Medico-Legal Notes.

REX *v.* ROBERT WILLIAMS.

THIS case was tried at the Central Criminal Court on January 9, before Mr. Justice Humphreys.

The accused, a carpenter, æt. 28, was charged with the murder of Julia Mangan, who was found in Hyde Park on October 23, 1928, with a wound in her throat. He had also attempted to kill himself. He had been tried at the preceding sessions, when the jury had disagreed. The defence, on both occasions, was that the act had been committed in a state of epileptic automatism.

The accused man's story was that while talking to the girl noises came into his head; it seemed "as if steam was coming out of the sides of his head, and as if a red-hot iron was being forced in behind his eyes." He thought that he saw Lon Chaney (a film actor, whose presentment on the screen would appear to be terrifying) making faces at him. He did not remember using the razor with which the crime was alleged to have been committed. The next thing he remembered was a nurse washing his feet at the hospital. There was, however, evidence that he had said to a constable, at the hospital, "I did it; she was teasing."

Evidence having been given of the existence of a number of cases of insanity in the family of the accused, medical witnesses were called. Dr. J. C. Woods stated that he had examined Williams on two occasions, and had formed the opinion that he was suffering from an epileptic attack at the time of the crime; there were many epileptics who were subject to states of automatism, during which they were completely irresponsible. The "vision" of Lon Chaney might have been a reproduction of something the accused had actually witnessed, or it might have been just a figment of the mind. Dr. W. R. K. Watson, medical officer of Brixton Prison, stated that he had seen no signs of epilepsy or insanity in Williams; he saw no reason to think that Williams did not know the nature and quality of his act, but he would not express a definite opinion, in view of the lapse of time between the date of the crime and his own examination.

No evidence is reported as to any previous epileptic manifestations in Williams; this is a very important point.

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The judge, in his summing-up, instructed the jury that if Williams's statement at the hospital indicated that he knew he had cut his own throat, or that of the woman, it was quite inconsistent with epileptic automatism. He could see nothing in the alleged vision of Lon Chaney that would indicate epilepsy. Had the accused seen a terrifying film it was not remarkable that he should recall the experience during a moment of emotional stress.

The jury found Williams guilty, and he was sentenced to death. The judge told the jury, after the sentence, that the Home Secretary possessed power to order the fullest investigation, and that this power would, no doubt, be exercised. Since then the death sentence has been commuted.

An Interesting Case of Alleged Dual Personality.

This somewhat unusual defence was set up in a case tried at the Oxford police court on February 19.

The accused, whom we will refer to as " M." (it seems only fair, in view of the ultimate disposal of the case, to suppress the name), is a school-boy, æt. 17, the son of a clergyman. He was accused of stealing a gold cigarette case, valued at eleven guineas, from the counter of a jeweller's shop. He asked to see some gold cigarette cases, and expressed himself as not satisfied with those which were shown him. The assistant went away to fetch some more cases, and on returning found that M. had left the shop, and that one case was missing. A detective sergeant saw M. in another jeweller's shop, and questioned him about the purloined case. M. said that he had bought it some months before. When told that he would be taken to the police station, M. ran away, was pursued and caught, and then confessed to the theft. Among his possessions at his school there was found a bag full of life-preservers, knuckle-dusters, and bowie knives ; these had been bought by him, and there was no allegation that they had been stolen.

The solicitor who appeared for the defence said that M. was subject to obsessions. He had a craze for collecting Chinese images, and tried to make the acquaintance of Chinamen. An obsession for knives and pistols occurred later. The headmaster of the school gave M. a good character for honesty, and said that, apart from the obsessions, he was quite a satisfactory lad.

Dr. Harrison Hall stated that he had examined M., and described him as suffering from dual personality. He would be perfectly normal for a time, and then would become enthralled with the idea that he was someone else.

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