

## Venereal disease and the great

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Venereal disease has been no respecter of persons and many notable figures have been afflicted in the past. Royal personages and politicians have enjoyed no immunity, and poets, musicians, writers, and artists longing for new experiences to inspire new works have ultimately had to face reality and publicity when complications arose in the form of stricture, tabes, insanity, or blindness with the whole world aware of their misfortunes. Soldiers and sailors with their extensive leisure and changing domiciles have always seemed to stray, but as they are expected to do so they have generally received adequate treatment with a better prospect of avoiding painful late consequences than is the case for civilians. Now things have been greatly changed by the impact of antibiotics, and the venereal history of the new great will become almost a secret in the future because the tell-tale 'lost nose', aneurysm, paralysis, insanity, or blindness will be no more.

### *Literature and Philosophy*

Writers have been greatly afflicted; they seem to yearn for experience to incorporate in new works. Alphonse Daudet could not have lived the youth he did without contracting syphilis. He truly earned it, and says so in a little book published after his death. This book, *La Douleur*, includes a vivid clinical account of tabes dorsalis written with great clarity by a master of prose; unfortunately his family edited it considerably when it was published in 1931 – 37 years after the author's death. He does not speak well of his doctors, Potain, Guyon, and Charcot. The first diagnosed tuberculosis, and the second rheumatism, but Charcot, a great friend who made the correct diagnosis, ordered Seyre's suspension treatment with such disastrous consequences that he and Daudet never spoke to each other again. Morphine alone made life bearable; Daudet enjoyed the *Bercements divins des nuits de Morphine*, and died an addict of morphia, cocaine, ether, and hashish. It must have been a pathetic meal for Mrs. Walter Palmer, the Mayfair hostess, with Alphonse Daudet on one side and Meredith on the other at her magnificent house in Grosvenor Square. To lean in front of her to touch glasses was beyond their ataxic powers, and the wine

was spilt over Mrs. Palmer though she was not disturbed by it.

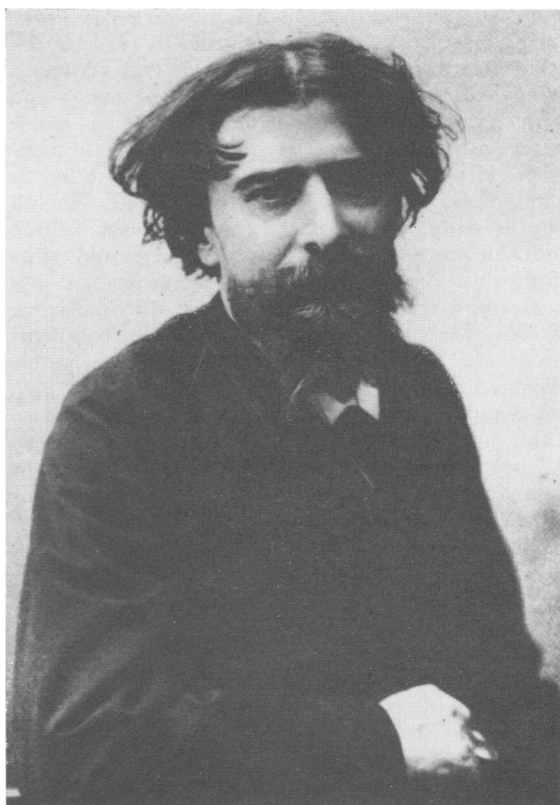


FIG. 1 *Alphonse Daudet* (1840–97), who left a vivid account of the sufferings of a tabo-paretic. He was a great friend of *George Meredith*, who was also paralysed from the same cause (Reproduced from the frontispiece of "*Alphonse Daudet*" (1949) by G. V. Dobie, published by Nelson, London)

*George Meredith* was born in Portsmouth in 1828. His father was a naval tailor, and in the snobbish Victorian age *George Meredith* disowned him, although his father had clothed Nelson, Rodney,

