Homicidal mania : a biography, with physiological and medico-legal comments / by D. Yellowlees, M.D.

With D. Yellowlees' Compliments

HOMICIDAL MANIA:

A BIOGRAPHY;

WITH

PHYSIOLOGICAL AND MEDICO-LEGAL COMMENTS.

BY

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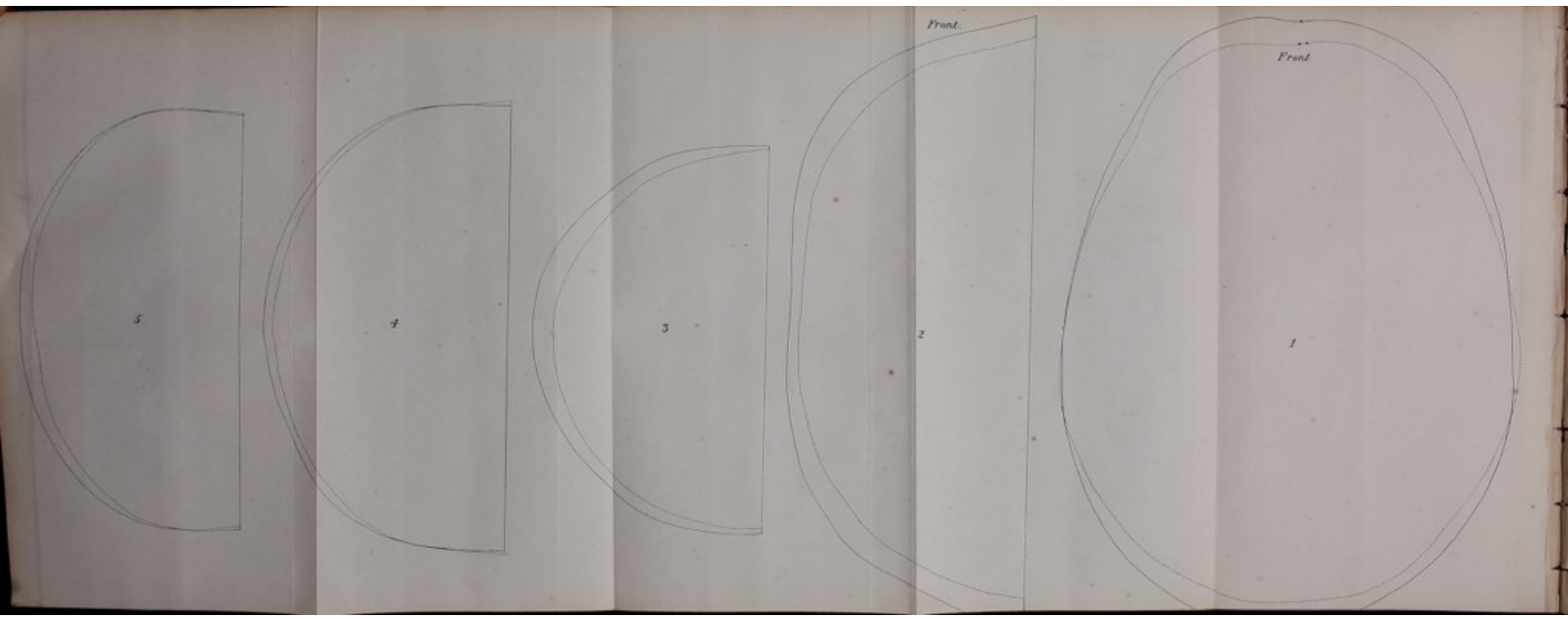
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EXPLANATION OF THE OUTLINES.

1. Horizontal section of both casts at the level of the eyebrows and occipital spine. Circumference,—old cast, 23 in.; new, 22 in.

2. Vertical section of both casts in the line of the longitudinal arch, from the root of the nose to the occipital spine: corresponding diameter,—old cast, 8·25 in.; new, 7·62.

3. Transverse vertical section at the junction of the anterior and middle thirds of the longitudinal arch: corresponding diameter,—old cast, 5·30 in.; new, 5·15.

4. Transverse vertical section at middle of longitudinal arch: corresponding diameter,—old cast, 6·10 in.; new, 6·20.

5. Transverse vertical section at the junction of the middle and posterior thirds of the longitudinal arch: corresponding diameter,—old cast, 5·70 in.; new, 5·60.

HOMICIDAL MANIA.

I HOPE the subject of my paper, and the biographical sketch with which it is illustrated, will justify me in bringing them before the Society without apology or preface. I shall, therefore, offer none, but proceed at once to give a brief sketch of the most interesting patient I have ever known.

William Smith was for more than twenty years the most remarkable and most dangerous inmate of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum: the story of his life is worth telling for its own sake; but yet more so for its physiological interest, and for its bearings on some very important and much debated questions in legal medicine.

His long seclusion from the outer world has made it more difficult to ascertain his history than might have been expected from the notoriety he at one time enjoyed. It is fortunate, however, for his would-be biographer that many of Smith's own publications—for, as we shall presently see, he was an extensive and enterprising publisher—contain fragments of his personal history, and a very complete record of the annoyances and persecutions, as he deemed them, which he endured for many years, and which culminated in what he said was the greatest wrong of all, his confinement as a dangerous lunatic in the asylum at Morningside.

Smith was the son of a joiner in Bristo Port, Edinburgh, and was born about the end of last century. He followed his father's occupation, served his apprenticeship in his father's workshop, and in course of time assisted him in carrying on the business.

For some reason or other, young Smith was led to turn his attention to a special department of the trade, and erelong his ingenuity and skill as a workman procured for him some local reputation as a printers' joiner.

From working among printing presses, type cases, and printing frames, Smith conceived the bold idea of becoming a printer himself, and not a printer alone, but author, printer, and publisher too. He had already attempted authorship, and had produced some

doggerel rhymes on various subjects, but you may imagine the difficulties with which he had to contend in carrying out his plan; yet in spite of the delay in making his printing press, in spite of his ignorance of the art of printing, in spite of the expense of types and paper in those days, in spite of his inexperience as an author, and his obscurity as a publisher, the young joiner struggled on unwearied and undaunted; his friend Austin, a wood-engraver, furnished him with illustrations, and at length, about the year 1820—twelve years before the first number of Chambers's Journal—there issued from the humble press at No. 3 Bristo Port, his first illustrated sheet, price one halfpenny—the earliest herald of that wonderful, illustrated cheap literature which educates and blesses our land to-day.

