

= Tarrare =

Tarrare (c . 1772 ? 1798) , sometimes spelled Tarare , was a French showman and soldier , noted for his unusual eating habits . Able to eat vast amounts of meat , he was constantly hungry ; his parents could not provide for him , and he was turned out of the family home as a teenager . He travelled France in the company of a band of thieves and prostitutes , before becoming the warm @-@ up act to a travelling charlatan ; he would swallow corks , stones , live animals and a whole basketful of apples . He then took this act to Paris where he worked as a street performer .

At the start of the War of the First Coalition Tarrare joined the French Revolutionary Army . With military rations unable to satisfy his large appetite , he would eat any available food from gutters and refuse heaps but his condition still deteriorated through hunger . Suffering from exhaustion , he was hospitalised and became the subject of a series of medical experiments to test his eating capacity , in which , among other things , he ate a meal intended for 15 people in a single sitting , ate live cats , snakes , lizards and puppies , and swallowed an eel whole without chewing . Despite his unusual diet , he was of normal size and appearance , and showed no signs of mental illness other than what was described as an apathetic temperament .

General Alexandre de Beauharnais decided to put Tarrare 's abilities to use , and he was employed as a courier by the French army , with the intention that he would swallow documents , pass through enemy lines , and recover them from his stool once safely at his destination . Unfortunately for Tarrare , he could not speak German , and on his first mission was captured by Prussian forces , severely beaten and underwent a mock execution before being returned to French lines .

Chastened by this experience , he agreed to submit to any procedure that would cure his appetite , and was treated with laudanum , tobacco pills , wine vinegar and soft @-@ boiled eggs . The procedures failed , and doctors could not keep him on a controlled diet ; he would sneak out of the hospital to scavenge for offal in gutters , rubbish heaps and outside butchers ' shops , and attempted to drink the blood of other patients in the hospital and to eat the corpses in the hospital morgue . After being suspected of eating a toddler he was ejected from the hospital . He reappeared four years later in Versailles suffering from severe tuberculosis , and died shortly afterwards , following a lengthy bout of exudative diarrhoea .

= = Childhood and early life = =

Tarrare was born in rural France , near Lyon , around 1772 . His date of birth is unrecorded and it is not even known if Tarrare was his real name or a nickname .

As a child , Tarrare had a huge appetite and by his teens could eat a quarter of a bullock , weighing as much as Tarrare himself , in a single day . By this time , his parents could not provide for him and had forced him to leave home . For some years after this , he toured the country with a roaming band of thieves and prostitutes , begging and stealing for food , before gaining employment as a warm @-@ up act to a travelling charlatan . Tarrare would draw a crowd by eating corks , stones and live animals , and by swallowing an entire basketful of apples one after the other . He would eat ravenously and was particularly fond of snake meat .

In 1788 , Tarrare moved to Paris to work as a street performer . He appears to have been successful in general , but on one occasion the act went wrong and he suffered severe intestinal obstruction . Members of the crowd carried him to the Hôtel @-@ Dieu hospital , where he was treated with powerful laxatives . He made a full recovery and offered to demonstrate his act by eating his surgeon 's watch and chain ; M. Giraud , the surgeon , was unimpressed by the offer and warned him that if he did so , he would cut Tarrare open to recover the items .

= = Appearance and behaviour = =

Despite his unusual diet , Tarrare was slim and of average height . At the age of 17 , he weighed only 100 pounds (45 kg ; 7 st 2 lb) . He was described as having unusually soft fair hair and an abnormally wide mouth , in which his teeth were heavily stained and on which the lips were almost

invisible . When he had not eaten , his skin would hang so loosely that he could wrap the fold of skin from his abdomen around his waist . When full , his abdomen would distend " like a huge balloon " . The skin of his cheeks was wrinkled and hung loosely , and when stretched out , he could hold twelve eggs or apples in his mouth . His body was hot to the touch and he sweated heavily , constantly suffering from foul body odour ; he was described as stinking " to such a degree that he could not be endured within the distance of twenty paces " . This smell would get noticeably worse after he had eaten , his eyes and cheeks would become bloodshot , a visible vapour would rise from his body , and he would become lethargic , during which time he would belch noisily and his jaws would make swallowing motions . He suffered from chronic diarrhoea , which was said to be " fetid beyond all conception " . Despite his large intake of food , he did not appear either to vomit excessively or to gain weight . Aside from his eating habits , his contemporaries saw no apparent signs of mental illness or unusual behaviour in him , other than an apparently apathetic temperament with " a complete lack of force and ideas " .

The cause of Tarrare 's behaviour is not known . While there are other documented cases of similar behaviour from the period , none of the subjects other than Tarrare were autopsied and there have been no modern documented cases resembling Tarrare . Hyperthyroidism can induce an extreme appetite , rapid weight loss , profuse sweating , heat intolerance , and fine hair . Bondeson (2006) speculates that Tarrare suffered from a damaged amygdala ; it is known that injuries to the amygdala in animals can induce polyphagia .

= = Military service = =

On the outbreak of the War of the First Coalition , Tarrare joined the French Revolutionary Army . Unfortunately for him , military rations were insufficient to satisfy his appetite . He would carry out tasks for other soldiers in return for a share of their rations and scavenge on the dungheap for scraps , but this was not enough to satisfy him . Suffering from extreme exhaustion , he was admitted to the military hospital at Soultz @-@ Haut @-@ Rhin . He was granted quadruple rations but remained hungry ; he would scavenge for garbage in gutters and refuse containers , eat the scraps of food left by other patients , and creep into the apothecary 's room to eat the poultices . Military surgeons could not understand his appetite ; Tarrare was ordered to remain in the military hospital to take part in physiological experiments designed by Dr. Courville (surgeon to the 9th Hussar Regiment) and George Didier , Baron Percy , surgeon @-@ in @-@ chief of the hospital .