Marryat, and other famous sailors. Marryat refers to Meredith's father in *Peter Simple*. Meredith wrote of his family in his novel *Evan Harrington*. Meredith's marriage was a tragedy, described in his poem *Modern Love*. He was first a publisher's reader and through serious errors of judgment lost thousands of pounds for his employers Chapman and Hall; *East Lynne* and *The Heavenly Twins* were two of his rejects. After his divorce he lived a Bohemian life with Swinburne, Rossetti, and others. He was then married again, this time happily, to Mary Vulliamy by whom he had two children, and later went to the Austro-Italian war as a correspondent. He may have acquired syphilis during his travels with the Army or during his excesses with Swinburne. In 1874 'gastritis' developed, he turned vegetarian and became a living skeleton; later, when he became ataxic and could no longer enjoy his country walks, locomotor ataxia and gastric crises were at last correctly diagnosed. His eyes were not affected; he went to live in London and even travelled abroad, and he was still able to write. *Diana of the Crossways* was written under the constant threat of gastric crises and lightning pains. Persisting bladder infection resulted in a large stone which was removed by Sir Buckstone Browne. Meredith not only paid the fee, but dedicated *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* to his surgeon. He remained cheerful and happy between bouts of pain and avoided addiction to drugs. While affecting to deride honours he was none the less glad when Edward VII presented him with the Order of Merit. He now lived a cripple's life with his bath-chair pulled by his faithful donkey 'Picnic'. When he died at the age of 81, his body was cremated and the ashes were interred beside his second wife in Dorking Cemetery. It is interesting that his second marriage was close to the time when he most likely contracted syphilis, yet his children were healthy.

Another writer who did not hesitate to inflame the passions of his readers and perhaps lure them into catching the disease from which he suffered was de Maupassant, the great master of the short story. Possibly like Schopenhauer he developed a tendency to misogyny when he discovered he had syphilis; his story of the monk who hated the sexual act and gloatingly pushed a loving couple in a builder's caravan office over a cliff during their love-making leaves one with this impression. He lived a youthful life of unbridled sex and died at the age of 43 from general paralysis of the insane.

Thomas Chatterton (1752-70) ended his short life, it is said, by suicide at the age of 18 after having contracted syphilis at the age of 16. He could not afford Greek water, a favourite remedy of the time; it cost ten shillings and sixpence a bottle, George II

having given a monopoly to its discoverer. Instead, he first took quack medicines without effect; he next drank huge quantities of hot well water from Bath and finally he took mercury and had 3 weeks of dreadful stomatitis. He then came to London to write poetry, but the disease returned and so he followed the treatment of Paracelsus, fasting, complete abstinence, and drinking Fowler's water. This latter he took in such quantities as to induce vomiting and diarrhoea for which he sought relief with opium. He died starving and utterly destitute from arsenical poisoning.

François Villon, who was born in 1431, undoubtedly suffered from venereal disease in the form of *ulcus molle* and *condylomata acuminata*. He lived before the appearance of epidemic syphilis in Europe but according to Prokisch and Rosenbaum he suffered from 'pre-Columbian syphilis'. He lived for a time on the immoral earnings of a prostitute, Margot, to whom he dedicated a poem. Bad company ruined his weak nature, and he became a thief, a cheat, a vagabond, and a murderer, twice sentenced to death. In 1463 he was banished from Paris and nothing is known of his last days. Villon has been cited in the argument in favour of syphilis existing in Europe before Columbus. His complete loss of hair, alopecia totalis, was asserted to be syphilitic alopecia and he refers in the *Ballade de Villon à s'amy* to a *Mademoiselle au Nez tortu* and she has been supposed to have had a syphilitic nose. The alopecia which came to be called the 'French Crown' was, with the saddle-nose, the commonest manifestation of syphilis.

William Thackeray, in his early years, had studied art in Paris, where he contracted gonorrhoea; later for 9 years he suffered the inevitable stricture which was dilated by Buckstone Browne an assistant to Thackeray's great friend Sir Henry Thompson. Buckstone Browne always passed his bougies with the patient standing and he derived tremendous wealth from his management of strictures.

Keats, also a doctor with a licence from the Society of Apothecaries, contrived in his short life to contract syphilis, and it is possible that if tuberculosis had not carried him off at the early age of 24, syphilis would later have marred his life. He took mercury on only two occasions and there are some who argue that this was for his general health and that he never had contracted syphilis.

