ARTICLE II.

HOMICIDAL INSANITY.—THE CASE OF NANCY FARRER.

By J. J. QUINN, M. D., SUPERINTENDENT OF THE HAMILTON COUNTY LUNATIC ASYLUM, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

One of the most important trials for homicide, in which insanity was set up as a defense, that has taken place in the courts of Hamilton county, was the trial of Nancy Farrer. This case is remarkable, not only from the enormity of the acts with which the prisoner was charged, but also from the different opinions of medical and other witnesses; the conflicting verdicts of different juries, returned upon the same testimony; and the varied opinions of the different judges, before whom the case, in some form, came up. By one court and jury the evidence was considered sufficient to regard the prisoner as a sane, and therefore responsible person. By another legal tribunal the same testimony was regarded as conclusive of her insanity and irresponsibility. Which tribunal gave the true decision? The circumstances of the murders of which she was accused, and the history of her previous life, habits, and character, can, perhaps, best answer.

In July, 1851, Nancy Farrer went to live with a Mrs. Green, to take care of her in her accouchement. A few days after the delivery of his wife, Mr. Green left home, Nancy remaining in charge as nurse. The patient kept some money (two or three hundred dollars) under her pillow, from which she occasionally took change for the nurse to purchase medicine. The money and the place of its concealment came to the knowledge of Nancy. It appears that she and a Mrs. Bazley, an occupant of another part of the house in which Mrs. Green resided, entered into an agreement or conspiracy to obtain this money. A conversation between the two was accidentally overheard, which showed this agreement. Mrs. Green recovered favorably from her confinement, and continued well until the 6th of August, one month after the birth of her child. She was then taken suddenly ill with symptoms of poisoning by arsenic. As some of these symptoms resembled those of cholera, and as that disease had not entirely disappeared from Cincinnati, foul means were not suspected. On the occurrence of vomiting Nancy was dispatched for the family physician. The summons, however, was not known to him until the next day, when he was again sent for. The first violent symptoms partially subsided, but the vomiting, burning in

the throat, &c., again returned,—again subsided and again returned, until the 10th of September, when the medical attendant, leaving for the East, placed his patient in charge of a medical brother. The same occasional subsidence and renewal of the symptoms continued during the attendance of the second physician, until the 3rd of October,—nearly two months after the first seizure,—when the patient died. Mrs. Green's child died three weeks before the mother. The symptoms were the same in both, and the child was supposed to have been affected through the nourishment of the mother. Nine days prior to the death of Mrs. Green, a consultation was held with another physician, but there is no evidence, except a subsequent intimation from Nancy, that either he or the other attendants suspected the administration of arsenic.

During the illness of Mrs. Green, she was visited by a lady friend. While there, the visitor partook of some ice water, contained in a pitcher from which the patient was supplied with drink, went home, and was soon after seized with symptoms of poisoning. The pitcher was not placed beside the sick woman, but was kept upon a cupboard in the room, and some of its contents given frequently to the patient. While this lady was in the room with Mrs. Green, Nancy entered and informed her that she had been sent for to go home, as there was company waiting for her. This was not true; and when upbraided, the next day, for the falsehood, Nancy excused herself by saying that it was another person of the same name who had been sent for.

In a conversation partially overheard between Nancy and Mrs. Bazley, just before the death occurred, the former remarked that the "doctors said they did not know what ailed her" (Mrs. Green). Mrs. Bazley replied, "Nancy, I think you know her disease better than anybody else," and Nancy answered, "I think I do."

After the decease of Mrs. Green, a friend, who took charge of her effects, thought some articles were missing. That a certain quilt was gone he felt confident. He returned and inquired of Mrs. Bazley for the quilt. She denied any knowledge of it, and said it must be at the washerwoman's. She directed Nancy to go and inquire for it, taking the person into an adjoining room to await her return. As soon as the parties entered the other room, Nancy, instead of proceeding to the washerwoman's, went to a bed in the room which they had left, abstracted the missing property from under it, placed it under her arm, went into the street, returned into the house, entered by a different door the room in which her accomplice and the friend of the deceased awaited her, and delivered up the property. In her circuitous route with the quilt, a small child of Mrs. Bazley's attempted to follow her,

threatening "to tell." Nancy rebuked her, stamped her foot at her, and told her to go down stairs.

