

A Peculiar Disease.

Tarantism was a peculiar disease which prevailed in Italy during the middle ages. It resulted from the bite of the tarantula, and was characterized by gesticulations, contortions, and cries somewhat resembling those arising from St. Vitus Dance.

The sufferer from tarantism assumed graceful postures, was partial to red colors, bright and luminous surfaces, and music; their recovery, in fact, being effected by the use of instrumental or vocal music. Although various treatments were used, one being to bury the patient up to the neck in the earth, the employment of music was so universally successful that a class of tunes and songs was composed, called Tarentella, to be used for Tarantati. The Tarantella have lingered long, and may be heard still in the wilder portions of Italy.

All classes were subject to Tarantism. A philosophic bishop, having allowed himself bitten by a Tarantula, danced as fast and as furiously as the peasants.

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