Molière, at whose death all the doctors cried in unison *Vivat, Vivat, Molière est mort*, was for the last 8 years of his life a chronic invalid. One diagnosis was aneurysm of the aorta. At the fourth performance of his play *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Molière had a convulsion and agonizing pain in his chest and it was thought that his aneurysm had started to leak; he was

taken home from the theatre to die that night from a huge haemorrhage, the aneurysm having burst into his bronchus. This chain of events is in better accord with the diagnosis of aneurysm than with that of a terminal haemoptysis from pulmonary tuberculosis. His 8 years of ill health made him consult many doctors and many quacks, on most of whom he poured hatred and ridicule, but he was instrumental with Boileau in winning Louis XIV's support for Harvey, from which emerged *L'Académie du Roi*, the School of Medicine which based all its teachings on Harvey and led the French profession back to reason and a century's domination of the medical world.

James Boswell, when he came to London in 1762, plunged into the debauchery of the capital with readiness, and his London journal describes in detail his various affairs with actresses and prostitutes in the Haymarket, St. James's Park, and particularly on Westminster Bridge. He despised himself for making amorous schemes whilst in church, and said that after 'the brutish appetite was sated I could not but despise myself for being so closely united with such a low wretch'. For his six attacks of gonorrhoea he was usually treated by his fellow countryman Douglas who is remembered for two anatomical eponyms; on one occasion he sent Douglas's bill to the damsel who had infected him. He doubtless also went to quacks, because he writes in his journal, when describing this affair, 'When I got home, though, then came sorrow. Too too plain was Signor Gonorrhoea. In this woeful manner did I melancholy urinate. I thought of applying to a Quack who would cure me swiftly and cheaply. But then the horrors of being imperfectly cured and having the distemper thrown into my blood terrified me exceedingly. I therefore pursued my resolution to go to my friend Douglas'.

Heinrich Heine (1799–1856), who composed some of the most beautiful poems in the German language, was of Jewish stock but became a Protestant to obtain his doctorate at Göttingen. He hated Germany and settled in Paris where he was welcomed by musicians and writers including Chopin and Victor Hugo. From 1834 he lived with Mathilde, a shop girl from a boot shop whom he eventually married; she nursed him devotedly when he was laid low by syphilis. His first symptom, as was the case with Maupassant, Villon, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, was unbearable headache starting when he was 24. In 1840 facial pareses and diplopias commenced and in 1844 he developed ophthalmoplegia. Then his oral muscles weakened and he could no longer osculate; ageusia, anosmia, dysphagia, and paralysis of the masticatory muscles then appeared. Then followed epileptic fits, lightning pains, and finally weakness of his legs, and he collapsed in the Louvre in May, 1848, quite appro-



FIG. 2 *Heinrich Heine lying on his 'mattress grave' paralysed by locomotor ataxia. He lay thus for 8 years (Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees)*

priately in front of the statue the Venus de Milo. Here he offered himself up as a cripple on the altar of love and retired to his 'mattress grave' to be waited upon faithfully in his helpless, paralysed, and incontinent state by the faithful Mathilde (Eugenie Murat). His end came on February 17, 1856, when he was 56 years old. His mentality was clear to the end and from wide reading of medical texts he acquired a comprehensive knowledge of his illness. He had a very eccentric and successful Hungarian doctor, David Gruby, whose main practice lay among women for whom he decorated his consulting room with skeletons and stuffed animals. He preferred anonymity when he drove to his patients in a carriage which was completely enclosed but for a hole in the roof. His prescriptions were of great length and absurdity running into many sheets of paper; the ingredients were bizarre and numerous but, significantly, were always dissolved in alcohol.

Oscar Wilde undoubtedly suffered from syphilis contracted from a lady known as 'Old Jess', the only working harlot in Oxford when he was an undergraduate. He later dedicated a poem to her in which

he refers to the disastrous consequences of their association. He received huge mercurial inunctions which left his teeth severely damaged. He had a medical examination before he married Constance Lloyd, and she gave birth to two healthy sons, but after the birth of the second his syphilis manifested itself again. He died in the Rue des Beaux Arts in Paris, probably of a cerebellar abscess due to otitis media consequent, he said, to falling upon his ear while in the Chapel of Reading Gaol. His grave in the Père La Chaise cemetery in Paris is now a place of pilgrimage for homosexuals.



