

II. *A Curious Case of Feigned Insanity.* Translated from the 'Archives Générales de Médecine,' March, 1866. By G. MACKENZIE BACON, M.D., &c. &c.

It is rare to meet with a more singular case of simulated insanity than that related in the following pages, or with one more creditable to the sagacity and good judgment of the physicians engaged in its investigation. In its conflict with public ignorance and prejudice medical science seldom has the satisfaction of demonstrating to the vulgar understanding the truth of its opinions in so signal a manner as in the present instance, and considering the way in which the evidence of alienists is so often received, the sense of triumph must have been particularly sweet. The case attracted some notice in the French newspapers at the time, and this led Dr. Ladueit de Lacharrière to publish a detailed account of the inquiry he made in common with M. Tardieu and M. Lasagne. They did not, he says, adopt the violent measures employed by some of their medical brethren at Lyons, in 1828, who, in examining a man accused of assassination who refused to speak, when other measures failed, applied red-hot irons to the soles of his feet, with the effect of, after the seventh application, making the man very communicative. The skill and patience of the doctors last year succeeded in overcoming the man's obstinacy by less cruel means, though we question whether the difficulties of the case were less. The following is, with the omission of a few sentences not directly connected with the narrative, a literal translation of the French report, which bears the title of 'Étude médico-légale sur un Cas de Simulation de folie pendant trois mois :—

On July 2nd, 1865, about noon, Miss M—, living in the Rue Vivienne, on entering her room discovered a person hidden under the bed. She immediately called for assistance and the man was arrested; when questioned by the police he pretended to have no other name than that of the Regenerator, and said he lived at Villejuif. There were found upon him some prospectuses of the office of general publicity, and the plan of a prospectus, written in pencil, appearing to be the work of a madman. Besides these prospectuses, he had a large joiner's chisel, a razor, and two small knives with sharp blades. The porter of the house said that the man had twice during the morning passed before his lodge. When questioned as to the motive which induced him to enter the room of Miss M—, he pretended that he had certain rights over her, resulting from an old connection with her and a promise of marriage; that he had known her at Châlons; had come to Paris to follow up his mistress; had found there that she had been unfaithful to him, and that he had hidden himself under the bed in order to surprise her in her misconduct. As proof of the innocence of his intentions, he reminded the police that he had not attempted to escape, nor offered any resistance. He was often asked as to his antecedents, but he gave nothing but falsehoods and extravagant tales in answer. He had been, he said, employed at Châlons in a mercer's establishment, and at Paris in the office of which he had the prospectus. The name of "Regenerator" represented the superior

faculties of which he and the members of his family were possessed. He had received a mission to regenerate the human race; and among his supernatural gifts, he had that of curing the deaf. At Villejuif everybody was anxious to give him all he wanted in return for the services he rendered so lavishly. These notions of imaginary superiority, so plainly opposed to the social and intellectual position of the patients, are not rare amongst the insane; indeed, they characterise one of the forms of insanity. But if the lunatic supposes himself a superior being, and immensely rich, when he has not enough to supply his wants, an eminent artist, a general, or a prince, he still would have no hesitation in saying where he was the previous evening; how he was occupied; what persons he met, &c., without even perceiving that these answers were so little consonant with the grandeur and riches of which some minutes before he declared himself possessed. The information received by the police soon established the fact that the statements of the "Regenerator" were so many lies; for he was not known in the mercer's shop, nor at the office, nor even at Villejuif, where he had probably never lived. Not only had his pretended title never been announced there, but no individual answering to that description had been known in that place. Once convinced that we had not believed any of his statements, the "Regenerator" adopted a new line of conduct; he absolutely refused to answer every question, and, when hard pressed, invariably replied, "I have offended God. I am making my retreat. I must not speak until my retreat is finished." This change and persistent silence supervening thus, without any new cerebral symptoms, could only confirm our suspicions. If there were occasion to suppose that we were dealing with a man who was determined to conceal his identity and simulate madness, it was necessary to proceed with the greatest reserve. The aspect of the man was, indeed, very odd; he had not certainly an intelligent face, but he possessed to a remarkable degree the power of assuming an expression of dull stupidity which he preserved nearly four months. He wore green spectacles, which he rarely parted with; his long hair was in such disorder that it was impossible to disentangle it, and was like the rest of his person very dirty. His clothes were soiled and torn, and his shirt was always wide open so as to show his chest. He pretended to have no care for himself, and to live in a state of utter indifference. After having remained some time at the police station, the "Regenerator" was transferred to the *Mazas* prison, and placed in a cell with three other prisoners for his companions, one of whom, a very intelligent and cunning fellow, was stimulated to get some information from him, but could not succeed.