It was in evidence that Nancy knew the value of money, as she had received and appropriated it to her individual uses. Previous to the time she came to take care of Mrs. Green, a lady with whom she lived (Mrs. Isherwood) had missed some property, and accused her of stealing a dollar. With this single exception, her character had been that of an honest, upright girl. There seems to have been nothing gained by the death of Mrs. Green. The money was removed after the suspicious conversation was overheard, and the quilt, the only article positively missed, was restored.

About the 27th of October, or some three weeks after the death of Mrs. Green, we find Nancy, in the character of servant, at the house of Mr. Elisha Forest—a short distance from the scene of the above occurrences. Mr. Forest's wife was laboring under phthisis pulmonalis, and though not constantly confined to her bed, her death had been expected for some time. On the very evening of the day on which Nancy first went to live with her, Mrs. Forest was seized with symptoms of poisoning. Nancy had prepared a supper for her, which consisted in part of fried potatoes. No sooner had she partaken of the potatoes than she complained of their containing so much pepper, or some other hot substance, that they burned her throat. The irritation of the throat was immediately followed with vomiting and other symptoms resembling the poisonous effects of arsenic, which continued one week, when she died.

The day after this fatal supper had been prepared, Mrs. Forest was visited by a girl who had previously lived with her. During this visit, the girl drank some water, and became so sick afterwards that she remained all night. Nancy inquired of this girl whether Mrs. Forest was not "a cross woman." On being answered in the negative, she said she had insulted her more than she had ever been insulted before; that "she had made her scrub the floor over because it was not clean enough, and stood in the door and watched her." Nancy also added, "she had a notion of speaking back about it, but thought she would fix her for it."

While Mrs. Forest was sick, Nancy asked a neighboring lady, who was visiting the patient, what she thought of her. The lady replied she "hardly knew,"—that she (Mrs. Forest) was very sick. Upon this Nancy remarked, that she had been taken "with vomiting and heaving, just like Mrs. Green."

Another lady remarked to her, during Mrs. Forest's illness, that it was singular she should be taken worse after having been so much better in

the afternoon. Nancy said, "It was just the same way with Mrs. Green; that she (Mrs. Forest) took to heaving, just like Mrs. Green, and she did not think she would live."

The night following Mrs. Forest's death, some of the neighbors sat up, and were told by Mr. Forest to get what they wanted to eat in the kitchen. At the request of one of the party, a lady went into the kitchen to prepare something. She increased the fire, took the tea-kettle—containing water not yet cold—from one part of the stove, and placed it upon another, to boil. At this moment Nancy entered and snatched the kettle off the stove, saying, "You devil you, I have a notion to kill you." She placed the kettle with the warm water behind the stove, put the coffee-boiler in its place, and poured cold water into it out of the bucket. To a remark of the lady, that she would not "kill" her, Nancy made no reply.

On the 20th of November, two and a half weeks after the death of Mrs. Forest, her youngest child, John Edward Forest, aged two years and eight months, was taken sick, and died the next day.

While this child was "laid out," Nancy remarked to the same girl to whom she had spoken of Mrs. Forest's "crossness," and who was assisting to make the shroud, "how lucky she was with sick folks.—They all died in her hands." The girl said, "May be you killed them," and Nancy rejoined, "May be I did." Both girls conversed in a careless and smiling way, and the remarks of Nancy excited no particular attention at the time. Previous to this conversation, James, an elder child, wanted the visitor to take some molasses syrup, which Nancy had made for the children. Nancy interposed, telling her not to taste it, that it would make her sick. She tasted a little of it, however, to satisfy the child, but experienced no bad symptoms from it.

Two or three days after the death of the child, a gentleman remarked to her that she had "very good luck" in losing people on whom she waited. She said yes,—that she had lost six persons. On enumeration, however, the number proved to be only five—the four referred to above, and the child of another person. To a question as to what had been the matter with Mrs. Forest and her child, she replied that the doctor had stated, but she had forgotten. She added, "In a week or two Jimmy will die." Being interrogated what was the matter with him, she said she did not know, "only he would not eat." Jimmy was the child who had wanted the former servant girl to taste the molasses syrup, and with the murder of whom she was subsequently charged. He was at this time in his usual health, running about and playing with other children. During this conversation, there was no excitement or emotion observed in her conduct. Her manner was that of relating an ordinary fact.

