There is however another explanation of the condition which the history very strongly suggests.

The incontinence of urine in youth and even in early manhood, the recurrent attacks of giddiness during his whole life, the desperate but meaningless violence, the sudden leap from the bridge, and the total oblivion of all that had occurred during the attacks undoubtedly point to epilepsy as the explanation of the case.

The fierce and fatal violence occurring suddenly on awaking recalls the case of murder by a somnambulist * and, like it, certainly suggests an epileptic seizure occurring during sleep.

It is the fashion to call every seizure which we do not understand "epileptic," and we are apt to think that we know more about a seizure when we give it a Greek name, but the term does not seem misapplied in this case.

If the attack was really epileptic, it is very interesting to find that the alcoholic epileptic convulsion can be replaced by an explosion of violence, just as ordinary epilepsy occasionally takes the form of mental excitement instead of physical convulsion.

Note on a Case of Impulsive Insanity. By Richard Greene, L.R.C.P., Medical Superintendent, County Asylum, Northampton.

At the Northampton Winter Assizes, T.L., a clerk, was tried for a homicidal attack on his mother. Shortly before the trial, but several months after the attack, I was asked by the solicitor for the defence to examine the prisoner, with a view to forming an opinion as to his probable mental state at the time of the assault, a difficult, if not impossible, task to have assigned to me.

The prisoner was a somewhat sparely formed youth of 19 years of age; his features regular, and expression not unpleasing; his face pale, and his temperament bordering on the nervous. He seemed fairly well educated for his station, and answered all my questions willingly, and with but little if any reserve. As far as I could judge, he made no attempt to deceive me in anything, and altogether it would be hardly possible to imagine anyone in manner, appearance, or

* "Journal of Mental Science," October, 1878.

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behaviour further removed from our conceptions of a criminal than he was.

He told me that for a year or more he had suffered from almost constant headache, and he referred the pain to the parts corresponding to the longitudinal fissure. His memory was good. He talked about his school days, about his work in the office, about his companions, his pursuits, his family, and finally about the horrid deed for which he was in a few days to be placed at the bar. When talking about the assault he was as unmoved and apparently as indifferent as when he spoke of his invoices and his ledgers. He said he tried his utmost to resist the impulse, but found it uncontrollable. After the act, "something told him he had done wrong, and he felt as though his brain were on fire."

This was all that I made out for myself—all that I could have stated in a witness-box: probably more than I should have been allowed to state; and when asked the question, "In what state did you find the prisoner?" I was bound to answer that I detected no conclusive evidence of insanity, and it was ruled that I could not state my opinion of the prisoner's mental condition at the time of the assault.

I stayed in Court throughout the whole of the trial; I made notes of the evidence, and through the kindness of the prisoner's solicitor I was allowed to read not only the depositions, but also private letters bearing on the prisoner's previous history. I am thus able to lay before the readers of the "Journal of Mental Science" an account of a case of a somewhat rare form of insanity—rare at least as compared with the other forms which are met with within the walls of our county asylums. I may premise my account by saying that T.L.'s relatives bear a highly respectable name; no stain of crime or insanity had hitherto darkened the annals of the family, and the young man himself was universally described as a most affectionate son and steady in his habits. The first paper I shall refer to is a letter written by the head of the school which T.L. attended when a boy of twelve. He writes that periodical fits of moroseness occurred, and during these times it was impossible to elicit answers to questions put to him. Sometimes his conversation was rambling, incoherent and vague, and he would break in with a remark not having the least bearing on the subject matter. At other times he was led away by an exuberance of spirits far from natural. He would lay his hand on his teacher's arm, look fixedly in his face, administer a severe pinch or kick, then laugh and run away. Shortly he would return and express sorrow for what he had done. Here is evidently described the first glimmering of that terrible disease which ultimately led the poor youth to the committing of an awful act, placing him at the bar on a grave charge which would have been a capital one but for the almost miraculous recovery of his victim. After leaving school he spent some time in a lawyer's office. Sub-