The attractions of literature appear to have increased in the eyes of the young author, and to have induced him to choose a more intellectual occupation, and one which would leave him greater leisure to devote to his literary labours; for we find him after a few years forsaking his bench and commencing a school in the Cross-causeway; he taught "the three R's" and book-keeping, and was for about seven years a laborious and successful teacher. He gave much attention to music also, frequently officiated as precentor in Greyfriars' Church, and published a collection of psalm tunes, with instructions in the theory and practice of psalmody.

During all these years, as well as subsequently, he continued to publish, at short intervals, songs, stories, biographies, humorous extracts from books, notices of eminent men, witty dialogues, and poetry in all kinds of measures, and on all kinds of subjects—forming a large and very miscellaneous collection. Among the most notable of his publications about this period (1829) was "The Life and Death of Daft Jamie" Wilson, the poor imbecile who was the last of Burke's victims, and whose sudden disappearance and subsequent recognition constituted important evidence against the murderer; the sale of this pamphlet was so great and rapid as to require the subsequent publication of a second edition. Smith was much elated by his success as an author, and in one of his brochures it is celebrated in these doggerel lines—

> "There's Willie Smith the carpenter
> Become at last a publisher;
> You'll meet his works in rhyme and prose,
> Throughout this land o' cakes and brose."

But with the success there came also its invariable alloy; for no sooner did Willie begin to realize his hopes of becoming a publisher, than he began to experience the annoyances, the malevolence, and the persecution which followed him, as he believed, throughout the rest of his life.

His grievances seem to have begun in the nickname of "Whisker Willie," given him very likely by his own scholars, on account of the unusual quantity of hair he wore on the face. He was much

annoyed when this name was shouted after him on the street; and at length summoned before the Police Court a person who had thus provoked him. The magistrate dismissed the case as frivolous, or at least did not decide as Willie had expected, which of course confirmed his belief that he was persecuted, and was the occasion of the first public manifestation of his insanity; for soon afterwards, while the magistrate was officiating as an elder on a sacramental occasion in Greyfriars' Church, Smith stood up in the midst of the congregation and assailed him with reproach and reproof for his partiality, hypocrisy, and unjust judgment.

In consequence of this conduct, a warrant was issued for his apprehension, and he was confined at first in the police cells, and then for ten days in the old "Lock-up" as it was called, which is frequently and emphatically stigmatized in his writings as very remarkable for its filthiness, and for the number and size of the parasites which infested it: while here his insanity was recognised, and he was then sent to the West-Kirk Bedlam. There, notwithstanding all the care of his attendants, he obtained and kept secreted about his person a sharp dagger, made by grinding a triangular file to a point, with which, to quote the words of my informant, who visited him while in the Bedlam, "he was going to revenge himself, but on nobody in particular."

From the Bedlam he was sent to one of the private asylums at Musselburgh. Here he was generally on the whole pretty quiet and contented, never attempted any revengeful act, but made himself agreeable and useful, in order to obtain his discharge. The exact period of his residence at Musselburgh I cannot ascertain, but it was probably very short, and he seems to have returned to Edinburgh apparently quite well, for about the close of 1831 we find him opening a shop as a bookseller and publisher, at No. 111 Nicolson Street, and naming it, after one of his periodical publications, "The Bawbee Bagpipe Office."

This "Bawbee Bagpipe" was published early in 1832, and is a fair specimen of his serial publications in matter, style, and typography. I am glad to be able, through the kindness of Mr Maidment, Advocate, Mr Deuchar of Morningside House, and Mr T. G. Stevenson, antiquarian bookseller, to show it to the Society, along with a large collection of his other writings. "The Edinbury Gleaner," "The Advocate," "The Paper Trumpet," were the titles of similar periodicals issued by him on different occasions.

Smith's old notoriety and old nickname still clung to him however, and the latter was now aggravated into "Daft Whisker Willie," in consequence of his residence in the asylum. His former ideas as to malevolence and persecution returned in full force; indeed, they seem never to have been entirely absent, but only in abeyance for a time, and he was constantly summoning persons to the Police Court for trivial injuries or imaginary wrongs.

These cases were either put aside as frivolous or decided against

the complainant; this of course confirmed or aggravated his notions as to the persecution he endured, and made him yet more impatient of the nicknames or mischief which the children of the district freely indulged in towards him.

These mischievous pranks were carried farthest in 1833, and were the occasion of his ninth appearance at the Police Court, and of other important events in his history. This grievance and its result can be best described in his own words, as contained in a long letter to the Lord Advocate, in which he bitterly complains of the injustice he received at the hands of the authorities.

"Case 9th.—Attempting to set the complainer's shop on fire, by putting gunpowder and a lighted match in at one of the bolt holes of the window. Offender caught in the act. Dismissed, not proven. Shame! sufficient proof when caught. Had the shop gone on fire, and my goods or the shop been insured, the insurance people would have handled the case and not allowed the defender to get off so easily; to a certainty he would have been banished; or if I could not have given a proper account of it going on fire, I would have been banished, or kept in jail for months.

"As I knew perfectly well that Tait would not give me justice in this case, no more than in my former ones, I wrote my mind on a large sheet of paper, and as soon as the offender was acquitted, I said loudly, in the hearing of all that were in the Court, My Lord, I knew perfectly well that you would not give me justice in this case no more than in my former ones. I have written my mind on this large sheet of paper, and intend to shut up my shop as soon as I go home, and paste the said grievance on the front of my shop, and I shall let you hear what it is:—

"SHUT

"In consequence of the injustice of the Police Court. The tenant of this shop has not only been grossly insulted by blackguards daily but hourly, by bawling in at his door and window most abusive language, blowing smoke out of a horn full of lighted tow into my shop, which caused me to imagine my shop was on fire. The blackguards broke five of the panes, each of which cost me two shillings and ninepence; the blackguards stole about £2 worth of my goods, and attempted to set my shop on fire by putting gunpowder and a lighted match in at one of the bolt holes of the window. Was I, the complainer, not in the right, and could prove it, or durst I have read my grievances in the Court or pasted them on the front of my shop to be read publicly."—*Police Retort*, pp. 25, 26.

