

the prevention of degeneracy or of its effects, by altering the environment, but this intention was frustrated by his death.

E. MAPOTHER.

*L'Automatismo Impulsivo* [*Impulsive automatism*]. (*Ann. di Freniat.*, vol. xx, fasc. 4, Dec., 1910.) Marro.

In this article, which is the second of a series of studies of the cerebral factors of homicide, the author deals with the automatic activities underlying impulsive violence. He points out that, while in the earlier stages of human history impulses of aggression were brought into play as much in satisfying the instinct of self-preservation as in satisfying the instinct of reproduction, the progress of civilisation has repressed and modified these impulses in a much greater degree with regard to the former than the latter of these fundamental tendencies. Puberty in the male involves the simultaneous development of two mechanisms—of the specifically sexual mechanism on the one hand, and on the other hand of those excito-motor mechanisms which subserve the aggressive impulse, and which are awakened at this time in association with the condition to which Marro applies the term “psychic hyperæsthesia.” It is this special excitability of the sensory-motor images of violence that determines the frequently homicidal character of adolescent criminality. Where it is absent, as is usually the case with women, the psychic hyperæsthesia of puberty is far less dangerous. The author would find in this fact the explanation of the relative rarity of homicidal offences in women. According to his view the sexual struggle between males is a notably important factor in homicide, and in this connection he observes that in his experience, in the large majority of instances, the victim of the male murderer is of the same sex. [Though this may be true of Italy, it does not hold good elsewhere; in this country, for instance, as pointed out by Sir John Macdonald in his remarkable introduction to the Criminal Statistics of 1905, “murder means to a very great extent the murdering of women by men.”—W. C. S.] The persistence even in civilised man of the tie between the sexual function and the automatic mechanisms which are called into action in impulsive homicide has an important influence in maintaining the force and organisation of these mechanisms. Hence in conditions which involve a disintegration of the personality, or, in less marked degree, an enfeeblement of voluntary control, there is a special liability to homicidal explosions. Amongst such conditions Marro refers more particularly to sleep and the state between sleeping and waking, somnambulism, epilepsy, and alcoholic intoxication, quoting instances of homicidal acts committed in these different states. As in the phylogenetic development the cerebrum has gradually increased its dominance over the lower centres, so, in the author's view, the ontogenetic development of the cerebral functions through education may be expected to augment the power of control and to restrain the sphere of automatism. In confirmation of this opinion he states that he has found the educational level amongst homicidal criminals to be very low; the proportion of illiterates, which in the non-criminal population amounts to 6 *per cent.* and amongst criminals in general to 12 *per cent.*, comes to 22·5 *per cent.* amongst homicidal offenders.

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