

Tarantula. But the true dancing mania of the Middle Ages had its theatre chiefly in the crowded streets of Germany about 1374. Men and women, losing all control of their movements, danced in wild delirium until they fell in extreme exhaustion and groaned as in the agonies of death. Some dashed out their brains against the walls.

The victims of this mania were insensible to all external impressions. Haunted by visions, such as being immersed in a sea of blood, they leapt high in an effort to escape.

The mania spread to Cologne, Metz and Strasbourg. The sufferers were usually in a miserable, half-starved condition; superstition and the corruption of morals had already prepared the wretched people, debilitated by disease, to seek relief in the intoxication of an artificial delirium.

Exorcism had been found an effective remedy at the commencement of the outbreak, but immersion in cold water met with better success.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the malady began to decline and was soon heard of in single cases only. It became known then as Chorea or St. Vitus' dance.

The next advance in the treatment of the insane came from Gheel in Belgium, near Antwerp, where a colony was formed of those mentally afflicted. It was an oasis in a desert, a village and commune about 20 miles in circumference, inhabited and cultivated by peasants in the midst of an extensive sandy waste called the Campine.

Over 1,000 insane persons were lodged with the citizens of this community and controlled and employed by them. No high walls surrounded them, no asylum appliances were employed by them, and very little coercion exercised. The docile sufferers resided one with each family in a village, while the more excitable cases were lodged in separate farmhouses some distance away. Those requiring medical treatment were taken to the infirmary in Gheel. The support of the patients was, in the main, guaranteed by the State.

Here, in A.D. 800, Dymphna, an Irish princess, is said to have been beheaded by her father, for resistance to his incestuous passion.

Pilgrims, the sick and the insane, visited the shrine of the Christian virgin, and many were restored to sanity and serenity.

With the Reformation and after it, the closing of convents and monasteries tended to shut religion out from many public activities. A great deal of the hospital work among other things, passed gradually into the hands of lay spectators.

There were very few asylums in existence, and the "mad-houses" came into vogue to supplement them. Many insane paupers were housed in prisons, but from that time onwards the welfare of the majority of mentally afflicted people must have been entirely neglected. In some countries, they were revered as specially God-stricken, in others tolerated or tormented or laughed at, as simpletons or buffoons; in others imprisoned as social pests, or even executed as criminals.

The conditions under which insane people lived between 1247 and 1777, were deplorable and incredible. It was a universal practice to chain patients in dark cells, naked or clad only in filthy rags. Straw was

strewn on the cold floor for them to lie on, and the sanitary conditions were appalling.

The treatment given and approved of by the physicians was the most ingenious form of torture ever devised. The only sedative used was opium, and patients were often narcotised to death.

Antimony was given in terrific doses and copious purging and emetics were administered to them. The head was shaved and blistered and sometimes bleeding was resorted to. The early theory that the patient was possessed of an evil spirit, seemed to account for much of this treatment as well as the lack of understanding and sympathy towards the unfortunate patient.

There were no county asylums during the eighteenth century, although almost every parish contained at least one mentally afflicted person. Many roamed the King's highway, half-starved, almost naked, shouted at and scoffed by passers-by. Some, kept in houses, were chained to the walls in underground cellars or outhouses and even sheds, and kept there all through the winter months. The iron manacles that held their feet caused mortification to the flesh.

A barber, would, in some cases, be called in to shave all the hair off the patient's head. This treatment was to cool the brain. Or water would be poured upon the wretch's head until he could stand no more.

One typical form of treatment was known as the "Bath of Surprise." The patient was blindfolded and led up to a bath let into the floor. The patient was then allowed to fall into the cold water without any warning whatever. This procedure was adopted when the patient needed "lowering treatment."

Whipping was a universal practice, while mechanical devices grew in popularity. Machines revolving at high speed whirled the patient through space; or they would be sat in swiftly rotating chairs until they fainted. Patients were underfed as a starvation form of treatment.

Some of these barbaric "relics" can still be seen in the museums of Bethlem Hospital and other old asylums. Bethlem Asylum, founded in 1247 by a London citizen, Simon FitzMary, on his return from the crusades, and erected outside Bishop's Gate, is believed to have had the care of insane persons since about 1400. It was seized by Edward III in 1375 and a year or so later, the patients of a medieval asylum in Trafalgar Square were transferred to the care of the Bishops' Gate hospice.

In 1546 Henry VIII granted a charter handing over the building to the City of London for the use of the insane. Eleven years later it was transferred to the Governors of Bridewell. This was the first Bedlam as mentioned in the plays of Shakespeare.

In 1676 the Bethlem Hospital was moved to Moorfields in a building specially designed to accommodate about 150 lunatics. The management was deplorable. Patients were exhibited to the public like wild beasts, and until 1777, it was one of the sights of London to visit the lunatics. At one time a regular income of £400 per annum was obtained from fees paid by sightseers.

In 1815, Bethlem Hospital was transferred again to St. George's Fields, Southwark. The establishment, however, was closed on the opening of the present buildings at Monk's Orchard, Beckenham, in 1930.

It was not until 1769 that no man, except the governor, was allowed on the female side of the hospital, a male

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