Medico-Legal Notes.

REX *v.* WALSH AND ALEXANDER.

Two sisters, Catherine Walsh, æt. 39, and Evelyn Alexander, æt. 35, were charged with the murder of their brother, George Sylvester Walsh, æt. 30, by administering to him gas and tablets on June 11, 1935, at Bamber Bridge, Lancashire. The trial took place at Manchester Assizes on July 17, before Mr. Justice Greaves-Lord.

The murdered man was an imbecile. He had lived with the sisters, one of whom had to watch him constantly. He never left the house, but his existence was suspected by some of the neighbours, one of whom was alleged to have threatened to have him removed. Next morning the deceased was found on his bed with a rug over his face, and with a tube leading from a gas tap to his mouth. When the police arrived, Walsh said, " I did it with these ", producing a bottle of tablets. " I wanted to get him past human aid, and I did not want a doctor. We gassed him." Charged with murder, she said, " Not with malice aforethought. Not to rid myself of a burden, but because I could go on no further. I had lived for him and I loved him ". Alexander said, " We did it for love of my brother. We promised mother we would do it ". When charged, she said, " The thing we have done has not only been a duty, but a promise to a dying mother. It was loving devotion for a hapless and helpless being ".

A third sister, Mary Hibbert, giving evidence, said that another brother had been an inmate of a mental hospital, and a third brother had died of fits in childhood. A grandmother committed suicide, and Catherine Walsh, one of the accused, attempted suicide some seven years ago. The other accused woman, Evelyn Alexander, blamed herself for the deceased man's mental condition, she having allowed him to fall when a child.

Dr. Shannon, Medical Officer of Manchester Prison, had seen both the accused soon after the occurrence at issue, and came to the conclusion that they were not of sound mind.

The jury returned a verdict of " Guilty but Insane " in both cases. The usual order for detention was made.

The horror of having a relative " put away " (as the phrase goes) is very strong, and may be quite enough to bring a mentally unstable person within the second part of the McNaghton criterion (not knowing that a particular act is wrong).

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