On the 27th of November (a few days after this) a lady, who had been acquainted with Nancy four or five years, remarked to her that she was unfortunate in living where so many died. She said, "Yes, five have died where I lived." She named Mrs. Green and her baby, Mrs. Forest and Johnny, and stated that Mrs. Isherwood's baby had died a day or two after she left. Mrs. Isherwood was the lady who had accused Nancy of stealing a dollar. To a query as to what had been their complaint, she said that "Mrs. Forest was consumptive and she expected the children were like her." She said, "Jimmy will go next, and Billy and the old man, and I expect they will all go of one complaint." Billy was the eldest son of Mr. Forest. At this conversation she exhibited no unusual emotion, and said she did not feel alarmed about the deaths,—that she "did not think anything of them."

On the morning of the first of December, eleven days after the death of Johnny, Nancy was seen going in the direction of a drug-store, at which it was subsequently ascertained she had purchased arsenic. When asked where she was going, she said "to buy muslin." A short time after this (the same morning) she was in company with James Wesley Forest, a child aged eight years and four months. A neighboring lady, noticing that the child appeared to be laboring under catarrh, advised her to give him some onion syrup, furnished her with a few onions, and directed her how to prepare and administer it. In less than an hour Nancy returned to the lady's house and informed her that Jimmy was very sick,—"taken with a vomiting and heaving, just the same as little Johnny was." The lady went to Mr. Forest's, saw the child, and asked what could have made him so sick. Nancy and the child both replied that "it was the onion syrup,—that he had not taken anything else." The lady remarked that "they (the mother and children) are all dying of the same disease," to which Nancy made no reply. To another lady who visited the child during his illness she appeared confused when asked what he had eaten to make him so sick, and answered "toast and coffee." With the exception of this confusion, which was noticed by one witness only, there was still no change observable in her conduct or demeanor.

When James was taken sick, Nancy proceeded, after informing the lady from whom she had obtained the onions, to the work of Mr. Forest, and notified him of his child's sickness. She also mentioned it to several others on the same day. To one she said "he was just taken like little Johnny, and she did not think he would live." And to an inquiry as to what she was sewing at the time, she answered that she was making a pair of drawers for him, as she thought he would need them.

The child was taken sick on Monday. That night the father sat up with him until 4 o'clock A. M. of Tuesday, when he left him in charge of Nancy. It appeared that he was better through the first part of the night, while his father remained with him, but under Nancy's attendance the symptoms increased towards morning. On Tuesday evening, at 9 o'clock, the patient seemed so improved that the attending physician thought he would speedily recover from the attack. That night Mr. Forest again sat up with his child, until 3 A. M. of Wednesday. Having felt unwell himself through the night, he then retired, leaving James, as on the previous morning, in charge of Nancy. Under her care the improvement ceased. Daylight found the symptoms returned in an aggravated form. The little sufferer sank rapidly, and died shortly after 2 P. M. in convulsions—two days and four hours after the first symptoms occurred.

After James became sick, two neices of Mr. Forest called to see him. The younger one took a draught of the water which was intended for the patient, and was seized with vomiting in half an hour. The other drank water not intended for the sick child, and experienced no bad effects.

On Tuesday, the day before the death of the child, Nancy went to the woman from whom she had procured the onions, and requested her to wash a shirt for Jimmy, as she "did not think he would live, and they would want it to lay him out in." On the same day, Mr. Forest remarked that if the physician could not discover the disease under which James was laboring, he would have a *post mortem* examination made in case of his decease. Nancy heard the remark, but said nothing. That evening, fifteen or twenty minutes after they had eaten supper, Mr. Forest and his eldest son, a boy 11 years of age, were seized with symptoms similar to those of which his wife and youngest child had died, and under which a third member of his family was then laboring. Nancy had until this time invariably taken her meals with the family. This evening, however, she did not sit down to the table with Mr. Forest and his son. She sat down to her supper after they had finished; and although she had always been in the habit of eating potatoes, if any had been prepared, she on this occasion avoided some that had been fried and placed before Mr. Forest and his child. The boy thought the fried potatoes had a "sweet taste" and partook of them freely. Nancy, however, passed them by, and, after she had finished her supper, gathered them up with the crumbs and threw them into the yard. The boy remained sick until about midnight, and Mr. Forest continued to vomit until 3 A. M. of Wednesday, when he lay down.

