

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

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ... (No. 21)

*At the Banks of the Mekong, Luang Phabang, Laos,
March 18, 1997*

Nerval's Diary: The End

I started off this column in New York City on May 18, 1994, commemorating the foundation of the world's oldest dermatological society, the N.Y. Dermatological Society. Some twenty articles have appeared in these pages since, thanks to the generosity of the editor and perhaps also due to the fact that I am one of the coeditors. How long can I make use of such a prerogative? This is a question I have asked myself repeatedly over the last 2½ years.

The answer could depend on readers' response, on editorial policy, on my own stamina. The editor, so far, has not changed his benevolence, readers' response was positive. At least as far as I knew of it. The penultimate remark in this regard was made just a week ago, by the past president of the International Society of the History of Medicine. He asked me if these 'interesting articles' would appear sometime in print all together. I answered,

jokingly, not to my knowledge would this happen, unless perhaps, posthumously.

A more sober surprise followed the other day. An erstwhile collaborator and coauthor of mine offered a much harsher view. Since she knows me quite well and has known me for a long time, I must give some consideration to the judgment. In case more persons share her view, looking at my deliberations in this diary as a mere showing off, a vanity fair, displaying all possible alphabets, a mix of poetry, 'no substance' anyway, – well, in this case I must reconsider.

I believe vanity is not an admirable facet of any character. If this feature to just put on a show were very much in the foreground, it would be despicable. A perspective I want to prevent or, at least to halt, as far as I am concerned.

Consequently, I will stop this series for the time being.

au revoir,

K.H., Vienna