memory." It is sufficiently clear that Mr. Nisbet's views on morbid psychology are of a somewhat eccentric character.

If we overlook these peculiarities, which do much to prejudice a scientific reader against the book, we shall find much in it that is of interest to the student of genius. Mr. Nisbet appears to have gone through a vast number of biographies, noting the abnormalities of men of genius and of their relations, and the enormous mass of interesting facts thus accumulated can be used by those who do not always accept the explanations here set forth. The main idea running throughout the book—the frequency of a neurotic element in genius—is far from novel, and no doubt sound, although Mr. Nisbet tries very hard to drive it to death. He seems to show also a remarkable frequency of gout among men of genius and of a ne'er-do-well among their near relatives. He also points out the great frequency with which one or other parent of a man of genius is described as a person of "strong character;" this is noteworthy, and does not seem to have been previously observed. An interesting speculation is brought forward as to the cause of Shakespeare's death, which Mr. Nisbet is inclined to attribute, with considerable plausibility, to a paralytic seizure rather than to typhoid fever, as has previously been supposed. The book is intended for the "general" rather than for the scientific reader, and is written in a clear and fluent style. There is a full and useful index.