Rex *v.* Laurence Oliver Mollor.

Reports of this interesting case have reached us from Western Australia. For the information contained in this summary we are indebted to Dr. Ethel T. Stoneman, formerly State Psychologist, on whose work in connection with the State Psychological Clinic (the operation of which is in abeyance) we have commented in previous issues of the *Journal of Mental Science*.

The case was tried at Perth, W.A., on May 1 and following days, 1934, before the Chief Justice, Sir John Northmore. The accused man was charged with the murder of his son Albert Daniel Mollor, æt. about 10 years, at Fremantle.' The accused is a widower, æt. 44, a ship's baker. He had one child, the victim of the tragedy, of whom he seems to have been exceedingly fond. He and the boy had been living in a hotel kept by a widow named Harper. The accused and Mrs. Harper had been engaged to be married, but there were frequent quarrels and the engagement had been broken off. On the afternoon of April 4, 1934, there appears to have been a violent quarrel. Mrs. Harper pointed a pistol at Mollor, and told him to " clear out ". He and the boy then left the hotel. During the night, screams, described as those of a woman or a child, were heard. Next morning the dead body of the boy was discovered in a motor-car in a garage attached to the hotel, with a knife driven through his chest. Mollor was found on the beach, apparently in a confused condition. When arrested for the murder he made a statement, in which he said, " I must have done it ".

There were certain points in the case which suggested that the crime might have been the work of some other person. Mollor was known to have been in the possession of a wallet containing £8. This and other articles of personal property were missing when he was arrested, and their absence does not appear to have been explained. But with this aspect of the case we are not concerned ; our interest is in the evidence which was called as regards Mollor's mental state.

The main part of this evidence was provided by Dr. Stoneman, who had examined Mollor on several occasions during the time that he was awaiting trial. She found him to be of very superior intelligence, with an I.Q. of 122. There had been domestic unsettlement during his youth. His parents were of different religions, and he had been brought up by his father. Later he returned to his mother, but never felt sure of his welcome from her. As a result of this he was always quick to perceive personal slights. He stated that after leaving the hotel on the evening of April 4 a condition of " blackness came over him ". Out of this he heard the boy crying to him for help. This cry appeared to be coming from a distance of about 100 yards. He did not go to the boy's assistance, as he was afraid of finding him " mangled ". His next recollection was finding himself on the beach on April 5. He did not know what had taken place, and he tried to explain matters to himself. (Dr.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.81.332.186 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Stoneman regarded the confession, previously mentioned, as being an attempt at rationalization.)

Having regard to the man's intellectual ability the possibility of malingering had to be considered carefully. Dr. Stoneman ruled out this possibility. There were no inconsistencies in his story, even when fatigue was in evidence. His memory, in other respects, was excellent. He did not remember what was of advantage to himself and forget what might incriminate him; on the contrary he stressed details which made it certain that he was in the vicinity when the boy was killed. He exhibited no change of manner or tone when probing questions were put. There was marked evidence of earnest co-operation in the examination. He made no attempt to incriminate anyone else. He consistently denied any previous attacks of amnesia. He made no complaint of bad physical health. On a variety of mental tests his reactions were normal, and were not those usually exhibited by subjects who have been guilty of offences against the person. (This last is a novel point which we do not remember as having been raised in any similar case.)

Having eliminated the possibility of an epileptic attack, Dr. Stoneman concluded that Mollor was suffering from reactive depression. She considered that this condition had existed for at least a year. The emotional disturbance with Mrs. Harper on April 4 had produced a state of dissociation in Mollor, who was already predisposed thereto.

The jury found a verdict of " not guilty on the grounds of insanity ". An order was made for Mollor's detention during His Majesty's pleasure.

M. HAMBLIN SMITH.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.81.332.186 Published online by Cambridge University Press