This rapid sketch of French legislation in regard to lunatics justifies, we hope, what we stated in the beginning respecting the real merits of the law of 1838. We point out as particularly worthy of attention the facilities allowed to patients to have their mental condition examined by the judicial authorities; and the measures taken for the immediate protection of even the least important interests of patients placed in asylums. These two orders of precautions, which were not inspired by any precedent, would suffice to recommend to us the legislation of 1838. Their work is, no doubt, capable of improvement in certain details, as asserted by the Minister of the Interior at the inauguration of the labours of the great Commission instituted in March, 1881. Nevertheless it is desirable that the main feature of the law should be respected, lest the desire of doing better should lead us to do worse.

CLINICAL NOTES AND CASES.

Moral Insanity. Case of Homicidal Mania. Contributed by H. MANNING, B.A.Lond., M.R.C.S., Laverstock House, Salisbury.

In the January number of the Journal we directed the attention of our readers to the question of Moral or Emotional Insanity, and requested contributions illustrative of this alleged mental condition. Articles have appeared on the subject by Dr. Savage and Dr. Gasquet. An interesting case of "Emotional Insanity with Homicidal Violence" has also appeared in the Journal.

The following letter from a patient to Mr. Manning referring to evidence given by him on the trial of Roderick Maclean for attempting the life of the Queen is another valuable contribution to the series. In forwarding it to us, Mr. Manning guarantees its genuineness, and observes—"As evidence of the reality of the insane impulse to murder, the possibility of which both Bench and Bar seem to ignore, this letter appears to me to be of great interest." —[EDS.]

April 25th, 1882.

SIR,—

In your evidence the other day, you said that you had often asked homicidal maniacs whether they were aware of what they had done, and that their answer had been, "Yes, I knew perfectly well

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.28.123.369 Published online by Cambridge University Press

what I was doing, and that I was doing wrong, but I had not the *power to control it.*"

Now, sir, *I am a Homicidal* (and sometimes Suicidal) *Maniac.* Up to the present time I have only *thought* these awful thoughts. I have never put them in *action*, but at the same time it is quite true that I cannot control them (the thoughts). But for God's help (in answer to agonizing prayer) I know not where I might ere now have been. It is awful to contemplate.

To go back. It is now 17 years since I had an attack of nervous debility, brought on by working overtime to help my dear old parents (curse overtime). One night my mother was away from home, and I slept with my father. There was an old Dagger in a cupboard in the Room, and my thoughts went unconsciously and without any will, wish, or control of mine to that, and I felt an almost irresistible impulse to get out of bed and murder my father with the dagger, but I did not. I laid and trembled, and after that fell asleep. From that moment to this I have been a different creature. Had it been an Inspiration like Disraeli's or Flaxman's, it would have led on to fortune, but being what it was I suffered indescribably. For 2 years it lasted. Of course I could not impart my terrible temptations to any one's ear. What would the result have been? I must have been put away. After that I got better and stronger, and the feeling wore off somewhat, but *never entirely.* At 27 I married, being better and stronger, and hoping that the duties of husband, father, neighbour, friend, and citizen, might stimulate my affections and overcome the demon of destructiveness within me. I may say it did, a great deal, and I loved the Wife and Children I possessed. Last year I had another attack of Nervous Debility, and although now I am somewhat better, yet what I suffered last Winter no tongue can tell. I have *done no act*, but I have *thought endless thoughts*, such and so many that I felt I was mad.

Now, notice. For 18 years I have performed all the duties of life *with credit*, and I have obtained the confidence and esteem of everyone, almost, with whom I have come in contact. I *love* religious services and reading good books, and good company, and no one can accuse me of unkindness or want of sympathy that I know of; yet all these years I have been on the verge of a precipice, with the perpetual fear of becoming either a *felon* or a *maniac.* But for this mania I should be the happiest of men. If you were to see my Bible you would find that all such passages as "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples *if ye have love one towards another*," are underlined. Oh that I could think them. You know the text that says, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." What do I continually think? *I am continually "devising evil against my Neighbour."* When I am out in the open air, and have enjoyed communion with God in earnest prayer to Him, it seems gone, but the moment I step indoors, I see a Knife, and then—Oh, my God, why is it so? I have

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.28.123.369 Published online by Cambridge University Press

never carried a pocket Knife for months. I did for a long time, but for months have not dared to do so for the sake of others.

I do not feel that I deserve to be called a Hypocrite, for paradoxical as it may seem, I have never had but ONE *ambition, which was to leave the world better than I found it, to benefit my fellow men, and to serve God faithfully.* At the same time since that unhappy night I slept with my father, I am also filled with what I conceive a *demon of pure destructiveness.* It shows itself as follows:—

1. When in a Town I dare not carry a Stick, or I should smash some of the large Windows. I feel sometimes I must do so with my fist.