For the first few days the "Regenerator" was as odd and incoherent with his companions as he had been during our visits; it was impossible to get a word from him. He remained stretched on his bed, and reading with interest some books of travel which the chaplain had lent him. He refused the least food until 3 p.m., and at this hour he devoured, besides two pounds of bread (his portion of food), anything that his companions had left from their meal. After some time he adopted the same habits as the other prisoners, still preserving an absolute silence. To his fellow prisoners, as also to us, he said he wished to enter La Trappe, and demanded to be taken there. He did not wish for liberty; only desired one thing, to be left alone in order to make his retreat. By degrees we were able to get from him some senseless remarks, which always terminated with these words, "I wish to make my retreat." Having decided to prolong our observation of him, up to this time so unproductive, we obtained an order to have the "Regenerator" transferred to the police station, where he was kept in the strictest solitary confinement, and was frequently examined. For two months he maintained the same line of conduct, making no requests nor complaints, not even uttering a word to ask for his food, and declaring, when closely questioned, that he

was satisfied and wanted nothing. His health did not appear to have suffered, either from the want of exercise or the weariness of solitude, and his face had assumed a more and more stupid expression. When we approached him he drew back as if afraid. The doctor of the prison having reproached him for throwing some wet bread on the ground, he said, in the silliest way possible, "It is for the flies," and endeavoured with a stupid air to look for some flies on the ceiling. Every one in the prison began to be persuaded that the "Regenerator" was really insane, and that he ought to be considered a 'veritable idiot.' Although this inquiry thus prolonged had given us nothing decisive on which to form a judgment, yet this sort of delusion agreed so little with the known points of insanity, that we resolved to wait longer before bringing our investigation to a close. The "Regenerator" knew it; we took care to repeat it, and to have it repeated to him by the warder. At last, weary of the struggle, and seeing that our tenacity was equal to his own, he was the first to give way, and discard his mask. "I have had enough of it," he said, one morning to a warder who brought him his bread. "I can no longer endure the life that I lead, and would rather acknowledge everything." He then wrote to the Procureur, imploring him to take pity on him, and furnished him very readily with all the information that we up to that time had failed to extract from him. On giving up his part the "Regenerator" became at the same time quite another man; he discarded spectacles, and his face, without being intelligent, had no longer that look of imbecility; he brushed his clothes, and his dress became neat and tidy. He acknowledged that he had feigned insanity, in the hope of being placed in an asylum, and of going out at the end of some time, without falling into the hands of justice. He had been brought up as a confectioner, and by his own account was no novice in theft and roguery. In 1859, he stole a sum of about 200 francs, and was condemned to five years' imprisonment, and sent to the prison of Poissy. Having distinguished himself by his industry and quiet behaviour, he was liberated at the end of four years. After having practised as a confectioner for some months in a country town, he came to Paris in 1863, but finding no work he went to Meaux, and called on a grocer, using the name of one of his neighbours, to borrow a small sum of money, but the neighbour hearing of it, the trick was found out and he was sent to prison for six months. For three months he refused to give his name, which they could not discover until they found an envelope in his pocket addressed to himself. When he left prison he came to Paris, and was soon after arrested as above described, in the house which he had formerly inhabited, and where he had committed the first theft. "I was hungry," he said, "not having had anything to eat since the previous evening. Having lived in the house. I knew that the room of Miss M— was used as a kitchen, and I went into it with the intention of getting some food; I had taken the joiner's chisel to force the cupboard if I found it shut." The man whose history we have just given is mild and of limited mental power, but he possesses a strength and tenacity of will very uncommon. Before getting into the house where he was going to commit the theft his plan was laid; if discovered, he must assume madness, and, accordingly, no sooner was he arrested than he raved and got incoherent, which made the police doubtful of his sanity. The name of "Regenerator" and these grand ideas were notions prepared beforehand, and which he knew sometimes to belong to the insane. He soon saw he was not clever enough to play the part of a talkative and excited madman for a long time, and, therefore, in order to avoid detection, he refused to answer, and said but little; wishing it to be believed that he was absorbed in religious ideas. What upset him (as it does almost all those who simulate madness) was that he overdid it, and did not dare, because he wished to be considered insane, to exhibit a single rational idea.