Before James died, Nancy asked what physicians were to be sent for "to hold a council over him." She was told that Mrs. Green's regular attendants had been sent for. She said, "it was no use to send for them. They did not know what ailed Mrs. Green, and could not tell what ailed Jimmy. If they would send for Dr. J., he could tell right away. He knew right away what ailed Mrs. Green." Dr. J. was the physician who was called in consultation before Mrs. Green's death, but there was no proof in the trial what he had stated to be the cause of her suffering. The doctor's own testimony was, that he found her greatly prostrated with inflammation of the stomach, and found many of the symptoms usually produced by arsenic; but there was no evidence that he suspected poisoning at the time of his visit.

Up to the death of James, Mr. Forest seems not to have had the least suspicion of the true cause of the visitation that had fallen upon his family. He saw his wife and two youngest children sicken and die of a disease which the family physician could not name or account for. He found his only surviving son and himself seized with symptoms which ushered in the last illness of his wife and children. And yet he suspected no murder! He thought the events strange, mysterious; wondered that the physician could not discover the cause; determined to have a *post mortem* examination to penetrate the mystery; spoke of his intentions in presence of Nancy; but the idea of poison had never crossed his mind.

A *post mortem* examination of the body of James was made, and revealed the presence of arsenic in the stomach. The bodies of John Edward Forest, Mrs. Forest, and Mrs. Green were exhumed, and chemical analysis also detected arsenic in each of their cases. The symptoms in all the victims corresponded, in every particular, to those produced by arsenic; and the *post mortems* proved, beyond doubt, that all the persons named died from the effects of that poisonous drug. It was proven that Nancy purchased arsenic, during the period that death and destruction were following in her path, on at least five or six different occasions, and at three different drug-stores, no two of the stores being less than half a mile distant from each other. When purchasing the arsenic, she stated it was for the purpose of killing rats. No person prepared Mrs. Green's drinks but Nancy and Mrs. Bazley; and none attended to the cooking and housekeeping of Mr. Forest's family but Nancy alone.

The discovery of the cause of death led to the belief that the first dose of poison given to Mrs. Green was a large one; but the patient partially recovering from its effects, subsequent doses were administered

more guardedly, in small quantities, frequently repeated. Circumstances favored the opinion that the ice-water, which had been directed by the physicians, was impregnated with arsenic, and given frequently to the patient, thus keeping up a slow but constant irritation and inflammation, until death relieved the sufferer from her agony. In the cases of Mrs. Forest and her children, less caution or less knowledge in the administration of the poison seems to have been displayed. Either the weakness of the already enfeebled mother and the age of the children were not taken into consideration, or the deadly drug was given with a bolder and more daring hand.

At the *post mortem* examination of James, Nancy stood by, watching the examination with great interest. She heard the physician state the child had died from arsenic, and ask the father whether he had any about the house to destroy rats, without betraying any unusual emotion. When the suspicion of arsenic, however, was fully aroused, her manner became somewhat excited, and she was observed, when two persons would converse together, to draw close to them and listen to their remarks. After the examination, Mr. Forest remarked to her that it was hard to think the children had all been poisoned, and that she "would have to bear the blame." She answered, "I did not do it." He then told her she had heard the doctor say the child had taken arsenic, and she answered, "I do not know what arsenic is."

That night she was found by Mr. Forest sitting by the fire in the room with the corpse, in an apparent study. She had a string, which she wrapt upon her fingers, then unwrapped it, put it in her mouth, broke it, and again wrapped it upon her fingers. This she continued to do for some time, there being several persons present in the room. The next night a label of a drug-store, at which she had, some three weeks previously, purchased arsenic, was found upon the steps leading to her room. She steadily denied any participation in the deaths of the victims, and made no effort to escape before her arrest. When arrested, she began to confess all, but was advised to keep her secrets to herself and acknowledge nothing.

