Development Project nurses (Lloyd *et al*, 1977). There has also been a good deal of valuable, if formally unpublished work, for example, (Smith L., 1979: *A Survey of Three Years Operation, Franche Hostel, Kidderminster, Worcestershire*; Hassall, Christine & Cross, K. W., 1979: *Closing a Mental Hospital to Admissions: Predictions and Predicaments* and, perhaps above all, *The Worcester Development Project* 1970, a feasibility study for a multi-reorganisation of mental health services, DHSS, London, HMSO).

As you can imagine, it was with keen interest therefore that I turned to Turner & Roberts', apparently substantive, review (*Journal*, January 1992, **160**, 103–107) to find that they had not mentioned any of these publications but devoted their dissertation to two, admittedly interesting, recent papers in a non-psychiatric journal *Health Trends*.

I trust that readers of the *Journal* will forgive my remarking that it seems tiresome to have such omissions when reviewing a topic where the complete literature is so easily accessible and far from overwhelming.

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PETER HALL

The Woodbourne Clinic
21 Woodbourne Road
Birmingham B17 8BY

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Succi's madness

The Italian fasting-man has succumbed to the fate which many of his compatriots anticipated for him – he has lost his reason and is now an inmate of the Asylum of Saint Anne in Paris. It is not so long ago that he was in London repeating, or attempting to repeat, the continuous abstention from food which had procured him such notoriety in Florence and elsewhere. He broke down, it will be remembered, and the failure to accomplish the self-imposed feat preyed on his mind, which, at the best of times, could never be called sound. From London he repaired to Paris, and there, it seems, such mental sanity as he preserved gave way, and, after comporting himself in an obstreperous and even wild manner on the Boulevard des Italiens, he was removed by the Commissary of Police, protesting that he was the "Emperor Caesar". This was on the night of the 29th ult.; but some days before he had been observed by his Parisian neighbours to be dejected, taciturn, and troubled – in the state, in fact, which usually precedes an outburst of mania. At the infirmary of the depot to which he was taken by the Commissary his demeanour became hourly more excited, and he passed the night in a furiously maniacal condition, shouting, gesticulating, and blaspheming in the polyglot dialect of which he is a master. Seen next day at noon by Dr Garnier, he was pronounced to be labouring under the form of mania known as "religious persecution", not actually dangerous to himself or to bystanders, but apt, in all likelihood, to become so. This development of insanity is often a derivative from what Italian alienists classify as "megalomania" – the madness of self-exaltation, of which, in the spring of 1888, when he performed his great fasting feat in Florence, he betrayed the premonitory symptoms. Those who saw him at that time, watched night and day by relays of medical undergraduates in his room attached to the Istituto di Studi Superiori, could not fail to detect the diseased self-importance which characterised his demeanour and conversation, more particularly when he attempted, in the daily ride allowed him under surveillance, to cross the path of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, whose notice he did everything to attract. No doubt the nutrition of his brain was seriously affected by his abstinence from food, and the inhibitory paresis that must in any case have overtaken him was accelerated, if not actually invited, by the practice. We trust his fate will act as a warning to those who would follow in his footsteps, and deter them from a repetition of feats which have long ago yielded whatever scientific fruit they were capable of bringing forth. Certainly, of all the "careers" known to a century prolific in eccentricities the stupidest, if not the ignoblest, is that of the professional fasting-man – earning his bread by refusing to take it!

Reference

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Researched by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Epsom, Surrey.

https://doi.org/10.1192/S0007125000138590 Published online by Cambridge University Press