Courville and Percy decided to test Tarrare 's capacity for food . A meal had been prepared for 15 labourers near the hospital gates ; although generally hospital staff restrained Tarrare in the presence of food , on this occasion Courville allowed him to reach the table undisturbed . Tarrare ate the entire meal of two large meat pies , plates of grease and salt and four gallons of milk , and then immediately fell asleep ; Courville noted that Tarrare 's belly became taut and inflated like a large balloon . On another occasion Tarrare was presented with a live cat . He tore the cat 's abdomen open with his teeth and drank its blood , and proceeded to eat the entire cat aside from its bones , before vomiting up its fur and skin . Following this , hospital staff offered Tarrare a variety of other animals including snakes , lizards and puppies , all of which were eaten ; he also swallowed an entire eel without chewing , having first crushed its head with his teeth .

= = = Service as a military courier = = =

After several months he spent as an experimental case , military authorities began to press for Tarrare to be returned to active duty . Dr. Courville was keen to continue his investigations into Tarrare 's eating habits and digestive system , and approached General Alexandre de Beauharnais with a suggestion that Tarrare 's unusual abilities and behaviour could be put to military use . A document was placed inside a wooden box which was in turn fed to Tarrare . Two days later , the box was retrieved from his excrement , with the document still in legible condition . Courville proposed to de Beauharnais that Tarrare could thus serve as a military courier , carrying documents securely through enemy territory with no risk of their being found if he were searched .

Tarrare was called on by Beauharnais to demonstrate his abilities before a gathering of the commanders of the Army of the Rhine . Having swallowed the box successfully , Tarrare was given a wheelbarrow filled with 30 pounds (14 kg) of raw bull 's lungs and liver as a reward , which he immediately ate in front of the assembled generals .

Following this successful demonstration , Tarrare became employed officially as a spy of the Army of the Rhine . Although General de Beauharnais was convinced of Tarrare 's physical capacity to carry messages internally , he was concerned about his mental state and reluctant to entrust him initially with significant military documents . Tarrare was ordered as his first assignment to carry a message to a French colonel imprisoned by the Prussians near Neustadt ; he was told that the documents were of great military significance , but in reality de Beauharnais had merely written a note asking the colonel to confirm that the message had been received successfully , and if so to return a reply of any potentially useful information about Prussian troop movements .

Tarrare crossed Prussian lines under cover of darkness , disguised as a German peasant . Unable to speak German , he soon attracted the attention of local residents , who alerted the Prussian authorities , and he was captured outside Landau . A strip search found nothing suspicious on his person , and despite being whipped by Prussian soldiers , he refused to betray his mission . Brought before the local Prussian commander , General Zoegli , he again refused to talk and was imprisoned . After 24 hours of captivity , Tarrare relented and explained the scheme to his captors . He was chained to a latrine , and eventually , 30 hours after being swallowed , the wooden box emerged . Zoegli was furious when the documents , which Tarrare had said contained vital intelligence , transpired only to be de Beauharnais 's dummy message , and Tarrare was taken to a gallows and the noose placed around his neck . (Some sources state that Zoegli never retrieved the box , as Tarrare had the presence of mind to recover and eat the stool containing it before it could be seized by the Prussians .) At the last minute , Zoegli relented , and Tarrare was taken down from the scaffold , given a severe beating , and released near the French lines .

= = Attempted cures = =

Following this incident , Tarrare was desperate to avoid further military service , and returned to the hospital , telling Percy that he would attempt any possible cure for his appetite . Percy treated him with laudanum without success ; further treatments with wine vinegar and tobacco pills were likewise unsuccessful . Following these failures , Percy fed Tarrare large quantities of soft @-@ boiled eggs , but this also failed to suppress his appetite . Efforts to keep him on any kind of controlled diet failed ; he would sneak out of the hospital to scavenge for offal outside butchers ' shops and to fight stray dogs for carrion in gutters , alleys and rubbish heaps . He was also caught several times within the hospital drinking from patients undergoing bloodletting , and attempting to eat the bodies in the hospital mortuary . Other doctors believed that Tarrare was mentally ill and pressed for him to be transferred to a lunatic asylum , but Percy was keen to continue his experiments and Tarrare remained in the military hospital .

After some time , a 14 @-@ month @-@ old child disappeared from the hospital , and Tarrare was immediately suspected . Percy was unable or unwilling to defend him , and the hospital staff chased Tarrare from the hospital , to which he never returned .

= = Death = =

Four years later , in 1798 , a M. Tessier of Versailles hospital contacted Percy to notify him that a patient of theirs wished to see him . It was Tarrare , now bedridden and weak . Tarrare told Percy that he had swallowed a golden fork two years earlier , which he believed was lodged inside him and causing his current weakness . He hoped that Percy could find some way to remove it . Percy , however , recognised him as suffering from advanced tuberculosis . A month later , Tarrare began to suffer from continuous exudative diarrhoea , dying shortly afterwards .

The corpse rotted quickly ; the surgeons of the hospital refused to dissect it . Tessier , however , wanted to find out how Tarrare differed from the norm internally , and was also curious as to whether

the gold fork was actually lodged inside him . At the autopsy , Tarrare 's gullet was found to be abnormally wide and when his jaws were opened , surgeons could see down a broad canal into the stomach . His body was found to be filled with pus , his liver and gallbladder were abnormally large , and his stomach was enormous , covered in ulcers and filling most of his abdominal cavity . The fork was never found .