Nancy was indicted for the murder of James Wesley Forest, the last of the victims, brought to trial before the Court of Common Pleas for Hamilton County, on the 18th February, 1852, where the above facts were given in testimony. The examination and arguments occupied nine days, and the jury having deliberated sixty-three hours, returned a verdict of "guilty." A motion for a new trial was overruled, and the prisoner sentenced to be executed on the 25th day of June, 1852. The case was taken up on error to the Supreme Court of Ohio, the verdict set aside, and a new trial granted.

The prisoner remained in the County Jail until the 7th of December, 1854, when she was brought before the Probate Court (Judge J. B. Warren) and a jury of twelve men, under an inquest of lunacy. R. B. Hays, Esq., appeared as counsel for the prisoner, and A. J. Pruden, Esq., for the State.

The poisoning of Mrs. Green by Nancy and Mrs. Bazley, and that of the Forest family by Nancy alone, were admitted, and some of the circumstances claimed as evidence of her insanity. In addition to these circumstances, her parentage, education, personal appearance, general character, together with the opinions of medical and non-medical witnesses, were adduced.

The circumstances attending the poisoning which favor her insanity have, of course, been noticed. Her history will require further comment.

Nancy Farrer was born in Fannington, Lancashire, England, in July, 1832. About the 10th year of her age, her father, with another child, a son younger than Nancy, emigrated to America. She and her mother followed two years later. Her mother had been a Mormon for six or seven years previous to leaving England. Nancy is said also to have given in her adherence to Mormonism before she left her native land. Her father joined the same faith after his arrival in Cincinnati. The family appears to have subsequently resided in Nauvoo two years, no doubt observing the practices and ceremonies of the religion which they had adopted.

The mother of Nancy was proven a religious monomaniac. She conceived herself a prophetess; imagined that she was the wife of our Saviour, and the mother of all the living; claimed that she saw every event transpiring in the world, and indulged in the wildest visions and most extravagant hallucinations upon religious subjects. Mrs. Farrer was, perhaps, a monomaniac previous to the time she became a Mormon; but whether she had any hereditary predisposition to insanity, or whether monomania manifested itself before the birth of Nancy, is not known. That she is now insane, however, is beyond all doubt. Mr. Farrer was a shoemaker, and possessed the ordinary intelligence for one in his sphere of life, but, probably from the whims and vagaries of his wife, contracted habits of intemperance, and finally died from the effects of drunkenness, in the Commercial Hospital of Cincinnati, in 1847. Previous to his death, he had once threatened self-destruction, by running into the Ohio river; and, upon another occasion, actually attempted suicide by cutting his throat. He was thought to be laboring under *delirium tremens* at these times, having had several attacks of *mania a potu* before his death.

So much for Nancy's parentage. From the character of her parents, her moral culture can be readily imagined. From a monomaniac mother, under whose exclusive guardianship she was left during the two years intervening between her father's emigration from England and that of her own, she could not reasonably be expected to derive any extraordinary amount of moral education. Nor could the example of a drunken father, after she came again under his care, add much to what she might have received from maternal teachings and precepts. Perhaps she received more moral instruction during her residence among the Mormons of Nauvoo than from either of her parents. If Mormonism teaches that it is contrary to the laws of God to steal or take human life, she must have reached a degree of moral elevation that would have enabled her to understand the nature and enormity of the crime with which she was charged, unless her intellectual organization disqualified her for a full and proper appreciation of the responsibility of the act.

Of Nancy's literary acquirements we know nothing, except that she went to school and learned to read. She seemed to derive pleasure from her hymn-book, and satisfaction and enjoyment from the perusal of newspapers and other light literature. It appears from the receipt of the copy of the indictment served upon her, that she cannot write, as she made her mark to it instead of attaching her signature.