This notice remained on his shop for about a month. At first Willie's irritation was greatly increased by the blackguard boys continually defacing it; and in consequence of this he placed it, I am told, on a board inside the window, with an intimation that he was himself stationed behind the board with a loaded gun, and would shoot the first person who tried to touch it. He and his parents lived after this in the back-premises, and the shop was never opened again.

In spite of these annoyances and interruptions, Willie continued to work zealously at his favourite avocation, and early in 1834, the year after the closing of the shop, he published a weekly periodical in six numbers, entitled "The Advocate," which was intended especially to expose his own grievances, and, as he tells us in an

appendix, "to let the public know that there is no justice got at law."

This "Appendix to the Advocate" was published in the same year, and contains some racy abuse of neighbours who had displeased him, copies of handbills about his grievances, and letters to the Lord Provost demanding redress.

In 1836, or thereabouts, he removed from Nicolson Street to Smith's Court, Crosscauseway, and worked chiefly as a joiner and toy-wright.

Change of residence did little to mitigate his annoyances; he was still an occasional complainant at the Court, but with as little justice as formerly, and the idea of personally exacting the vengeance which the law denied him as justice, became uppermost in his mind; he began to collect swords, firearms, and similar weapons in his house, apparently without any definite object or idea, except the vague one of revenge. He said to my informant "that if he could just get blood shed he would be satisfied, but that he must kill somebody."

Once more, and for the last time, we find him a complainant at the Sheriff-Court in 1839; but this case also was dismissed, and he now ceased to seek or expect justice at the hands of the authorities. His indignation settled itself chiefly on Sheriff Tait, whom he blamed above all others for the oppression and injustice to which he was subjected. My informant, who was for many years Smith's intimate friend, assures me that Willie frequently watched Sheriff Tait when passing along the street from his own house to the Court Room, and carried files, sharpened into daggers, in his pocket, in order to kill him.

The Sheriff was far from being the only object of his hatred and revenge; he detested and vowed vengeance upon all in authority, but especially upon the police force, the members of which he regarded as his bitterest enemies. Yet he seemed fully aware—and this secret consciousness of their condition is often seen in the insane—that something in his own behaviour did or might require their interference, for he began to fortify his house as if to resist their entrance. He had a sliding panel in the door, by which he could see or speak to any one without opening it, and a contrivance for barricading it, so that it could not be forced open; he had also a long spear with which to defend the entrance, and firearms which were always kept loaded.

When his friends asked the meaning of all these preparations, he told them it was for fear of his enemies, but especially the police.

In his last publication, dated 1840, and entitled "The Police Retort," his grievances are fully detailed in a letter to the Lord Advocate, and the spirit of revenge which now possessed him is very plainly seen. Two or three sentences from it will illustrate this:—

"He or she that breaks a man's or a woman's character justly deserves to suffer a cruel death."....." If I do not get justice in this said case, serious will the consequence be; and I humbly hope my fellow-citizens will assist me in battle, if one takes place, and raise a riot, as I have broken the ice for it, and have justice given them in future at Court."....." When I was apprehended before, I made no resistance in the smallest, but went as a lamb to the slaughter; but let them try to apprehend me now, and, if it is in my power, before they make me prisoner, I will make my entry swim with blood."

It was obvious to the authorities that such a character could no longer be allowed to go at large; but his apprehension was evidently to be a difficult matter, and only to be accomplished by stratagem. Accordingly, a sheriff-officer went to the house in disguise, pretending that he wished to buy a canary, of which bird Willie had now become a great breeder; but apparently his design was suspected, for, although Smith did not know him, he kept an axe in his hand during the visit, and told the stranger to come no nearer him than a certain mark on the table, or he would strike with the axe. The officer, thinking that Willie would forget, edged a little nearer, and just up to the mark, when he was startled by the axe coming down a firm blow into the table within an inch of his thigh.

The arrest was at length accomplished by an officer who went in disguise to look at the birds, and who said he would come back in the afternoon with two gentlemen from the New Town who were anxious to purchase some; they secured him when he was intent on the sale, by seizing him from behind, as he was getting down one of the cages.

He was committed to the prison of Edinburgh as a dangerous lunatic in December 1840. In March 1841, he was removed to the lunatic wards of the West-Kirk Workhouse, under the idea that he could be safely confined and cared for there; but this idea was soon dispelled, for before two months were over he murderously assaulted Dr Deas, the medical-officer of the workhouse, at his professional visit. On the doctor's entrance, Smith spoke to him in his usual friendly manner; but when he was about to leave the ward, suddenly attacked him with a shoemaker's knife which he had procured; he chased him downstairs, weapon in hand, wounded him slightly in the back, and it was only his accidentally stumbling, in his eagerness to strike another blow, that saved the doctor's life. This affray so terrified the workhouse officials that they were glad to thrust him into a cell in one of the outbuildings, and to keep him constantly there, handing in his food through the partially-opened door. The warrant for his removal to Morningside was soon obtained, but Smith was still armed, and his desperate character was so well known that no one would dare to enter. It was found necessary actually to unroof the cell, and to entangle his arms with ropes before he could be secured. He was then put in irons, and brought to the Asylum (31st May 1841); but the man who brought him was so terrified at his prisoner, and at the thought of his ven-

geance, that, I am told, he secured his own safety, as soon as Smith was within the house, by making off as fast as he could with the key of the wrist-locks in his pocket.

From this period the Asylum case-books furnish a complete record of his history; and even that record can be supplemented by the reminiscences of the older attendants. By condensing the information derived from both these sources, a correct sketch of the remaining twenty years of his life is obtained.

On admission to the Asylum the handcuffs were at once removed, and he was treated by Dr Mackinnon, the then superintendent, with much consideration and kindness. He was put under no personal restraint, and was granted as much freedom within the walls as was consistent with his safe custody. He obtained facilities for writing a more detailed history of his case, his taste for music was encouraged, and he was allowed to conduct the psalmody at morning prayers.

At first this treatment was apparently beneficial. Although his belief that he was the victim of persecution and injustice was unchanged, and although he daily vowed vengeance on those who were the authors of his wrongs, he used neither threats nor violence to the Asylum officials.

