

finest and most beautiful of exercises and was especially cultivated among the Greeks, when it probably reached its highest perfection in grace, agility and rhythmical movement."

The illustration of Miss Leila Morris executing the Tambourine dance is, the author states, a most perfect example of grace, elegance and poise.

The last chapter on "The Mental Factor in Health," is of extreme interest.

"Thought," we are told "is a vibration sent out from the mind; it is a force which has the power of acting on other minds, and few people realise how much we are influenced by the thoughts of others for good or for evil, especially the thoughts of those with whom we are intimate, or with whom we are in contact, and how they are equally influenced by our thoughts."

THE INFIRMARY OF THE MEDIÆVAL MONASTERY.

On Friday, February 21st, Mr. Percy Flemming, F.R.C.S., Emeritus Professor of Ophthalmic Medicine and Surgery in the University of London, gave a lantern lecture at University College, on "The Infirmary of the Mediæval Monastery, with special reference to the Abbey of Westminster." The Dean of Westminster was in the chair and there was a very large attendance. Mr. Flemming showed many views of different cathedrals, indicating the spot where the infirmary of a monastery had existed in each case.

Plans were also put on the screen showing how few of the old infirmary buildings are incorporated in the cathedrals, which took the place of the monasteries after the Reformation. The sanitary arrangements of the monasteries apparently reached a fairly elaborate development. From the fourteenth century onwards there was a tendency to make the infirmaries more comfortable and to provide a greater amount of isolation than was possible when the occupants of the infirmary slept principally in the common hall. In certain cases the remains of alcoves were shown round the infirmary, which presumably were curtained off. The kitchen was a most important adjunct to the infirmary and one equally important was the physic garden; Mr. Flemming recalled the fact that St. Bernard had been very scornful in regard to drugs and a scientific study of medicine, because he claimed that all the requirements in this direction could be obtained from the physic garden of a monastery. Certain slides showed that the infirmaries have now been adapted to be used as houses in connection with the cathedrals. One interesting view was that the fourteenth century door at No. 3 Little Cloisters at Westminster, where part of the infirmary now forms a private residence, the door shown was, he said, that of the infirmary chapel, rebuilt after a fire; St. Catherine's Chapel was probably the chapel belonging to the infirmary. One Abbot in the latter part of the fifteenth century has left some indications of the habits and customs observed

in the infirmary, and apparently he spent a considerable interval there. It is to be presumed that he suffered from some nervous complaint, which apparently was not uncommon in the monasteries; the monks would appear to have been fairly enlightened in the treatment of such ailments and fresh air was regarded as the principal cure; they were sent from Westminster to monasteries at Wandsworth, Battersea or Hendon in order to recuperate. In certain monasteries it was the duty of the Infirmary to see that there was no malingering.

Mr. Flemming stated that disease of the tibia appeared to be very common among the monks at Westminster, and made the interesting suggestion that the cause was much kneeling without modern amenities. Further, the allowance of baths for the monks was only two a year, and if a small abrasion occurred when a bath was five months overdue it might easily have become infected. In 1310 one monk had the trouble in both legs, and in 1334 another needed surgical treatment for the disease, the cost of which was 3s.; but it is to be remembered that this amount must be multiplied by fifteen in order to bring it to the

equivalent value of money at the present time. This gentleman would appear to have spent twopence for wine, which apparently was used as a lotion for local application.

The Infirmary held much the same position as a Medical Superintendent of a hospital to-day, and there is every indication that he had power to call in physicians; these physicians had to swear that they would not divulge secrets which they might learn when on their visits.

A certain Master Robert of St. Albans, in 1351, would appear to have practised in Westminster and among his cures were ginger, camomile and poppy, and the little Master, who placed considerable reliance on these, indicates that he was considered to be learned in his particular science.

Then the monks were periodically bled; the indication is that this is the cure which has now been replaced by a visit to Harrogate. Occasionally a monk might request this kind of treatment oftener than was strictly necessary, and it was presumed that the rest which ensued after bleeding, was the main reason for his application. Measures were taken, therefore, to prevent possibilities of malingering in this respect.

The little fountain in the middle of the Little Cloisters might be taken as the water which supplied the Mediæval Infirmary, coming from springs in Hyde Park.

Mr. Flemming referred to the debt which medicine owes to the monasteries, stating that in Canterbury there was a library containing 200 medical books. The Church, however, was inclined to put a ban on surgery and to regard it more as a matter of handicraft than of real scientific practice.

The Dean of Westminster in moving a vote of thanks to Mr. Flemming gave some further very interesting information about Westminster Abbey and specially with regard to St. Catherine's Chapel.



PATIENT IN SITTING POSITION BEING TREATED BY A HOT SAND BATH FOR SYNOVITIS OF THE KNEE.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)