FIG. 3 Oscar Wilde, who contracted syphilis while an undergraduate at Oxford, died from an unassociated brain abscess in 1897 (Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees)

Baudelaire was also undoubtedly a syphilitic and a letter of his to Madame Aupick still exists in which he wrote, 'Étant très jeune, j'ai eu une affection vériolique'. He was a dissolute man and an opium addict, with which drug he attempted to kill himself on occasions. Many of his masterpieces were written during his period of addiction.

Dean Swift is thought by some to have suffered from cerebral syphilis. His behaviour became pro-

gressively more eccentric in his latter days and his poem on Celia is clearly the work of a madman.

Andreas Ady, a great German poet and writer, died of general paralysis of the insane in 1919.

Mirabeau, one of the literary forerunners of the French Revolution, died in 1791 of syphilis.

Goethe's only live-born son was regarded as having died of general paralysis of congenital origin; the other pregnancies culminated in still-births.

Shakespeare's godson and probable natural son, the Poet Laureate, William Davenant (born in 1606, ten years before Shakespeare's death), who figures in Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, suffered from both gonorrhoea and syphilis, and as a result of the latter he lost the bridge of his nose. It was said of him that:

'He got a terrible clap of a handsome  
Black wench that lay in Axe - Yard Westminster  
Whom he thought on when he speaks of Dalga  
In Gondibert which cost him his nose  
With which unlucky mischance many witts  
Were too cruelly bold, e.g. Sir John Mennis,  
Sir John Denham, and Sir John Suckling'.

Sir John Mennis (1599-1671) was the sailor poet who fought at sea and on land for Charles I and Charles II. Sir John Denham was another gambling drunken poet. Sir John Suckling (1609-1642), yet another dissipated royalist poet, committed suicide at the age of 33; he invented cribbage and is supposed to have made a fortune from selling marked cards, and mocked Davenant's amorous mishaps in the following lines:

'Will Davenant ashamed of a foolish mischance  
That he hath got lately travelled in France  
Modestly hoped the handsomeness of his Muse  
Might any deformity about him Excuse'.  
'Surely the company would have been content  
If they could have found any precedent  
But in all their records either in verse or prose  
There was not one laureate without a nose'.

Of Thomas Carewe, a contemporary minor poet, Suckling wrote:

'If it be so his valour must I praise  
That being the weaker yet can force his ways  
And wish that to his valour he had strength  
That he might drive the fire quite out at length  
For troth as yet the fire gets the day,  
For evermore the water runs away'.

A fair description of Carewe's *chaude pisse*.

Shakespeare himself is not above suspicion; he speaks so often of venereal disease with feeling and knowledge that it has been postulated he was a sufferer himself; thus in *Timon of Athens*:

'Consumptions bow  
In hollow bones of man: strike them sharp  
And mar men's spurring. Crack the lawyer's voice  
That he may never more false title plead

Nor sound his quillts shrilly; hoar the flamen  
 That scolds against the quality of flesh  
 And not believes himself: down with the nose  
 Down with it flat: take the bridge quite away  
 Of him that, his particular to foresee,  
 Smells from the general weal: make curled pate ruffians  
 bald,  
 And let the unscarred braggarts of the war  
 Derive some pain from you: plague all;  
 That your activity may defeat and quell  
 The source of all erection. There's more gold:  
 Do you damn others, and let this damn you  
 And ditches grave you all'.

William Hickey (born 1749), the 'Indian Pepys', was a patient of John Hunter and of his surgical predecessor Robin Adair. He suffered severely from syphilis when he was 30 but largely ignoring it he continued drinking and committing every degree of folly and excess. Early in 1777 he had a thorough course of salivation for a severely ulcerated throat, which developed in spite of taking Velno's syrup, and in the face of a favourable opinion of his case given him previously by Mr. Howard of the Middlesex Hospital. For this course of treatment he quit the house of his friend Mr. Cane, and went into lodgings. 'The horrible ceremony of rubbings' commenced on February 1st, and by the sixth his saliva was pouring four pints a day, and his mouth terribly sore. Adair was very attentive, came frequently, and gave him permission to leave for India on March 10th, provided he continued with hot baths and plenty of sarsaparilla.