After about a year's confinement, however, he manifested his belief that they also were implicated in the oppression he had endured, and began to threaten vengeance of the direst kind; these threats were directed chiefly against Dr Mackinnon and his assistant, both of whom he declared he would murder. Additional precautions were therefore used, and he was more closely watched than formerly; but in spite of this vigilance he managed one day to pick up in the grounds a pointed rod of iron, which had apparently served as the spindle of a spinning-wheel, and had probably been turned up by the ploughshare. Recognising its fitness for his purpose, he concealed it about his person, sharpened the point in secret, warped a strip of a blanket round the other end of it for a handle, and then kept this formidable dagger in various hiding-places for no less than three months—as he himself subsequently confessed—deliberately waiting till he could get an opportunity to use it effectually. This opportunity at length offered itself in June 1842, when Dr Mackinnon and his assistant entered the ward one morning in the accidental absence of the attendant. Smith at once embraced it, and, without the slightest warning, suddenly sprang on the doctor when his back was turned, and stabbed him repeatedly with the dagger. When the assistant-physician, Dr Douglas, rushed forward to his help, Smith attacked him in the same manner, and wounded him in several places, striking so fiercely that, I am told, the note-book which he was carrying was pierced through by one of the blows. The attendant, hearing the noise, hastened to the ward, when Smith "ran into his room, threw the weapon out of the window, and resigned himself to his fate, fully

believing that he had killed his victims, and that his own life must pay the penalty of his crime."

Fortunately, none of the wounds were dangerous, and both the doctors recovered to care for the man who had well-nigh murdered them.

This assault was only the manifestation of a revenge and bloodthirstiness which had long been slumbering; even at the time of admission the same fierce desire for blood possessed him; and he often told afterwards that many a time when Dr Mackinnon was conducting morning prayers, and he was sitting near him as precentor, he "could scarcely keep from rising and braining the —— with the chair he was sitting on." He always gloried in this murderous attack, and only lamented that he had not been more successful.

In consequence of this affair, Smith was removed to another room, and his liberty restricted, although no personal restraint was used. He continued to vow yet greater vengeance, and to mutter fierce threats against all the officials. He often attempted violence to the attendants, and it was found necessary for their safety to prohibit any one from going alone to his room.

In spite of these precautions, about six months after the assault on the doctors, he attacked two attendants in his own room with a piece of wood which he had broken off from his chair; fortunately, the scuffle was heard, and by additional assistance Smith was overpowered. He, evidently, hoped to have overcome the attendants, then to have obtained possession of a key, and so made his escape.

Each disappointment only made him, if possible, more bloodthirsty and vindictive, fiercer in his threatenings, and bolder, more ingenious, and more persevering in his attempts to fulfil them. The man's whole life was a study how to murder, and he was constantly gloating over the thought and hope of a cruel and bloody revenge.

In 1845, he made another attempt to murder an attendant, which shows well the deliberateness and cunning with which his plans were made. While walking in the airing court, he picked up quite carelessly some cuttings of lead, which had been allowed to fall there by workmen who were repairing the roof; these scraps he carefully secreted, then tore away a large piece of lead from the water closet, and kneaded the whole into a heavy ball; this ball he enclosed in a network of strings, shoelaces, strips of handkerchiefs, etc., and fastened it loosely to the end of a short stick—thus forming a heavy life-preserver. The secret fabrication of this weapon must have occupied him for months, for all was done in spite of the closest vigilance, and we can imagine how he lightened his anxiety in constructing it, by glorying in the anticipation of the bloody vengeance it was to procure. When the weapon was ready for use, he waited until it was the turn of a certain attendant whom he specially disliked, to make the night visit. When this night arrived,

Willie stationed himself behind the door of his room, and quietly waited for his entrance; when the attendant was opening the door, Willie suddenly stopped it with his foot, so as to prevent it from opening further, and the man naturally put in his head to see what was holding it; this was exactly what Willie had calculated on, and he bestowed on the instant a murderous blow with his weapon. The man was severely injured, and a large piece of the scalp was detached, but he was still able to struggle with Smith, and had overpowered him even before the noise had brought others to his help.

Smith was now constantly confined to his room, except for an hour daily, which he spent in the airing court under charge of one or two attendants. He was as querulous, irritable, and dangerous as ever, but spent a great deal of time in writing to the Sheriff and others, an account of his "seven new inventions," and offering half of the profits to any one who would liberate him. These new inventions included the discovery of perpetual motion, and other schemes equally extravagant; they constitute the first very obvious manifestation of intellectual insanity, supervening on the moral perversions he had laboured under so long.

On the appointment of a new physician to the Asylum in 1846, Willie confidently hoped to obtain justice and liberty. He wrote for Dr Skae a very full account of his life and grievances, described with much ingenious colouring his murderous attacks on his former medical attendants, and said that he would give the new doctor a definite period to judge of his case, and make up his mind about it, before pronouncing his curse upon him.

When he found that he was not to be liberated, his indignation knew no bounds, and he gave notice that on the twelfth day of the following month he would kill one of his attendants.

In consequence of this threat and the terror which it inspired, in consequence too of the perseverance, cunning, and ferocity which it was known he would use to fulfil his purpose, it became necessary for the first time to have recourse to personal restraint; it was effected by a belt fastened round the waist, to which handcuffs or rather wristlets were loosely attached, so as to permit and yet limit the free use of the arms. The restraint was applied on the day preceding the one he had fixed for the murder; he did not know of its intended use, and at once prepared to resist desperately; but observing other attendants in reserve, and seeing that resistance would be hopeless, he submitted to its application amid tears of vexation and sorrow.

The effect at first seemed beneficial, and he refrained for a time from his threatenings and curses; but this was very transient, for very soon after its application, he declared he could not possibly take his food with it, and in the most friendly and coaxing way he tried to persuade an attendant to try on the belt in order to prove the truth of his statement. His intention was so obvious, that, fortunately, it defeated itself, and the man declined to fasten his own

hands in order to facilitate his strangulation. The next entry in the case-book shows both the gradual weakening of his mental faculties, and the unimpaired intensity of his morbid feelings. "At present he is in a state of partial dementia, with exaltation of the feeling of pride, and high ideas and delusions regarding his own powers and capabilities, particularly as an engineer, architect, and musician. . . . He sometimes soliloquizes upon the persecutions and insults he has received from his enemies, threatens vengeance upon them, and blasphemes God in a most awful manner for permitting such occurrences."