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sequently he took the post of clerk in a merchant's office, and for some years the sypmtoms of a disordered mind seem to have been in abeyance. Beyond a certain amount of reserve, unusual in anyone of his age, nothing seems to have been remarked about his mental state until we come to March, 1882. On the 24th of that month, he was sent to the railway station with a parcel which he was to despatch to Birmingham. Without the slightest preparation he went to Liverpool, where he stayed a fortnight. He said nothing about his intended journey to anyone, and although the day was a bitterly cold one, he left his great-coat in the office. This journey seems to have been made in obedience to some sudden unaccountable impulse, and on returning he could give no explanation of it. There was not the faintest suspicion that he had been behaving improperly either in Northampton previous to his journey or in Liverpool during his stay there. This freak caused his friends much anxiety, and he seems to have had some remorse for the grief he caused his mother. He was more than usually kind and attentive to her afterwards. He went back to his office work, which he performed satisfactorily and punctually; but soon further symptoms of insanity showed themselves. One of his fellow-clerks stated that he often noticed him staring vacantly out of the window. At other times he seemed absorbed in contemplation; he would knit his brows and grind his teeth, or remain for hours without speaking. All these symptoms were more pronounced a few days before the assault, and the clerk remarked to a friend that "something ought to be done about Thomas." But, of course, nothing was done, and it so happened that on the fatal day he was brighter and more cheerful than he had been for some time. In the morning, on the 4th October, he ordered a present for his mother, took his meals as usual, and in the evening went to a young men's meeting connected with the church he attended, returning home about nine o'clock; had supper, and read a religious book, entitled the "Pathway to Heaven." He then said good-night; kissed his mother, and went off to bed. Shortly afterwards his mother went to her room. He lay down in bed, but could not sleep. The awful impulse had seized him. In vain he tried to shake it off. He got out of bed, went down to the coal-cellar, laid hold of the coal-pick, which, although in the dark, he found at once without search or fumbling, and returned upstairs with it to his mother's room. The door creaked as he pushed it open, and he hoped the noise would awake her; but alas! there was no such result, and in an instant the pick was buried in the sleeping woman's neck. A second and a third blow followed: one with the sharp end of the hammer and one with the blunt end. It was then he felt as though his brain were on fire. He left the house, wandering purposelessly and aimlessly in the neighbourhood of Kettering. He slept either in the fields or in barns, and for food he had one or two meals from cottagers, but fed for the most part on wild fruit for three days, and

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then, having come to himself, as he expressed it, walked back to Northampton to his mother's house. He asked if she were dead, and on being told she was not, said he was glad to hear it, and offered to give himself up to the police. In the morning he was taken into custody.

Such is an epitome of the evidence given in Court, and it is amply sufficient to convince any medical man, and almost any layman, that the prisoner was unquestionably insane. He was ably defended, and his counsel, Mr. Attenborough, in a forcible and eloquent speech laid before the jury the grounds on which he raised the plea of insanity. He pointed out that there was absolutely no motive for the act; no preparation for it; no concealment of the weapon; no attempt to escape the consequences; but an apparent indifference as to what became of him.

The Judge, in addressing the jury, said that to acquit the prisoner on the ground of insanity they must not only be satisfied that he was insane, but that in consequence of his insanity *he did not know the act he was doing was wrong.*

The jury, without leaving the box, returned a verdict of not guilty on the ground of insanity, and the Judge ordered the prisoner to be detained during her Majesty's pleasure.

In reviewing this case, one cannot help being once more struck with the strange state of the law relating to insanity. It had an odd sound in medical ears to hear a judge lay it down *that the fact of insanity was not sufficient to sustain the plea of insanity.* In civil courts a very slight trace of mental disease may be enough to nullify a contract or set aside a will, but when the life or liberty of a fellow creature is concerned, insanity of any degree is inadequate to obtain acquittal, and it needs the absence of knowledge of right and wrong to sustain the plea. So at least it seems. By the French code it is enough to show that the crime is a product of insanity. "There is no crime nor offence," says Article 64 of the French Penal Code, "where the accused was in a state of madness at the time of the action." To alienist physicians this will almost justify the prediction of a living author that Napoleon will be remembered as a law-giver long after he is forgotten as a general. How differently will the clumsily expressed opinions of the English Judges of 1843, be remembered!

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