In person she is very unprepossessing. Her forehead is narrow, but not remarkably low, although the hair extends downwards over it. The nose is flat, with a slight indentation or fissure running up its center. The lips are rather thick, and the mouth, when not engaged in conversation or otherwise employed, is half open. The face is square, and the eyes widely separated, measuring two and three-eighths inches between the inner canthes. Her body and limbs appear to be well formed. Her head seems to be proportionate to the size of the body, and, with the exception of a slightly narrow forehead, presents, to my mind, no particular malformation. A distinguished physician of Philadelphia, however—a man of sound medical judgment, of enlarged experience, and of unquestionable abilities—thinks there is a "marked deficiency of the anterior portion" of the brain, that, "from the extraordinary position of the eyes, the space allowed to this part of the brain is greatly encroached upon." "In this case," he says again, "I do not find much development of the propensity to destroy." Now, the history of the poisoning, aside from phrenology, would seem to justify the opinion that she possessed the "propensity to destroy" in an eminent degree, whether that propensity was developed or not. Another wit-

ness, testifying from a physiological and phrenological examination, thought that she was a woman of "strong motives to act." If she had strong motives to the commission of these murders, the State failed to prove them. Indeed, the absence of any adequate motive was one argument relied upon by her counsel to establish her insanity. This witness also thought she had no "cunning," and very "little power to conceal." He made a difference, however, between "cunning" and "diplomacy," and between concealing and "withholding information." The inference was that diplomacy guided her in the purchase and administration of the arsenic, and the faculty of "withholding information" enabled her not only to conceal her own agency but also that of Mrs. Bazley. The latter was indicted jointly with Nancy for the murder of Mrs. Green, but was acquitted upon trial because Nancy refused, under oath as a witness, to answer any questions or furnish any testimony that would criminate her. She stated, subsequently, that she had been instructed by Mrs. Bazley not to implicate her, as it would only expose Nancy's own participation in the matter. She regretted, however, that she had by her silence and evasions exculpated Mrs. Bazley, as she (Mrs. Bazley) had promised to visit her (Nancy) at the jail, when she would be acquitted, which promise she failed to perform.

In my opinion, the deformity of Nancy is in her face, and here it exists in a very remarkable degree. Besides the formation of the features, the eye is unsteady, the look stupid, the whole expression dull, insipid, and almost void. There is a peculiar twitching of the muscles of the mouth and cheeks in conversation; and her laughter is accompanied or followed by grimaces. As the most faithful description of an individual will not enable a stranger to recognize him with infallible certainty, so any written description of Nancy will convey but an imperfect idea of her physiognomy. The association of the singular expression of countenance with the peculiar formation of features forms a picture which can be accurately impressed upon the mind only by observation. The picture is repugnant, but not revolting,—very remarkable in its characteristics, and yet exceedingly difficult of correct description. Either a feeble or an exaggerated outline could readily be drawn; but for a just appreciation it must be seen and studied. When first seen it presents the appearance of a low degree of imbecility, if not actual idiocy. And this impression is rather strengthened by the timidity and confusion with which she meets your first approach. And though it may be weakened by a lengthy conversation, it still returns, with more or less force, at the beginning of a subsequent interview. In all her interviews, except with intimate acquaintances, she exhibits an

embarrassment, not dissimilar to that manifested by children in the presence of strangers, or by timid persons generally in the presence of those superior to them in social position.

During the trial upon her insanity, Nancy maintained a silly expression of countenance, the utmost composure, and apparently the most perfect indifference to the proceedings. She sat playing with her fingers or biting her nails during the whole progress of the case, her attention being directed from the jury, the testimony, or the attorneys, on the least noise in any part of the court-room. And yet she noticed particularly all that was transpiring, and could subsequently converse with witnesses upon their statements, ask them for explanations of portions of their testimony, and point out what she considered the inaccuracies of the evidence.

To her disfigurement she was entirely reconciled, any allusion to it never annoying her. In dress she was said to be rather slovenly. She sought the company of children, to whom she was very kind, and seldom associated with persons of her own age. Her conversational powers were limited. She answered interrogations directly, but in short sentences, asked few questions, and seldom commenced a conversation. Such was the testimony upon the trial; but I have since found that it is true only in regard to strangers. On acquaintance, she commences and carries on conversations freely and with little, if any, embarrassment. Nor is she less inquisitive than most persons in her sphere of life. And whatever may have been her former habits, she is not now slovenly either in dress or in the performance of domestic duties. In fact, it was in evidence that she performed household duties with great care, cleanliness, and precision. She was susceptible of emotions, and easily influenced by others, becoming gay and lively, or serious and grave, according to the feelings manifested by the person engaged with her in conversation.