Amongst great foreign authors who suffered from syphilis were Dostoevski, Strindberg, and Walt Whitman. The last-named American poet wrote some remarkable erotic poetry during his life time, rivalling even that of Robert Burns.

Philosophers, some of whom regard themselves as superior individuals on a different plane from other men and therefore less liable to female entanglements,

nevertheless make their contribution to famous syphilitics; the two best known are Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, both of whom suffered from cerebral syphilis. Anatole France was a great admirer of Nietzsche and said that *la paralysie général fait seule les grands hommes*; he looked upon syphilitic insanity as providing the drive and restless energy so necessary for the advancement of the human race. Lange thought similarly and in peculiar words said that Nietzsche was 'A wonder of spirit and destiny'. Nietzsche's medical history was a long one; in 1865 he contracted syphilis in a brothel which he considered the only place for love. During the secondary stage in the same year he had syphilitic meningitis, and 8 years later in 1873 he had basal meningitis. After a further 8 years came typical general paralysis of the insane which pursued a most unusual course and remitted after 4 years. A year later came iritis and 4 years later the general paralysis returned and progressed for 2 years; it then developed a permanent state until his death 10 years later in 1890. While a syphilitic he produced much of the writing which had so strong an appeal to Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler, providing the 'philosophical' inspiration to the makers of the two World Wars. Arthur Schopenhauer was not of a war-making philosophy, in fact he held that syphilis and war were the two greatest enemies of mankind. He contracted syphilis while a student at Göttingen and underwent exhausting and uncomfortable mercurializations for long periods. As a result of his discomfort he became an inveterate misogynist and syphilophobe. His misogyny carried him as far as violence at times, and he once threw a harmless woman downstairs with her sewing machine after her. As a result of a law suit for this he had to pay her £9 a year for life; when she died and relieved him of this obligation, his comment was *Obit anus, abit onus*. He regarded women as no better than

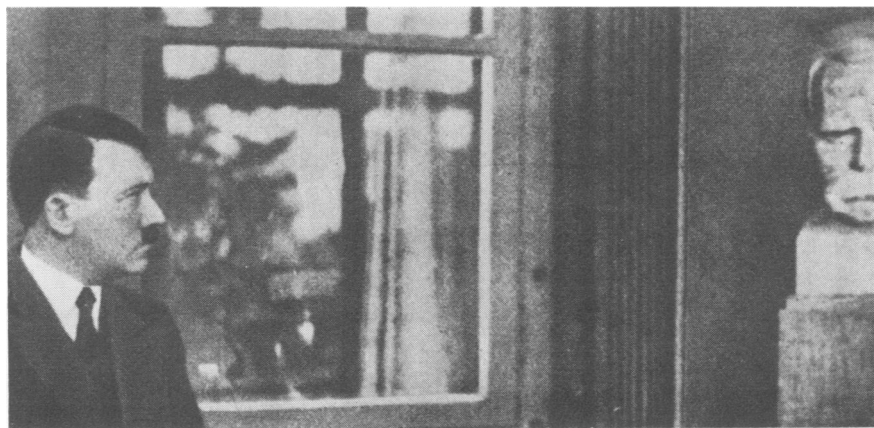


FIG. 4 Adolph Hitler gazes reverently at the bust of his syphilitic inspirer - Nietzsche

purveyors of syphilis. He did not die of syphilis as did Nietzsche but of pneumonia at the age of 72, but syphilophobia and pessimism dominated his life. The suicide of his father in Hamburg when he was at school in Wimbledon, and his quarrels with and separation from his mother followed by his syphilis made him into a strange miserable man, well fitted to his melancholy philosophy. He loved to point out as proof of the logic of his misogyny that Descartes, Leibnitz, Malebranch, Spinoza, and Kant all preserved their philosophic personalities from the 'tyrannies of women' and perhaps from sex and remained unmarried. Schopenhauer died in 1860.

