Dates of Acceptance

SIR: Readers with an eye for detail might have noticed a change in the March *Journal*. Would-be contributors are no longer allowed to muse over the gestation period of papers accepted for publication: the date which used to be given at the end of each article has disappeared. Eighteen months ago dates of receipt were transmuted into dates of acceptance. Since, notwithstanding, the *Journal* continues to enlarge, perhaps the next step might be to omit page numbers.

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CORRIGENDA

Journal, October 1986, **149**, 535. Review of *Handbook of Psychiatry*. 'Jarrold Woolfson' should read 'Gerald Woolfson'.

Journal, March 1987, **150**, 412. Letter by Jacob *et al.* "Neurotic individuals appear to be more prone to develop AIDS-phobia in India than in the West" should read "... *and* in the West."

Journal, May 1987, **150**, 723–724. The letter entitled "Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome and Compulsive Water Drinking" is by D. N. Anderson, *Sefton General Hospital, Smithdown Road, Liverpool L15 2HE.*

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

A curious outbreak of convulsionist mania, analogous to those which occurred from time to time during the Middle Ages, is reported to have shown itself at Agosta, in the province of Rome. For some weeks past the country people have been labouring under the delusion that the district is under the immediate government of the Evil One, and before retiring to rest they carefully place on the threshold the broom and the salt, which are credited with the power of keeping off evil spirits. Many of the younger women have epileptiform attacks, during which they utter piercing shrieks, and are violently convulsed. So serious had the condition of things become, that the syndic of Agosta found it necessary to inform the Prefect, who sent detachments of soldiers into the district in order to calm the apprehensions of the inhabitants. The contrast between this strictly physical way of dealing with the disease and the more imposing but less effectual religious ceremonies formerly employed must be interesting to historical students. As a natural consequence of this condition of mental perturbation, the country is overrun with quacks who claim to possess the only infallible remedy for the seizures. One of these nostrums, the vendor of which was making a rich harvest from its sale, was found on analysis to consist of earth, snuff, and borax. Three medical men who were commissioned to investigate the cause and nature of this extraordinary affection, came to the conclusion that it was an epidemic of hysteria. They examined a number of the sufferers, mostly young women, some of whom were alleged to have vomited nails, horseshoes, and other equally indigestible substances, while others barked like dogs. Several of them were removed to Rome for treatment in the hospitals there, and measures have been taken to check the spread of the mischief. In a milder degree, this contagious form of hysteria is not infrequent, especially in places where ignorance and superstition favour manifestations of nervous disorder. The worst excesses of popular outbreaks, like the French Revolution, have been attributed to similar influences, and with every appearance of justice.

Reference

British Medical Journal, 1887, *ii*, 94.

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