Her general character had always been that of a mild, kind, and affectionate girl—a careful, obedient, and faithful servant. During the poisoning of these five persons, a period of four months, her deportment furnished no grounds of suspicion; her disposition seemed to undergo no change; her manner excited attention only for its apparent fondness for those around her. To Mrs. Green she was apparently kind throughout. So attentive was she to this unsuspecting victim of a demoniacal conspiracy, that she won and retained her confidence to the last, and the sufferer finally expired in the arms—apparently in the affectionate embrace—of the insane or the malicious destroyer. To Mrs. Forest she betrayed no malice, except a slight, angry excitement for having to

do a part of her house-work over. Her conduct, other than this, was in accordance with her general character. During the sickness of the children, according to their father's testimony, "no mother could have shown more kindness (to them) than she did." Indeed, so very affectionate was she, that her attentions were frequently spoken of by the neighbors. For the death of Johnny she appeared very sorry; and on one occasion, while indulging her sorrow, a neighbor told her not to grieve, that she had done her duty towards the child. To this Mr. Forest gave his assent, saying, "Yes, she has done her duty." While James was ill she waited upon him with the greatest real or affected care and solicitude. She appeared, however, more excited when he died than when the others expired.

Of the non-medical witnesses whose testimony favored her insanity, one thought that she was of "a soft turn, and could easily be persuaded in any kind of way;" another did not "regard her as sensible as other girls;" another "always thought there was something lacking about her, she seemed so silly, soft;" another "never thought her quite sensible,"—that she had "a small touch of her mother's complaint;" another "never thought she was right," and had "heard her spoken of, years back, as a simple girl;" and another believed her "simple," and "used to ask her mother if she was wise." Besides the six witnesses referred to above, the jailor, who had charge of her for two years, considered her of "a weak and imbecile mind," but believed that she "knew it was wrong to take human life." The Judge of the Criminal Court of Hamilton County regarded her as "weak-minded, but not exactly an imbecile," and "thought she was not such a responsible being as to be a proper subject for punishment." Her attorney, from his frequent interviews with her since the poisoning, was fully convinced of her imbecility. He found her easily impressible by a superior will, and unable at any time to give an accurate history of herself, or furnish him with any information that would be of the least service to her on trial.

Of six medical witnesses whose testimony favored her insanity, three were reputable members of the regular profession, two were *eclectics*, and one a regularly educated physician, who has written a work in connection with an *eclectic*. The last, and one of the *eclectic* physicians testified from physiological and phrenological examinations. And each of these witnesses gave his evidence upon a single interview and conversation with the prisoner. Of the three regular physicians, one would not regard her "as low in the scale of imbecility if she escaped observation;" another thought "she was of a low grade of intellect," and that an "insane impulse" led her to the commission of the mur-

ders; the third believed "she would not pass muster with half the inmates of lunatic asylums in France and England." The two *eclectics* regarded her as an imbecile; and the other physician thought she was "partially both imbecile and idiotic," though he could only tell her impulses, disposition, &c., by the head, and not her insanity.

Eight non-medical witnesses who had been neighbors of Nancy, and who were acquainted with her before and during the period of the poisoning, did not believe her insane. Two of these had never entertained a doubt of her sanity; a third testified that she had never been treated as an imbecile by the neighbors; a fourth "always thought she had sense enough;" a fifth "noticed nothing weak-minded;" a sixth said she "appeared to have right sense;" a seventh did not think her insane, though her personal appearance was against her; the eighth first thought she was not of sound mind, but, after becoming acquainted with her, this impression was entirely removed. Besides these, the present jailor, who had been acquainted with her for two years, and had charge of her for two months, first thought her idiotic, but this opinion entirely changed on acquaintance with her. He testified that she "appeared as sensible as any person in the jail, and had a full knowledge of the responsibility of committing murder."