In the beginning of 1849, restraint was discontinued, except when he was out walking, but mentally he was unchanged, and the same precautions and vigilance were still required. The last quotation from the case-book sufficiently describes his condition in 1850 and 1851, while in 1852 he is said to be, "*if possible*, more than ever full of murderous threats."

In 1853, he was summoned before the Sheriff, in consequence of a letter he had surreptitiously sent to him, in which the lives of the attendants and physician were fiercely threatened, and was by the sheriff's order committed to the Edinburgh Prison. In three months, or rather less, he was brought back to the Asylum, not improved as we can well suppose, by his imprisonment. In proof of this, the following entry occurs a few months later:—"This day, upon his attendant going into his room, in order to take him out for an airing, he suddenly threw himself forward and tried to grip him by the throat; fortunately, he was secured before he could accomplish his design. In the scuffle a spoon sharpened at the handle fell from his bosom. Doubtless, had he succeeded in keeping down the attendant, he would have at once proceeded to dig out his eyes, a threat which he has of late repeatedly uttered."

A favourite amusement with him about this period, and one which illustrates well his love for cruelty and murder, was to entice mice into his room, by leaving some of his food near a hole in the corner; he prevented their escape by closing the hole, killed them by tearing them into quarters with his fingers, and had the pieces arranged in a row in the morning to show his attendants how he would treat his enemies if he could.

In the following year, 1854, he made another murderous attack on an attendant with a weapon similar to the life-preserver formerly mentioned. He had made this one in the same way,—a stone which he had picked on the airing ground, in spite of the constant presence of attendants, serving instead of lead. When the weapon was ready for use, and a proper occasion offered, he purposely left some bread on the floor of his room that he might get a better blow at the attendant as he stooped to pick it up. The attendant, however, was on his guard, and drew back in time to save his head, although not his shoulder; a sharp struggle ensued, which was happily overheard by the night-watch, and with his assistance Willie was secured.

It is scarcely possible to find language strong enough to describe the bloodthirsty passion which possessed the man, the devilish ingenuity, deliberateness, and determination with which all his attacks were made, or the fiendish delight with which he gloried in relating them, and revelled in the thought of a merciless and bloody success.

In 1855, his health began to give way, but he still indulged in fierce threatenings far beyond his power of execution. In this year restraint was finally discontinued, and he was taken regularly under special charge of an attendant to the chapel and the weekly ball—privileges which he highly valued. He spent his time chiefly in writing songs, anthems, and choruses, which were the names he gave to miserable attempts at music with original words attached. Upon these he set great value, delighted to rehearse them to the medical officers, and spent many a solitary hour in transcribing them.

Occasional days of murderous vows and threatenings varied the monotony of his life; but they were not quite so frequent as they used to be, probably, because he had found other occupations now.

Years passed away thus; and they may be described in a single sentence:—gradual mental deterioration, with persistent and unquenchable desire for revenge and blood.

In 1858, I first made Willie's acquaintance, and a visit to his room then was a thing to be remembered. You might have noticed, ere leaving, the strength of the door, the absence of all furniture except a fixed bed, the height of the window which Willie insisted on having open even in the depth of winter, and the many writings and drawings on the wall, but your attention would certainly have fixed itself first on Willie himself. He was always to be found sitting up in bed, with his inkbottle beside him and his manuscripts on his knee.

He was now a bent old man, with coarse wiry brown hair, fast turning to grey, as his "haffits" showed, for he disdained to doff his "Kilmarnock" in the presence of any visiter. He had greyish whiskers, and long grey, shaggy eyebrows, overhanging deep-set little grey foxy eyes that gleamed with cunning and cruelty. He had a very decided nose and a good brow, while his mouth and chin told you he had once been a man who could both dare and do. His manner was rude and defiant, as if his visiter had done him some personal wrong. If you attempted general conversation or offered anything like an agreeable or friendly greeting, the answers were short and blunt. He at once gave you the impression that he had found a savage satisfaction in turning his hand and hatred against every one, seeing that every one had turned his hand against him. If you asked what he was writing, you were probably told that it was Smith's version of the Queen's Anthem, that he was the prince of singers, and would let you hear it sung. The words were doggerel and the music poor enough, but the honour they rendered was sincerely meant; and it was indeed a strange sight to see the weird

old man, who had spent so much of his life in this solitary room, doffing his Kilmarnock, raising himself in bed with the dignity of a poet-laureate, and singing with heart and voice the praises of our honoured Queen.

He professed to be indifferent to praise, as already perfectly satisfied with his own performance, still it was not unwelcome. Ere you left, he was almost certain to tell you, if he thought you worth speaking civilly to at all, that he was going to remain in the Asylum no longer; that he had already shown what he could do, and was determined ere the week was over to murder the doctor or some of the attendants. That he had houses in Edinburgh, whose accumulated rents now amounted to a large sum, and that even if he had nothing, his own inventions would secure him a fortune; that therefore they had better let him out before he kills some of them, for if he has to begin he'll soon "do the trick for them and give them a most unmerciful cruel death." When the subject of his murderous attempts was introduced, he delighted to rehearse them to his visiter; they lost nothing in the recital, and he always darkly hinted of some deed far more terrible than these which he was about to perpetrate. If he was pleased with you and your visit, he probably would offer or promise you a copy of the anthem he had sung.

In the end of 1858, he had a slight apoplectic attack, but its effects were very transient and did not alter his mental condition.

In 1859, he was as poetical, loyal, and homicidal as ever. He frequently appointed days for murdering certain people, and had always some ingenious reason for his non-fulfilment of the threat. When he failed to find a good excuse, he said it was in order to show that he was a merciful man, and not the bloodthirsty villain they took him for. In further support of this, he used to quote occasions when he might have brained or strangled an attendant and yet refrained, not recognising that this very argument was a confession of how constantly the thought of murder was uppermost in his mind.

