

N E R V A L ' s D I A R Y

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

The Drake Hotel, Park Avenue, N.Y. C., May 18, 1994

Dear Reader:

This day lends itself to an installment as much as the Big Apple as an appropriate place: 125 years ago to the day, the New York Dermatological Society was founded, the world's oldest, in the home of Henry Dagget Bulkley (1804–1872), 42 East, 22nd Street [1].

Referring to the caption of this column, it should be explained that 150 years ago the *voyageur enthousiaste* returned from his travels to Vienna, Cairo, Beyrouth, Akko (Haifa), Constantinople, and back to Paris: *Gérard de Nerval*, actually Gérard Labrunie (1808–1855), erstwhile medical student, freemason and sentimental traveller [2], who followed the tradition of Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), François Chateaubriand (1768–1848), and Alphonse Lamartine (1790–1869). Nerval shall serve as a fictional narrator to the travelling doctor of our day who can cover so many more miles in his lifetime but all-too often is not a sentimental traveller any more. (Incidentally, Nerval was born in May, the 22nd of the month, in Paris.)

Travelling is quintessential for the broadening of knowledge and the widening of personal scope. Travel prevents narrow-mindedness, travel educates. As the sage puts it, «*les voyages forment la jeunesse*» [3]. This holds, more so, for academic medicine, per se an international field and wholly dependent on free exchange of experience.

Dermatologists pride themselves as keen observers of visible signs displayed on 'surfaces' as is the skin. But *visibility* alone will never do, to comprehend skin disease.

The writer has been led to observe local dermatology and pittoresque facets of life around it, for well over three decades, from the banks of the Danube to the river of black swans, from the plains of Upper Burma to the pemphigus hospitals in central Brazil, and beyond. The classical centers of the field all over North America, and Europe, stations along the *Grand Tour* of old, will not satisfy the modern dermatologist in his attempt at gaining proper experience in his discipline, *World Dermatology*, as referred to in so many meetings.

Personal and *sentimental* impressions along travel routes will be presented in this column in irregular intervals.

- 1 Crissey JT, Parish LC: The Dermatology & Syphilology of the Nineteenth Century. Praeger, New York 1981, p. 290.
- 2 Gérard de Nerval: Voyages en Orient. Garnier-Flammarion, Paris 1980, M Jeanneret, ed., 2 vols. German ed. Nerval. Reise in den Orient, Winkler, München 1986, N Miller, F Kemp, eds.
- 3 Proverb: Le Grand Robert, Dictionnaire de la langue Française, Le Robert, Paris 1989, vol IX, p. 829.

à bientôt,

K.H., Vienna