

Medico-Legal Notes.

REX *v.* ANNIE ROBSON.

This case, in which the charge was wilful murder, was tried at Leicester Assizes on October 24, 1931, before Mr. Justice McKinnon. The facts were undisputed, and were of an unusual character.

The accused, *æt.* 55, is a trained nurse. For a number of years she had nursed private cases, and had performed her duties to the complete satisfaction of her patients, and of the doctors for whom she had worked. In March, 1931, she was engaged to nurse an elderly lady, Mrs. Pochin. She nursed the case at the patient's house, and had accompanied the patient when staying at a Brighton hotel. On July 8 she obtained a large jug of boiling water from the kitchen of the house, and shouting, "You damned old cat; this has been going on ever since you came home," she threw the contents of the jug over Mrs. Pochin, who died as a result of the scalds and subsequent toxic nephritis.

The defence was that of insanity. The accused was obsessed with the idea that her patient, and certain members of the patient's family, were constantly taunting her (the accused) with undue familiarity with men. Evidence was given that no such taunts had ever been made. Dr. Alexander Macintosh had seen her soon after the occurrence, when she appeared unable to think of anything except this imaginary defamation of her character. Dr. A. N. W. Colahan had examined her while she was awaiting trial. He considered that, at the time of the occurrence, she suffered from an attack of "psychic epilepsy." He added that he believed she "would have committed the act if a policeman had been present." Dr. G. Goldie Smith had also examined the accused, and agreed with the last witness. He regarded the case as one of "irresistible impulse." Dr. M. Hamblin Smith, medical officer of Birmingham Prison, had kept the accused under special observation. He was unable to accept the view of "psychic epilepsy"; but he considered that she had brooded over her delusions to such an extent that although she knew the "nature and quality" of the act, she did not know that it was "wrong."

The jury found a verdict of "Guilty, but Insane," and the usual order for detention was made, the judge remarking that he entirely agreed with the verdict.

REX *v.* EDITH MAY DAMPIER.

This case was tried at Hereford Assizes on February 12, 1932, before Mr. Justice Roche.

The accused is a widow, æt. 36. She lived with her two children in a small farmhouse, near Ross-on-Wye. She was accused of the murder of a man named George Parry, who had been employed by her for about nine years as a "handy-man."

On January 9, about 6.30 p.m., a lad was delivering bread at the house. The accused told him that Parry had shot himself. The lad having obtained assistance, Parry was found seated on a chair in the kitchen, with a gun between his knees. He was dead from a wound in the left side of his neck. Evidence was given by Sir Bernard Spilsbury to the effect that this wound could not have been self-inflicted. The accused, later, made a statement that she had shot Parry, but that this had occurred as the result of an accident. No motive was suggested for the accused having shot Parry. But the defence did not dispute the facts, as set out by the prosecution, and relied entirely on the plea of insanity.

Dr. J. L. Dunlop had attended the accused for about five years. In September, 1931, he had treated her for gonorrhœa. She was much upset about this, especially as her son, aged 9 years, had lost the sight of his right eye through gonorrhœal infection. The accused had stated that she intended to cut the boy's eye out with a pair of scissors. She also stated that she had remarried (a delusion), and that her second husband had left her and had been drowned. Dr. Dunlop had sent her to a nursing home, which she had attempted to leave in her nightdress. He had considered the question of her certification in September.

Dr. G. W. T. H. Fleming, medical superintendent of Hereford Mental Hospital, had examined the accused on February 4. He regarded her then as definitely insane, and he considered that she had been insane on January 9. She had told him that she had seen and conversed with her deceased husband. She was more worried over a recent loss of weight than over the charge now brought against her. He had taken a specimen of her blood, and the Wassermann reaction had proved to be positive. He believed that she was in the early stage of general paralysis.