Ulrich von Hutten, a great humanist and reformer, contracted syphilis in 1511 fairly soon after its arrival in Europe, and when he was aged 23 began 9 years of suffering for his youthful immoral life; he died when he was 34. The malady showed itself in the form of very painful ulcers, knot-like lesions (gummata) on his legs and arms, stiff joints, rending night pains, and filthy running sores, which had worn him away to skin and bones. He had been, 'As well cut as burnt with scissors, knife and fire both actual and potential to no purpose; salivated six times as ineffectually; all was cured by a strict diet for thirty days and upwards with a sudorific decoction of Guaiacum'. Hutten wrote of his 'cure' in *De medicina Guaiace vel de morbo gallico*. It is strange that both Ulrich von Hutten and Benvenuto Cellini should have had such faith in this useless remedy.

Casanova, the epitome of the lover, excelled in the technique of preliminary seduction, but in the subsequent consummation all was not joy. Many of his 'conquests' were ladies of the street for which he paid with four attacks of gonorrhoea, five of chancroid, one of syphilis, and one of herpes preputialis. He probably spent 5 years of his life between the ages of 19 and 41 submitting to cures of these conditions.

#### *The armed forces*

It is often said that soldiers and sailors worship Venus as ardently as Bellona, and of soldiers the one most remembered is Napoleon who contracted gonorrhoea when a young army lieutenant in Paris. It was said that the affair took place against a convenient wall near the Tuileries. Cure took some time and he suffered a good deal from stricture; he was often to be seen in a characteristic posture with his head resting on his raised right forearm as he endeavoured to urinate against a tree. At his *post mortem* examination stones were found in his bladder. His scabies contracted in Toulon may well have been sexually acquired; it tormented him for many years until he was cured by Corvisart. It is also said that he acquired



FIG. 5 Benvenuto Cellini (1500–70), the celebrated Italian goldsmith and jeweller, extolled guaiacum as the drug which cured his syphilis (Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees)

syphilis during the 'Hundred Days' after his escape from Elba.

Frederick the Great, a homosexual, wrote to Voltaire in a letter, part prose part verse, in 1760 at the age of 49 as follows:

J'eus l'honneur  
De recevoir pour mon malheur  
D'une certaine imperatrice  
Une bouillante chaude p . . .

It is recorded that he developed such a severe orchitis that he was castrated, but authorities differ as to whether this was unilateral or bilateral. As he grew older he became progressively more peculiar, living alone or with men such as Voltaire and with his dogs at Sans Souci Palace in Potsdam; he painted his face and never washed or bathed.

Lord Cardigan, while leading the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, is reported to have had severe gonorrhoeal orchitis; he rode with a little less

dash as a result of it and to this he may have owed his life!

#### *The Church*

Members of the church have not been immune from venereal disease. Cardinal Wolsey contracted syphilis and it was probably conducive to his death. The prepared indictment, to which he never answered because of his premature death, stated that he 'Knowing himself to have the foul and contagious disease of the great pox, broken out upon him in divers places of his body, came daily to your Grace rowning in your ear and blowing upon Your Most Noble Grace with his perilous and most infectious breath to the marvellous danger of Your Highness'. So one of the many charges was that of infecting the King with syphilis.

There were three syphilitic Popes: Alexander VI, Julius II, and Leo X. They died in the early days from 1503 to 1521 before the papacy became alive to the dangers brought to Europe by Columbus. Cardinal Richelieu had a large perianal abscess, probably of venereal origin, and developed retention of urine on his journey to Bordeaux. He was catheterized several times in the standing position; the first time the catheter was passed, four pints of urine were obtained, giving his eminence *une joie inconceivable*. Dr. Donne, the famous Archdeacon of St. Pauls and favourite of our homosexual King James I, left an ode of reproach and sorrow to the maid who gave him the Pox. He pointed out the logic of the disease, starting in one pointed member, and finishing with destruction of another – the nose.

#### *Art*

Painters were notoriously prone to relieve the tedium of their apprentice years with what they termed the Bohemian life and a number acquired venereal infections which shortened their lives or fostered suicide and drug addiction. Manet, van Gogh, and Gauguin were all syphilitics; van Gogh cut off his ear and sent it to the object of his affections, and Gauguin thought the sunny climate of Tahiti would cure him, but the main consequence was that he shared his complaint with the natives.

