

Bernardino Ramazzini (1777)

From Essai sur les Maladies de Disseus (On the Diseases of Writers)

Translated from Latin in "De Mortis Artificum" by M. De Foureau.

"Yet 'tis certain that in each City and Town, vast Numbers of Persons still earn their Bread by writing. The Diseases of Persons incident to this Craft arise from three Causes; first, constant Sitting; secondly, the perpetual Motion of the Hand in the same manner; and, thirdly, the Attention and Application of the Mind. Now 'tis certain that constant sitting produces Obstructions of the Viscera, especially of the Liver and Spleen, Crudities of the Stomach, a Torper of the Leggs, a languid Motion of the refluent Blood and Cacbexies. In a word, Writers are depriv'd of all the Advantages arising from moderate and salutary Exercise.

Constant writing also considerably fatigues the Hand and whole Arm, on account of the continual and almost tense Tension of the Muscles and Tendons. I knew a Man who, by perpetual writing, began first to complain of an excessive Weariness of his whole right Arm, which could be remov'd by no Medicines, and was at last Succeeded by a perfect Pally¹ of the whole Arm. That he might sustain as little Loss as possible by the Accident, he learn'd to write with his left Hand, which was soon after seiz'd with the same Disorder."

¹ Paralysis.

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CHAP. II.

*the Diseases of WRITERS and
AMANUENSES.*

THO' Writers and Amanuenses were far more numerous among the Antients, who were ignorant of the Art of Printing, than at present; yet 'tis certain that in each City and Town, vast Numbers of Persons still earn their Bread by writing. The Diseases of Persons incident to this Class, arise from three Causes: first, constant Sitting; secondly, the perpetual Motion of the Hand in the same manner; and thirdly, the Attention and Application of the Mind. Now 'tis certain that constant sitting produces Obstructions of all the Viscera, especially of the Liver and Spleen, Cruditities of the Stomach, a Torpor of the Leggs, a languid Motion of the refluxent Blood and Cachexies. In a word, Writers are depriv'd of all the Advantages arising from moderate and salutary Exercise. Constant writing also considerably fatigues the Hand and whole Arm, on account of the continual and almost tense Tension of the Muscles and Tendons. I knew a Man, who, by perpetual writing, began first to complain of an excessive Weariness of his whole right Arm, which could be remov'd by no Medicines, and was at last succeeded by a perfect Palsy of the whole Arm. That he might sustain as little Loss as possible by that Accident, he learn'd to write with his left Hand, which was soon after seiz'd with the same Disorder. But what

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what is worst of all, is, the continual and intense Application of Mind; for in writing, the whole Brain with its Nerves and Fibres are highly tense, and a Privation of their due Tone succeeds. Hence arise Cephalalgies, Stuffings of the Head, Hoarseness, and Delusions of the Eyes, produced by continually looking on the Paper. These Misfortunes are principally incident to Philosophers, Arithmeticians, Merchants Clerks, and Secretaries, whose Minds are often perplex'd with a Multitude of Letters, and the variety of the Subjects on which they write.

In order to repair the Damages sustain'd by a sedentary Life, Writers ought to use moderate Exercise as often as their Situation will permit. Nothing is also more beneficial for such Persons, than frequent Frictions; which, as *Celsus in lib. 2. cap. 14.* tells us from *Hippocrates in Char. Offic. N^o. 11.* produce contrary Effects. "If, says he, the Friction is violent, it indurates the Body; if gentle, it softens it; if long continued, diminishes it; but if moderate, augments and enlarges it." If the Signs of a beginning Obstruction of the Viscera appear, 'tis expedient to purge with some Laxative, and in the Spring and Autumn to make universal Evacuations. In order to prevent or remove the Weariness of the right Arm and Hand, nothing is more proper than gentle Frictions with Oil of sweet Almonds, to which a small Quantity of Aqua-vitæ may be added. In the Winter-time Writers are to take care that their Hands be not render'd torpid by the intense Cold, for which Reason they ought to wear warm Gloves. In order to preserve the Head from the Misfortunes to which it is subject, I recommend all Cephalics, especially those pos-

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sess'd of a volatile Salt such as Spirit of Salt-ammoniac, the Smell of which alone is capable of removing the Torpor of the Brain, which is also to be purg'd. Proper Doses of Pileole Cratonis are to be exhibited, and Narcotics and Purgative Substances used; which, by exciting Sternutation, drive the ferous Humours from the Glands of the Brain. Among the Masticatories, Tobacco moderately used is highly beneficial. The Body is to be kept soluble by soft Aliments, and if these don't produce the desired Effect, laxative Clysters are to be injected; for, according to *Hippocrates in 6 Epidem.* "Constipation produces universal Confusion, a sordid State of the Vessels, and the Consumption of the Brain."