About this time Willie was offered the privilege of a visit to Edinburgh. For almost twenty years he had never been beyond the grounds of the Asylum, and had spent most of the time in his solitary room. He was, from old age and increasing dementia, by no means the formidable man he once had been; and it seemed that this indulgence might with proper precautions be safely granted, and might add a little happiness to his lonely life. He was much elated at the prospect and very grateful. He selected the night-watch as the person who should accompany him, and at the time appointed he was ready, dressed in the best suit the attendants could procure. He went to the door full of eager anticipation; but as soon as he saw the carriage waiting for him, and understood that he was not to walk through the town as he had intended, he turned and went straight back to his room, threw aside the new suit, and absolutely refused to go.

He had evidently intended mischief, and was so mortified at his purpose being thus thwarted under the guise of special kindness, that no persuasion could induce him to change his resolution.

He still continued to attend the ball regularly under special charge of an attendant, and was present by his own desire at a meeting of the glee club. He did not join in the singing, but said that "Smith the critic and victor of singing could sing them all blind and deaf."

In the autumn of 1860, his bodily health began to fail very much, and, although he recruited a good deal in summer, he was never quite free from bronchitis and asthma. The next winter brought with it great aggravation of his illness; but throughout it all his mental condition remained unchanged, and he might have been seen gasping his vows of murder or his loyal anthems during a paroxysm of dyspnœa. It was not in his nature to yield.

But Nature herself yielded at last, and he died about the age of 70, on the 3d of December 1861.

The autopsy revealed the ordinary signs and sequelæ of chronic bronchitis, as well as many evidences of very chronic brain disease.

The brain seemed somewhat atrophied and smaller than usual, the cerebrum weighing but 35½ ounces, and the cerebellum 5½ ounces. The arachnoid generally was opaque and slightly thickened, but its sac did not contain more than a drachm or so of fluid. The lateral ventricles contained very little fluid, too little to be collected and measured. There were found three very distinct softenings, one about the size of a filbert in the anterior extremity of the right corpus striatum, another of about equal size under the floor of the posterior cornu of the right lateral ventricle, and the third about the size of a field-bean in the centre of the left optic thalamus. They all contained similar semi-fluid matter of a dirty, greyish-white colour, and were all apparently of old standing. All the arteries of the brain were more or less atheromatous.

The softenings in the corpus striatum and the atheromatous arteries are well seen in this preparation. The appearance of the softened matter under the microscope, was just what is usually seen in old softenings,—atheromatous vessels, compound granular cells, abundance of fatty granules, molecular matter, and fragments of disintegrated nerve structure.

Even the skull itself was not exempt from the consequences of this protracted disease of the brain, for it was found to exhibit a pathological change, or perhaps I should rather call it a physiological accommodation, which has never, so far as I know, been certainly observed before. On comparing the cast of the head taken after death with another taken about seventeen years before, there was found to be a very remarkable difference between them, not in form only, but also in size, the head having become less during these seventeen years by an amount equal to at least 12 cubic inches.

A case so singular and so suggestive requires very little in the way of comment. Allow me, however, for the sake of rendering the case more complete, to offer a very few remarks suggested by it; and for the sake of brevity and distinctness let me put them under three several heads—physiological, medico-mental, and medico-legal.

1. *Physiological.*—This remarkable alteration in the size and form of the cranium during adult life deserves special notice. It is generally believed that all alterations in the brain substance which imply diminution of its bulk, are compensated for by the effusion of fluid, so that the entire volume of the cranial contents is always the same. From this case it would seem that this effused fluid, which we can be very sure once existed in Smith's cranium, may slowly disappear, and the osseous case gradually accommodate itself to the diminished size of the organ it contains. The possibility of such changes in the cranium has usually been admitted, but I am not aware of any other case where it has been actually observed. The long term of years that must elapse, and the small probability of correct measurements having been taken at first, of course render opportunities for such observations exceedingly rare.

I am glad to be able to show both these casts, along with the skull itself, to the Society, that my statements or measurements may be open to question or capable of proof, and that the actual alterations may be more readily appreciated than by any description. One of the ears of the older cast has unfortunately been broken off, and perfectly accurate corresponding measurements are thus impossible; but I have endeavoured in some measure to make up for this, by drawing a line round the head of both casts on the level of the eyebrows and the occipital protuberance, and at as nearly as possible the same level on both. I have submitted these lines to several medical friends to test their fairness and accuracy, and all have agreed in thinking them as correct as they can be made. I have allowed these lines to remain on the cast, that the Society may judge of their fairness. I have ascertained the difference in cubic inches by filling a vessel with water till it overflowed, and allowing it to settle brimful, then immersing each cast in turn as far down as the line, and measuring the difference in the quantity of water displaced by each. The various external measurements were easily made by tape and calipers, and the various circumferential curves were transferred to paper by means of mouldings in wax, verified subsequently by actual sections of casts moulded from the original ones. I am aware that exception will be at once taken to the correctness of these measurements; and I do not contend for their perfect accuracy. The shrinking of the tissues after death, the diminished quantity of fat under the scalp in old age, and the imperfection of the ears in the older cast, all tend to vitiate the results; but, allowing fully for all these sources of error, the difference in size still remains both very considerable and very remarkable.

The change in form is also very marked, and is at once apparent

on looking at the two casts side by side. It affects, of course, the roof or arch of the skull, the solid base remaining unchanged. It is chiefly obvious in the shortening of the distance between the root of the nose and the occipital spine, and in the change of the corresponding arch. This diameter is nearly three quarters of an inch shorter in the more recent cast; while its arch is correspondingly smaller, and exhibits marked flattening or subsidence in the frontal and occipital regions, with comparatively little change in its parietal segment.

The actual shape and size of the heads, and their relative differences, are seen at once by looking at the accompanying outlines of different sections of the cranial vault, where the single line exactly represents the segment in the old cast, and the dotted line the same segment in the new one.

This alteration of the form of the skull has a remarkable correspondence with the mode and order in which the different cranial bones become ossified and solidified in youth; for the parietal bones, although not the earliest to begin to ossify, form the part of the vaulted roof which is first built, and the frontal and occipital bones close the ends of the cavity, and so complete it. The parts of the cranial roof most recently solidified are thus the parts where the contraction has chiefly occurred.

