

*Zunahme*, Berlin, 1825.—<sup>(3)</sup> Lunier, quoted by Morselli.—<sup>(4)</sup> Morselli, *Il Suicidio*, Milan, 1879.—<sup>(5)</sup> Baer, *Der Alkoholismus*, Berlin, 1878.—<sup>(6)</sup> Wynn Westcott, *Suicide*, London, 1885.—<sup>(7)</sup> Ferri, *Sociologie Criminelle*, edit. française, Paris, 1895.—<sup>(8)</sup> Grotjahn, *Der Alkoholismus*, Leipzig, 1898.—<sup>(9)</sup> Colojanni, *L'Alcoolismo*, Catania, 1887.—<sup>(10)</sup> Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, Paris, 1897.—<sup>(11)</sup> Strahan, *Suicide and Insanity*, London, 1893.—<sup>(12)</sup> Adolph Wagner, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit, etc.*, Hamburg, 1864.—<sup>(13)</sup> *Journal of the Statistical Society*, 1886.—<sup>(14)</sup> "Alcoholism and Suicidal Impulses," *Journal of Mental Science*, April, 1898.—<sup>(15)</sup> Baer, "Einfluss der Jahreszeit auf die Trunksucht," *Berlin. klin. Wochenschr.*, 1899.—<sup>(16)</sup> It may be noted that in another variety of toxic suicide, that related to pellagra, drowning is the method almost always employed; hanging is very exceptional. (Roussel, quoted by Ritti in article on suicide in *Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales*, Paris, 1884.)—<sup>(17)</sup> Maudsley, *Physiology of Mind*, London, 1876.

---

*Concerning Irresponsibility in Criminals.* By CHARLES MERCIER, M.B.Lond.

MR. WHITEWAY'S paper on this subject in the last number but one of the JOURNAL is very interesting to medical men as an indication of the view taken by an enlightened legal mind, and it is especially interesting to us as proving that all legal minds are not so steeped in mediæval notions of responsibility as some medical men are apt to suppose. It contains, however, statements that must not be allowed to go unchallenged, and it pushes the doctrine of irresponsibility further than I, for one, should be prepared to follow.

The statement that it is common knowledge that recently a general paralytic was received into an English asylum from a prison, with the marks of a flogging still fresh upon him, is incorrect. Such an incident may have occurred, but its occurrence is not common knowledge; and if Mr. Whiteway has any proof of the fact, the proof should have been adduced; for, although Mr. Whiteway seems to have a brief to fall foul of all our arrangements for dealing with criminals, from their birth to their final exit upon the scaffold, there are other people who, if less interesting, are not altogether outside the pale of our sympathies. Prison officials are, after all, God's creatures as well as criminals, and a charge brought against them should be substantiated or withdrawn.

Mr. Whiteway is of opinion that Mary Ansell should have been excused from the consequences of her crime on the ground that, although not herself insane, she had several insane rela-

tives, and was a degenerate. The first of these reasons we regard, taken by itself, as totally inadmissible. Mr. Whiteway is probably not aware that there are very few families indeed in which there are not, or have not been, some insane members ; and if once the insanity of a relative or relatives is admitted as a substantiation of the plea of irresponsibility, responsibility is practically abolished, and all prisons must be superseded by lunatic asylums. That this position is held by some extremists we are aware ; but it is not held by them on this ground, and it does not appear that it is held at all by Mr. Whiteway himself.

If we admit, as we should not be slow to admit, that the existence of a strong family history of insanity should be taken into account in estimating the validity of the plea of insanity, yet we do not admit that such a consideration ought to entirely overbear and swamp that of the circumstances of the crime itself.

As to the plea that she was a "degenerate" we must suspend our judgment, and ask Mr. Whiteway and everyone else to suspend their judgments, until they know precisely what "degenerate" means.

Mr. Whiteway says that Mary Ansell "wanted badly £22 10s., and got the idea that by sending phosphorus paste to her imbecile sister, if her sister ate it she would get the money." In this we should agree with him, and we would point out that it is for people who badly want things, and who get the idea that they can obtain these things by crimes, and then proceed to put the idea to the test of experience, that the whole of the criminal laws are enacted ; and that it is to such persons that these laws are meant to apply. Mr. Whiteway accuses us of begging the question when we infer that, since she knew that she would gain personal advantage by the crime, therefore she knew that she ought not to commit the crime ; and he says that the nature and quality of her act she did not properly evaluate ; and this statement, we suppose, is not begging the question. A little later he admits that it is a probability only, not a certainty, that she did not know that she was doing wrong. Now as to this, Mr. Whiteway, as a trained and experienced lawyer, must admit that we ought to be guided by the facts of the case. What are these facts ? The prisoner not merely knew that she was sending the poison for the purpose of killing her sister, and that if

her sister died she would get the money, but she took elaborate precautions to conceal her tracks. She obtained the poison by telling lies. She forged a letter some time beforehand to induce the asylum authorities to believe that the parents of their patient were dead, and so to prevent them from sending intelligence of the death, when it should take place. She induced her father to forbid the making of a post-mortem examination. She planned the deed with deliberate cunning, and carried it out with remorseless cruelty. That no criminal should under any circumstances be punished is a position which we find intelligible, although we cannot agree with it ; but that if any criminals whatever ought to be punished, such a criminal as Mary Ansell should not, is a position which we cannot even understand, for a crime more deliberate, more heinous, more sordid, more wilful, more abominable in any way, we do not remember, and we have a difficulty in even imagining.

---

*On Bodily Disease as a Cause and Complication of Insanity.*

By G. J. CONFORD, B.A., M.B., B.Ch.Oxon., M.R.C.S.Eng.,  
L.R.C.P.Lond., late Assistant Medical Officer to the Coppice  
Hospital for the Insane, Nottingham.

THE observations upon which this essay is written have been made in the Coppice Hospital, and refer to cases admitted between 1st August, 1859, and 1st August, 1893, and still surviving at the latter date, and to cases thereafter admitted consecutively, all of which have come under the writer's care, being 175 in all.

Of the whole number recorded, 80 are examples of mania, 29 being males and 51 females ; 55 of melancholia, 28 of whom are males and 27 females ; 12 of chronic mania, 7 males and 5 females ; 11 of general paralysis, all males ; 9 of dementia, 5 males and 4 females ; 6 of acute mania, 3 of each sex ; 1 of acute delirious mania ; and 1 of idiocy.

In the cases where bodily disease has preceded the insanity it is not contended that the latter is caused entirely, or even chiefly, by the physical condition, but only that this has an important influence.