

Medicine for Managers

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The Celestial Bed

The Celestial Bed was the creation of ‘Dr’ James Graham, perhaps the most notorious quack of the eighteenth century. He was a proponent of the use of ‘electrical medicine’, having become convinced of its wondrous power after learning of Benjamin Franklin’s experiments with electricity. He was born in 1745, the son of a saddler. He studied Medicine at Edinburgh, though he failed to complete his studies, but he called himself ‘doctor’ anyway!

During his professional career he pioneered a range of therapies, many of questionable benefit.

Initially he established an Apothecary in Doncaster before travelling to America in 1771 where he set himself up as an ‘oculist and aurist’ in Philadelphia.

His treatments included the provision of artificial eyes, cataract surgery and help with hearing difficulties. There he learned about electricity and came to believe it was a cure-all.

In 1775, he returned to England and established a practice in Bath, promoting cures including chemical essences, aethereal, magnetic and electrical vapours, together with fragrant baths and various applications.

One particularly strange treatment was an ‘earth bath’.

The client would go into the garden, strip naked and be placed in a hole in the ground buried up to the neck in earth, remaining there for three or four hours. Many patients claimed that their rheumatism improved. His clientele included members of the Peerage and Dukes and Duchesses

His success prompted him to establish in London a centre for treating his rich and famous patrons using ‘electric therapy’. Treatment involved shocking his patients with a pulse of electricity delivered through headgear or electrical thrones.

His practice prospered and flourished and he converted a large house in central London to his **Temple of Health**. For a fee of two guineas, he



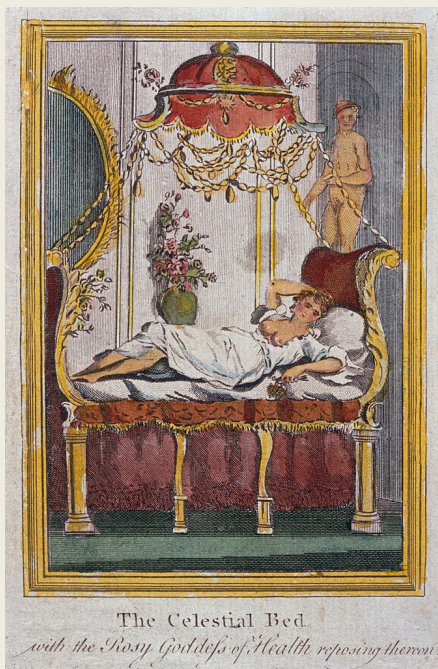
offered a panoply of services in an environment pervaded with perfumed air and sensual music, which included everything from lectures by Graham to watching scantily-clad young women dancing amongst statues.

One such woman was Amy (later Emma) Lyon, who started as a high-class brothel dancer, and who would go on to marry Sir William Hamilton and subsequently become Lord Nelson's lover.

Rather novelly, his entrance hall was stacked with crutches discarded by his successfully treated patients!

The Temple of Health centrepiece, available for £50 a night, was **The Celestial Bed**.

The bed was reputedly twelve feet by nine feet



and the mattress was filled with sweet oat straw pervaded with balm, rose leaves and lavender flowers.

Lovers in the bed would smell fragrance and hear soft music.

A large mirror hung from the ceiling. The headboard was connected to an electrical generator.

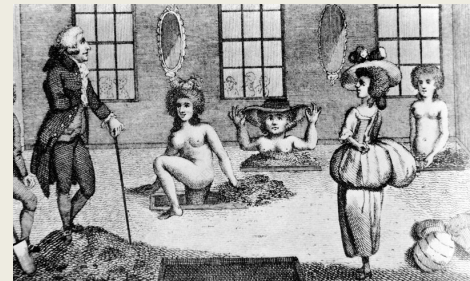
The magnetic field was designed to give 'strength to the nerves' and the headboard was embossed with the inscription;

"Be Fruitful and Multiply and Replenish the Earth".

Unfortunately Graham fell deeply into debt and, in 1784, moved to Edinburgh where he promoted mud baths.

He advocated the technique explaining that all nutrients for life could be absorbed from mud.

By the early 1790s he had been gripped with a religious



enthusiasm and founded the **New Jerusalem Church**.

He signed his letters "Servant of the Lord, Oh Wonderful Love".

His behaviour became increasingly bizarre he stripped off all his clothes and walked along the street giving them to the poor.

He was arrested for the behaviour in 1794 and died soon after.

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