There is no physiological reason against the occurrence of such changes; on the contrary, analogy would lead us to expect them, —for why should *bone* be the only structure which does not accommodate itself to the changes in neighbouring or in contained organs.

These casts are very interesting phrenologically, as showing at what an advanced age such cranial alterations may take place. I have not been able to ascertain Smith's exact age, but there can be no doubt that these changes occurred after the age of fifty. Those who believe in the phrenological distribution of organs will eagerly ask as to the correspondence of the cranial alterations with the relentless and bloodthirsty dispositions manifested during and after their occurrence. So far as I can judge, I am bound to say that they seem to favour the phrenological theory; but the wisest phrenologists reject entirely all evidence derived from cases of unsound mind, whether that evidence be for or against their doctrines. This is at least prudent, whether legitimate or not, for phrenology would certainly derive no support from this department of medicine.

2. *Medico-Mental.*—We may hope that the progress of cerebral pathology will gradually enable us more frequently to associate certain mental conditions with the occurrence of cerebral disease of certain kinds, or affecting certain particular parts. But as yet this is very often impossible, and we cannot, for example, establish any distinct or necessary connexion between the cerebral softenings and the insanity in the case I have read, however strongly we may believe in its existence. We must therefore be content to look at Smith's insanity from the psychological rather than from the pathological side.

Homicidal insanity has, nosologically, at least, three distinct

forms. The first is *Homicidal Monomania*, properly so called, and consists simply in a morbid impulse to shed blood, for which no reason or motive can be assigned. The impulse may be sudden and irresistible, urging the patient at once to the perpetration of some horrible deed, or it may have the form of a more or less constant and almost irresistible desire to kill. The patient is otherwise apparently sane, but can give no explanation of the feeling, and often bitterly laments it. A convenient object or opportunity stimulates the morbid desire, and its recurrence at different periods in the life of the individual is not infrequent. Besides this desire or impulse, no other sign of insanity can be detected. It is a case of purely emotional monomania,—as purely emotional, at least, as monomania can ever be,—for surely the mere fact that a motiveless impulse takes possession of a man, and irresistibly urges him to commit acts from which his whole nature would formerly have revolted or revolts even now, proves of itself that the mind is unsound and weak, by the very absence of that self-control which in a healthy mind would correct, or restrain, or banish such morbid thoughts.

As an illustration of the sudden irresistible impulsive form of this disease, I would quote the first of a very valuable series of cases published by Dr Thomson of the General Prison, Perth, in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* for June 1862. It is the case of a man who murdered his own son by stabbing him with a table-fork with which the child was playing. "No premonitory symptoms were known; he became at once intelligent after the act, and under bitter remorse exclaimed, 'I was impelled by the devil.'" Nearly seventeen years after this attack, the homicidal impulse returned, the patient begged to be secluded from the others, and entreated the warder to shut the door of a fellow-patient's room, "for, when passing, he felt himself strongly tempted to rush in and murder him." This attack lasted about a week, at the end of which time he said he might now safely be allowed to go about as usual.

As an illustration of the almost constant and almost irresistible desire to kill, I mention the case of a woman who came to the Asylum some time ago, along with her husband, to consult Dr Skae. She said that every forenoon, as soon as her household work was over, and she had nothing to occupy her attention, she was seized with an almost irresistible desire to murder her children. She lamented the horrible feeling, and could in no way explain it, for she loved them tenderly, but was obliged daily to leave them in the house and walk up and down before the door till her husband returned from his work, lest the murderous impulse should prove too strong for her if she remained beside them.

The second form in which homicidal insanity shows itself to the alieniste is that of *Homicidal Impulses occurring in Melancholia.* This form is allied to the last, but quite distinct from it. There is insanity *already existing* in the form of melancholia, and the homi-

cidal impulse is but an intercurrent phase of it. Illustrations of this type of the disease are found in cases where a despairing mother murders her children, that they may reach heaven in peace, and may never become hopeless and wretched like her; or where a husband kills his wife, and then himself, that they may both be delivered from the gloom and misery with which his melancholy has enveloped their home. It is in this class of cases that homicide and suicide are so often associated; and the homicidal melancholiac has even been prompted to the deed by the hope of being executed as a criminal, and so delivered from the life which he loathes.

The third nosological form of homicidal insanity is *Homicidal Mania*, strictly so called, where insanity already exists in the form of mania, and where delusion of some kind has occasioned or prompted the murderous desire or deed. The motive or object may be of the most inadequate or insane kind, but it fully justifies the patient in his own eyes, however frivolous it may seem to others, or however insufficient to justify murder even had the delusion been true.

Illustrations of this form of the disease are not infrequent. In the Perth Asylum there was very recently a patient who believed that another of the inmates was continually annoying him by mesmerism, and, under the influence of this delusion, he one day assaulted his tormentor so fiercely, that the man died from the injuries he received. And, in the Morningside Asylum, there was lately a patient who almost murdered his son, under the belief that God wished to prove his faith as he did Abraham's of old.

The murderer may imagine, like a patient at present in Morningside, that she is the messenger of Jehovah, and that the Divine glory demands a sacrifice; or, like the subject of my sketch, he may insanely magnify trivial annoyances into grievous wrongs, which can only be wiped out with blood.

I believe these three *nosological* varieties include all the cases of homicidal insanity; but, of course, the classification is not absolute, and the varieties may merge into each other. It would be easy to multiply illustrations, and to quote cases already published, but it is unnecessary, and time forbids.

In the case I have read, the homicidal impulses, which were so fierce and persistent, were only the ultimate and farthest development of what was at first nothing more than justifiable displeasure at real annoyances. The natural "touchiness" of temper which could not bear even a nickname, and summoned a man to the Police Court for shouting it, can scarcely be regarded in any sense as insanity; but the injustice with which he thought the case was dismissed, and the consequent increase of his annoyances, soon aggravated his irritability into insanity of the most dangerous kind,—a mania which was continually thirsting for revenge, and deemed no vengeance, however bloody or cruel, a sufficient satisfaction for the wrongs he believed he had endured. Yet his numberless homicidal attempts were so obviously the result of a deliberate intention to

murder, and were planned with such care and acuteness, that, if he had unhappily succeeded in any of his earlier attempts, and had been brought to the bar as a criminal, I think it very unlikely that any ordinary jury would have considered him insane. This leads me to say a very few words on the legal aspect of such cases.