Goya's illness was due to cerebral syphilis. When he was 45 he suffered for a year with blinding headaches, vertigo, a right-sided hemiplegia, aphasia, loss of vision, tinnitus, and deafness. He was left with total deafness, headaches, tinnitus, and further cerebral illnesses but survived until he died of a stroke at the age of 82. No general paralysis developed, all his signs and symptoms being due to a luetic meningitis. Of his twenty children all but one died soon after birth. A remarkable portrait of him and his doctor Anieta

survives; Goya is obviously very ill and the doctor is pictured giving him a draught of medicine.

#### *Music*

Musicians do not make a great historical contribution in this respect, although Beethoven is stated to have been syphilitic with his deafness due to the same cause. Gluck was possibly a sufferer from general paralysis of the insane. Schumann's illness and madness was said to be of syphilitic origin. His was a pathetic story; as he felt and saw the black bats fluttering round his head, he threw himself into the Rhine at Dusseldörf in his dressing gown, having previously paid the bridge toll with his silk scarf. He fell just beside a fishing boat and was rescued to die paralysed and insane in an asylum near by.

Schubert, at the age of 24, contracted syphilis for which he received mercurial treatment; if tuberculosis and poverty had not carried him off while he was young he was unlikely to have avoided late manifestations.

Lorenzo Daponte, librettist of *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*, had severe syphilis with widespread rashes and pharyngitis for which he was given much mercury; he later died of general paralysis of the insane.

Donizetti, who lived for only 50 years, spent the last 7 years of his life declining slowly with general paralysis of the insane. It was noted first by friends that he had lost his ability to compose yet continued to conduct, but he deteriorated and finally became partially insane. His first epileptic fit he described in language of terror saying that it had struck him like a thunderbolt in his brain. He became more and more insane and efforts were made to get him away from Paris back to his birthplace Bergamo near Milan so that his sexual activity would be stopped by the absence of the music-loving ladies who surrounded him. He sank lower and lower and finally his paralysis permitted him only to totter between two helpers. He sat all day long with his sunken head bent over to the left of his chest. His eyes were seldom opened, but he was dressed in court dress and wearing all his medals, with his helpless hands dangling in white gloves, while his urine dripped uncontrolled into his clothes. Then for his last few months of life he returned to Bergamo. Lying like this he never lifted an eyelid as Giovanni Battista Rubini and Giovannina Basoni bawled the duet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* into his ears. He died with the usual fever and convulsions at the age of 50, a typical case of G.P.I.

#### *Monarchy*

I will now consider the question of royalty and venereal disease: Ivan the Terrible was born in 1530

and succeeded to the throne 3 years later. He was educated in the worst possible way by his courtiers, though his mother, Helena Glinska, tried to protect him. He married a good woman, Anastasia, but when she died he contracted syphilis. His whole aspect changed and he became wanton in his cruelty; he had seven 'wives' and became a sexual maniac. He massacred the 15,000 inhabitants of Nijni Novgorod in 5 weeks in every possible brutal way, and murdered his heir most brutally; the picture in the art gallery at Moscow of the lunatic king holding the bloodstained head of his dead son in his hands conveys a horror that one remembers for a lifetime. He once proposed marriage with Elizabeth I of England, but she refused him and proposed an aristocratic English lady to him whom he refused in turn. Elizabeth also gave him permission to come to England if driven from his country by rebellion, on one condition, that he paid for his stay here.

Louis XIV reputedly suffered from gonorrhoea. There was no history of syphilis; his fourteen acknowledged children are indirect evidence of this.



FIG. 6 Charles V (1500–58), the holy Roman emperor, was infected with syphilis (Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees)

He had four official mistresses but he would copulate with any handy lady-in-waiting if in the mood and one of his regular mistresses was not at her post of duty. In his latter years he became a model of puritanical behaviour as a result of his association with Madame de Maintenon, his secret morganatic wife.

Henry III of France was undoubtedly syphilitic and described how he cured himself on the advice of Dr. Peña, a Spaniard, who learnt the treatment from a Turk. The cure consisted of a decoction of Barden root, a method which never achieved acceptance. Henry IV, his son, behaved with great recklessness as regards women and is reputed to have suffered from gonorrhoea on several occasions. An account survives of his treatment with a catheter made of tin and passed in a standing position.