2. When walking the street I feel I must dash my fist in someone's face, or do some other outlandish act of foolishness, and the same when travelling in a Railway Carriage.

3. When at a Railway Station I feel an impulse to push someone or throw myself under a Carriage.

4. Indoors I suffer indescribably. Every Meal time, whenever knives are on the Table, oh! dear, will it never cease? Those I love best are nearest being my victims. I sometimes feel I must murder the lot. *If you are a religious man pity* and *pray* for me.

5. Go where I will, be where I may, in Church, Chapel, Street, House, or public Meeting of any sort, the same ideas pursue me. *I hear* NO *voices.* It seems an IMPULSE, as in other people there is an impulse to go whoring, &c., when no object is present to give rise to the thought. But I argue this way. Sins of the flesh, avarice, ambition, &c., are *natural,* my mania is *un*natural; and whatever is unnatural must be wrong. Still it is all of no use. However I will hope, strive, pray, and endeavour by God's help not to fall. I am certainly in Hell. Such thoughts form a Hell to anyone who has just sense enough to know they are wrong.

Now for my object in writing to you.

As I have said I hope never to commit any act. I strive, I pray, I hope the cursed thoughts will leave me, *but if at any time I should fall, then I shall refer to you to produce this Letter.*

Another reason is that *unburdening myself will give me relief.* In all other temptations a man can consult his fellow man. Can I? No. *I have had to carry this burden all these years,* and I am naturally open, truthful, and confiding. Of course I should be sorry for Wife and Children ever to know me. If I go to my grave "*in peace*" they will never know anything of this, and although I have written it hoping you will preserve and file it, I trust never to have to call for it to *expose either those I love or myself.*

I trust to your honour, although I dare not sign my name. If ever I get past control I shall take train to your place, and you will know what to do with me. *Your address and the date of this Letter will be in my pocket book for future reference, but in cypher.*

I am passing Thetford, so I shall get off, post this there, take the next train and be in another part of England before you get this.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.28.123.369 Published online by Cambridge University Press

All my ingenuity seems to centre round destructiveness. I can see at all times how, with edged tools, stones, sticks, or anything else, it would be *easy* to *destroy life.*

However nil desperandum.

I will hope on, but in the meantime I remain,

Yours in tears,

SUFFERER.

P.S. I consider that Palisy the Potter, Livingstone, Geo. Stevenson, Edison, the Electrician, John Howard the Philanthropist, F. Nightingale, and Lord Shaftesbury, are all examples of Maniacs, and Good Templars, &c., are also.

In these cases their mania is or was (in each case) *beneficial to humanity*, but *it was* a *mania* because it was a *predominant idea* which ridiculed opposition, and enmity could not overcome. MINE IS THE OPPOSITE. *Who is responsible? Am I? I trow not.* Talk about Self Control, I have more discipline in Self Control in a week than some of my fellow Creatures have in a lifetime, and at times I tremble on the brink with one foot nearly over.

Do you know *the very writing of this has made me feel better.* I went to a religious meeting a short time ago where I felt I must do some foolish thing to ruin myself. When returning home bemoaning my hard fate, I heard no voice, but these words came into my mind, "*Thou shalt be delivered, and shalt yet live to praise and glorify my name.*" How grateful I was for the comfort, but I was beginning to despair of being delivered when I read your Evidence (the paragraph I have quoted at the beginning *I shall always keep by me*), and knew the latter to be *so exactly true* that I felt I must write to you, and I believe and hope that my emancipation will begin from the moment I post this if it has not begun already. The feeling that someone shares my terrible secret with me (*although he has no power over me to betray me*) is already a relief, and will help me I am sure.

My apology for this long epistle is the gravity of the subject matter, and if I get any better I will write you again one day to say so. If otherwise—but I will not contemplate that just now.

A *parson* would consider this Letter a hoax, but you will know better. It bears its genuineness on the face of it. None but a *homicidal Maniac could compose it, or a Doctor like yourself, always with such people, understand it.*

The evidence of Dr. —— was off-hand and unprecise compared with yours.

Allow a Maniac to compliment you on the accuracy of your description of a Hom. Maniac.

The only point where I differ from you is, that I sometimes think it my duty to *sacrifice* my *favourite child as Abraham* was tempted to do, but then he didn't do it, that's one Consolation.

I am not afraid of this Letter becoming public, although the very perusal of it would send some weak minds clean off.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.28.123.369 Published online by Cambridge University Press