3. *Medico-Legal.*—In regard to cases of this nature, the medical jurist is in the position of a judge as well as of a physician. He therefore cares little for nosological distinctions like the above, and inquires rather as to the motives for the act, the person's knowledge of what he was doing at the time it was committed, the existence of other proofs of insanity, and the degree of self-control which the accused was able at the time to exercise,—he is aware that there may be an avowed motive, careful premeditation and planning of the deed, a perfect knowledge of its criminality and of its legal consequences, and yet that the murderer may be insane and not deserving of death. The essential questions in his eyes are the existence of other unquestionable proofs of insanity, and whether the person had at the moment such consciousness of his act and such command over himself that he *could have refrained* from the deed. If he had not such self-control, he is not guilty or responsible in the same sense as other men.

The law, however, disdains all such refinements, and rejects as worthless the testimony of medical experience. At the second reading of the Lunacy Regulation Bill, the Lord Chancellor lately declared in the House of Lords, that "the introduction of medical opinions and medical theories into the subject has proceeded upon the vicious principle of CONSIDERING INSANITY AS A DISEASE, *whereas the law regards it as a fact*, which can be ascertained by the evidence in like manner as any other fact. Therefore we empannel a jury of ordinary men, and call upon them to try the question by proof of the habits, the demeanour, the conversation, and the acts of the alleged lunatic."

And this extraordinary speech is only a parallel to the answers given by the fifteen judges to a series of questions on this subject submitted to them by the House of Lords in 1843, and suggested by the trial of M'Naughten for the murder of Mr Drummond.

I shall quote the words of their answers, as they are brief, and constitute the most important deliverance on this subject.

"Notwithstanding a party commits a wrong act while labouring under the idea that he was redressing a supposed grievance or injury, or under the impression of obtaining some public or private benefit, he is liable to punishment. The jury ought in all cases to be told that every man should be considered of sane mind until the contrary was clearly proved in evidence; that before a plea of insanity should be allowed, undoubted evidence ought to be adduced that the accused was of *diseased* mind, and that at the time he committed the act *he was not conscious of right or wrong.* Every person was supposed to know what the law was, and therefore nothing

could justify a wrong act, except it was clearly proved that the party did not know right from wrong. If that was not satisfactorily proved, the accused was liable to punishment. If the *delusion* under which a person laboured were only partial, the party accused was equally liable with a person of sane mind. If the accused killed another in self-defence, he would be entitled to an acquittal; but if the crime were committed for any supposed injury, he would then be liable to the punishment awarded by the laws to his crime."—*Brit. and For. Med.-Chir. Rev.*, July 1843, page 273.

By the law, therefore, Smith would certainly have been condemned and executed had he unfortunately succeeded in any of his homicidal attempts, for he was perfectly aware of the criminal nature of such deeds and of the legal penalties they implied, and any "jury of ordinary men," testing his condition, as the Lord Chancellor directs, "by his habits, demeanour, conversation, and acts," would, in the earlier part of his history, have most undoubtedly pronounced him guilty; yet surely the latter part of his life demonstrates that this would have been most unjust, and his execution nothing less than a judicial murder.

The case of Clark who was lately tried for murder at Newcastle, in many respects resembles the one I have read, and illustrates well the imperfection of the law in such cases. In revenge for supposed injuries Clark murdered a tax-gatherer on the public street, and on trial for the deed he was found guilty and condemned to die. The medical evidence was strong and clear as to the existence of insanity. The prisoner believed that he was Jesus Christ, and his conduct at the trial, where he conducted his own defence, was certainly very insane; yet the jury, recognising a motive for the deed, and acting on the principle laid down by the Lord Chancellor, found him guilty of murder; the judge declared his belief that he was responsible for his conduct, and the poor lunatic was sentenced to death.—*Med. Critic and Psycholog. Journal*, April 1862.

Immediately after the trial, as if to put in their strongest light the absurdity and the danger of the legal views of insanity, the judge wrote to the Home Secretary to direct attention to the peculiar circumstances of the case and the strong evidences of insanity, the result of which and of the steps taken by the public, was the respite of the sentence on that ground. A man who believed himself to be Jesus Christ was by the law condemned to death as a criminal, and then the crown was besought to interfere to prevent the law taking its course! The Lord Chancellor is the legal guardian of all the insane in England, and ought, therefore, to be an authority on insanity; but the extraordinary principles he has propounded have received a prompt, opportune, and conclusive answer in the verdict of his model "jury of ordinary men" lately assembled at Newcastle.

It is high time that the ridicule and contempt with which medical men are so often insulted when testifying to insanity in courts of

law, should be thrown back on those who deserve it. They are regarded sometimes almost as partisans of the criminal, who wish to screen him at the expense of truth and justice, and this by those whose ignorance of mental medicine rather aggravates than excuses such treatment. The state of the lunacy laws generally is very discreditable to the legal profession, and affords very uncertain justice to the criminal lunatic. The question of degrees of insanity with corresponding degrees of general capacity and criminal responsibility, has received far too little attention. A man may be quite able to go at large and to mix with the world like other men, but quite unable to manage his own affairs with discretion or safety; and another may be quite unable to be at large or to mix with the world, and yet quite able to manage his own affairs with propriety and intelligence. There are surely degrees, too, of criminal responsibility. In one insane person the intelligence and self-control may be so perfect that death would be a righteous penalty for murder. In another, the insanity may be so far apart from the crime, that it would modify responsibility only as evincing a weakened state of the mind generally, and should, I think, modify the penalty, not absolve from it. Whereas in others the homicidal act may itself constitute the insanity, or may be so directly connected with delusions, that the individual is quite irresponsible.

"A jury of ordinary men" cannot possibly decide such questions, and I believe they will never be satisfactorily settled until medical experts have a more prominent place in their adjudication, and until the law recognises more distinctly the various phases of insanity, and the different degrees of imbecility.

I am sorry that these remarks have unintentionally grown to such length, but I cannot conclude without expressing the great obligation I am under to my friend and chief, Dr Skae, for permis sion to report this case, and for valuable advice and assistance in doing so.

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