Both the Emperor Charles V and Francis I, whose intrigues with and against Henry VIII of England make a most bewildering story, were said to be syphilitic. Henry VIII is generally regarded as being syphilitic because he had deep ulceration of both legs above the knees. The ulcers seemed to be sinuses of



FIG. 7 François I (1494–1567), king of France, with whom Henry VIII wrestled physically as well as politically on the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold', was said to be syphilitic (Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees)



some depth reaching down to the femur, and he tried hundreds of remedies on them without effect. The prescriptions still survive and one is designed 'to cool the member', suggesting the origin of his disease. It is probable that the disease spread to his brain because in his latter years his murderous brutality was of an insane degree, most of it based upon distorted interpretation of religion. When his leg sinuses closed and he was tortured with pain he would sentence hundreds to death; it was said that his leg ulcer was responsible for more deaths than the ingrowing toe-nail of Richard the Bold of Burgundy. It has been estimated that Henry in his lifetime executed 3 per cent. of our population.

Paul I of Russia was the natural son of Catherine II of Russia. His putative father Peter III was assassinated by strangulation in 1764 six hours after being forced to sign a shameful abdication and his body was brought to St. Petersburg for a lying-in-state, where his death was announced as due to a 'haemorrhoidal' colic. Paul I (to be) developed a syphilitic nose at about the age of 10 and it became quite typical as he



FIG. 8 Henry VIII (1491–1547), who intrigued and quarrelled during his reign with the king of France and the emperor of Germany. All three were syphilitics

grew older. His mother became Empress after her husband's murder and ruled for 30 years. She succumbed to an apoplexy while on a commode made from the captured Polish throne. Two of her peculiarities were an inordinate consumption of coffee, and a severe syphilophobia which oppressed her greatly, witness the hereditary syphilis of her son. At St. Petersburg she started the first hospital in the world for venereal disease, which had fifty beds. In pursuance of her syphilophobia the lovers selected by her from the Army or in the course of social contacts, had first to be passed by a committee of six women known as *les Épreuveuses*, one of whom was a lady of good English family. After 3 months' observation the lovers would be accepted only if approved by the committee on grounds of technique and if judged free from infection after examination by her Scottish doctor, Fergusson.

Edward VII described by Rudyard Kipling as 'an obese voluptuary' was notoriously promiscuous. The three best-known mistresses were the Countess of Warwick, Lily Langtry a married woman with a complaisant husband, and Mrs. Keppel who held his hand when he died. He consorted with many women after his experience with Daisy Barton who was pushed into his bedroom by Army officers on the Curragh. From one of his many paramours he contracted gonorrhoea in Karlsbad which he passed on to Queen Alexandra, and it has been suggested that the 'Alexandrine limp' was caused by a painful heel spur of Reiter's disease. They were both treated by George Hastings who received a knighthood in the last year of King Edward's life.

#### Medicine

A number of famous doctors have contracted venereal disease particularly during the period when there was no protection for the hands during *post mortem* examinations and surgery. Emil von Behring, Koch's famous assistant, died of general paralysis in 1917 at the age of 63: Finsen died of tabes in 1904, and Karl Westphal died in 1923 of cerebral syphilis. He, with Edinger, had discovered the mid-brain nucleus concerned with eye movements, and sadly enough diplopia was one of the symptoms which heralded his cerebral syphilis. The most famous doctor to have had both gonorrhoea and syphilis was John Hunter who inoculated himself urethrally and in the scarified skin of the glans with pus from a case of double infection with urethral discharge and syphilis. In time he developed both infections and by this misinterpreted and courageous experiment he perpetuated the belief that both diseases were the same until Ricord the great French syphilologist proved him wrong a century and a half later.

*Conclusion*

So ends a chronicle which has extended over many centuries but has barely touched on the pain and misery, individual, familial, and social, caused by the accidents of sexual promiscuity. For who, however promiscuous, would willingly contract venereal disease? Yet it is almost by accident that in this country any great men of our present era who have run the risk of infection are unlikely ever to figure in some future history of syphilis. The widespread use for minor infections of antibiotics with treponemoidal effect has, in the past 25 years, almost certainly cured hundreds of cases of unsuspected latent syphilis, so that victims of newly developing tabes, G.P.I., and cardiovascular syphilis are rare enough to pose a major problem in providing material for teaching. Let it indeed be hoped that soon this chronicle can be judged retrospectively as an obituary of late symptomatic syphilis in the great.

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