

## LITERARY NOTES.

MR. G. MUNRO SMITH, Consulting Surgeon to the Bristol Royal Infirmary, sends us the following note containing an interesting suggestion as to the source of some of the "visions" on which William Blake founded many of his most striking drawings: "Whilst examining some of the drawings of William Blake I was much struck by the irregular zigzag outline which is present in several of them, notably in one called 'The Ancient of Days,' and in two or three illustrations to the Book of Job. This very peculiar embellishment gives to the picture a weird and rather terrible appearance, and it is possible that Blake introduced it for this purpose. But if we compare the fortification-like angles and lines in the engraving of 'The Destruction of Job's Children' and in 'Job's Dreams' (Fig. 1) with the Sinistral Teichopsia figured as a prodroma of migraine in Dr. Hubert Airy's paper reproduced in Dr. Liveing's book on migraine (Fig. 2), the similarity is so great that it has occurred to me that probably Blake suffered from this form of premonition of sick headache and reproduced it in his drawings. With an ordinary artist this would seem unlikely; but we know from the testimony of several that Blake declared that he actually saw many of the things he drew. The visionary heads he copied for his friend Varley were, according to Blake, actual copies from the spectre of the individual who came, at his bidding, to 'sit for his portrait.' When we further remember that these 'visions' could only be conjured up occasionally, and that Blake was, to say the least of it, very eccentric, it does not seem improbable that we have in these much-talked-of drawings of the artist-poet an interesting reproduction of his own premonitory visual symptoms of migraine. Whether there is any evidence that he suffered from headache I do not know, but the absence of such evidence does not disprove the probability of this suggestion, which I give for what it is worth." As Mr. Munro Smith leaves in doubt the question whether Blake suffered from headache, and as evidence that he did would have gone far to confirm the suggestion made in the above note, we asked Mr. Henry B. Wheatley if he knew of the existence of any evidence on the point. He very kindly took much interest in the inquiry, and informs us that after going through Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* page by page he can find no mention of headaches, nor, indeed, any reference to illness of any



FIG. 1.

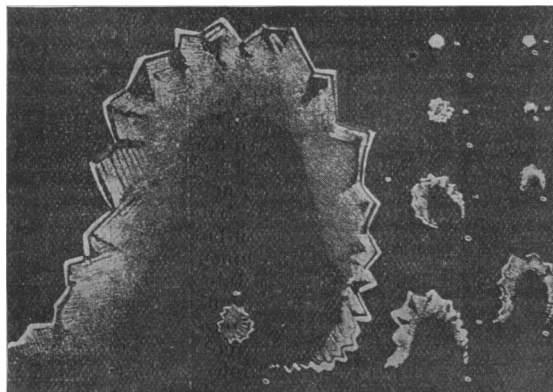


FIG. 2.

kind. It is not probable that any facts overlooked by Gilchrist would be found in other works on Blake, and a less detailed search of two such books afforded no information on the point.

We are indebted to Mr. Munro Smith for the following note also: "In the Literary Notes of the JOURNAL for August 7th there is a brief notice of the last Linacre lecture in which Professor Osler suggests that 'Linacre may have been the scholar who gave Browning the idea of the "Grammarians' Funeral."' The age in which Linacre

lived (the period of the revival of learning in Europe), his devotion to learning, his classical studies, and his death from calculus all point to this conclusion. It has struck me, however, that the resemblance to other great scholars, who have devoted themselves to learning regardless of all other considerations, is so close that probably the prototype is 'composite.' For instance, one of the greatest grammarians, Samuel Johnson, was, like Browning's hero, 'soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst' for knowledge of all kinds, which he cultivated in the teeth of ill health; he also lived for many years 'nameless,'

and had this further likeness that in his youth he had, according to Boswell, a countenance 'of the cast of an ancient statue' (He was a man who had thy face and throat, lyric Apollo!)

"But there is perhaps a still greater resemblance (as pointed out to me by Dr. Alexander Smith) between 'the Grammarian' and Isaac Casaubon, who lived, if not in the Renaissance, yet in the immediate wake of it. He

was not only a keen scholar, working early and late at his books, but he had the essential characteristic of Browning's hero—an utter contempt for health and all worldly advantages compared with the acquisition of knowledge. 'When the claims of business or society have taken up any considerable part of a day, his outcries are those of a man who is being robbed. When he has read continuously a whole day from early morning to late at night, "noctem addens operi," he enters a satisfactory "To-day I have truly lived"—"Hodie vixi" (Mark Pattison's *Isaac Casaubon*,

cf. Browning's "Before living he'd learn how to live"). Towards the end of Casaubon's life he was harassed with 'phlegm in the air passages' and a 'hacking cough' ('tussis attacked him'), and suffered intense pain from vesical stones ('calculus racked him'). He, moreover, like Browning's hero-scholar, had his 'thoughts on eternity' and 'reckoned not the number of his years, felt not the encroachment of age, or the sap of health, or the decay of his body.'"

## BRITISH MEDICAL BENEVOLENT FUND.

At the August meeting of the committee 16 cases were considered, and grants amounting to £155 made to 15 of the applicants. Appended is an abstract of the cases relieved:

1. Widow, aged 39, of M.D., C.M.Aberd. Left penniless at husband's sudden death three years ago, and now endeavours to support herself by letting lodgings. Two children, aged 11 and 9. Relieved twice, £10. Voted £12.
2. Daughter, aged 53, of late M.R.C.S., L.S.A. Used to act as a nurse-companion, but is now unable to obtain a post on account of failing health. Relieved seven times, £61. Voted £12.
3. L.R.C.P.Edin., aged 65. Used to have a good practice, but family troubles have exhausted his means, and he is now com-

elled to give up work owing to ill health. Children unable to help. Voted £18.

4. Daughter, aged 58, of late M.R.C.S., L.S.A. Has supported herself since father's death forty years ago, but is now in feeble health. Voted £10.

5. Daughter, aged 59, of late L.R.C.P.I. Since father's death in 1870 has maintained herself by teaching, but now finds it impossible to get pupils, and is dependent on an elder sister whose income is only 15s. a week. Voted £12.

6. M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., aged 41. Practises near London, but is in temporary difficulties owing to ill health. Four children, 12 to 7. Voted £9, with leave to apply again in six months.

7. Lady practitioner (L.R.C.P. and S.Edin.), aged 34. No income, and has been incapacitated for the last three years by ill health. Friends unable to help. Voted £18.

8. Daughter, aged 60, of late M.R.C.S. Maintained herself as a dispenser for several years, but is now unable to obtain