Six regular physicians testified, in substance, that upon first sight their impression was that she was an imbecile or idiot, but that this impression had been removed on subsequent conversation and acquaintance. One thought her sane; another had heard nothing in the testimony "that would lead him to think her insane;" another did not think her intellect lower than most persons in her station; another found that she possessed more intellect than at first appeared; another first believed her idiotic, but subsequent observation satisfied him that she was not; another regarded her, from appearance, as an imbecile, but was convinced afterwards, upon acquaintance, that though her intellect was of low grade, it would not come under that of imbecility,—that she had a full consciousness of right and wrong. Three of these physicians had been connected with the treatment of one or more of the victims; one had made the *post mortem* examinations, and had several conversations with the prisoner; one had visited her on two occasions, with the particular view of ascertaining her mental condition; one had her under his daily observation for more than a year; and all had infinitely better opportunities for ascertaining her intellectual development and mental soundness than the physicians who testified in favor of her insanity.

The jury deliberated eighteen hours, and returned a verdict finding "Nancy Farrer to be of unsound mind."

There is one remarkable fact in the testimony relating to her sanity or insanity. The first impression was the same in most of the witnesses. Almost without exception, every witness had formed an opinion, on the first interview with Nancy, that she was an imbecile or an idiot. But most of the witnesses who subsequently cultivated an acquaintance, or continued their interviews with her, had been forced to change this opinion.

To the medical jurist, this case certainly presents some points of interest. If Nancy Farrer is of "unsound mind," to what class of mental unsoundness does she belong? Is she an idiot, an imbecile, a monomaniac, or a maniac? Was she laboring under moral insanity, as described in the books, or was she the subject of homicidal monomania? If she is unquestionably and incurably insane, the verdict is not only just, but also affords protection to society, as her future home must then be a lunatic asylum. But if she is not insane, the community has much at stake. A verdict of insanity does not necessarily imply imprisonment for life. Under our laws, she may at any time be discharged upon the certificate of the attending physician that she has recovered the use of her reason, or that it is no longer necessary to confine her. And even without such certificate she may be set at liberty under a writ of *habeas corpus*, unless it be proven that she is still of unsound mind at the time of the application. Under the verdict, then, she may yet be released from the imprisonment of an asylum, and reinstated as a member of society. If her acts were the result of insanity, no injurious effects would probably follow this, as in that case she would have recovered. But if they were not insane acts, the lives of innocent individuals might again be jeopardized. Society, then, has a deep interest in the justice or injustice of the verdict.

There is certainly much in favor of her insanity. Her parentage, her personal appearance, her low degree of intellect, her education, her moral culture, her naturally amiable disposition, her previous good character, and some of the circumstances attending the poisoning, all tend, in some measure, to point to a mind so low in the scale of intelligence as to approximate to, if not to actually establish irresponsibility. But, on the other hand, there is a shrewdness and cunning in the execution of her designs, and the concealment of her agency, that are difficult to reconcile with an insane, and particularly with an imbecile mind.

Although there was a motive for the murder of Mrs. Green, there was none shown for that of the others. Yet it is possible that a motive, even stronger than the other, might have existed, although it has not come to light. In cases of homicide from insanity, there is generally a motive, though often a weak, and sometimes even an imaginary one.

Her uniform kindness and attention to the victims would appear to contradict the idea of malice. Yet such conduct would not be inconsistent with a sane mind. Might not a person of sound mind, who, from secret motive, had deliberately planned a series of murders upon persons against whom he had no individual ill will, continue, if not increase the appearance of kindness, to escape suspicion? On the other hand, do not the insane, susceptible of emotions as Nancy was, generally manifest a degree of hatred proportionate to the violence of the assault, however much they may have previously loved the victim? Do they, while perpetrating murder, exhibit their previous friendship, or does that friendship assume the form of enmity? If they enter upon the horrid crime of murder in such a manner as to require considerable time to elapse between the beginning and end of the tragedy, would they not exhibit some variation from their usual kindness, unless they had sufficient consciousness to continue it for the purpose of concealment? Nancy's kindness was so remarkable as to attract the attention of the neighbors. This might happen in the case of a sane but wicked mind, whose depravity might lead one to the murder of harmless and innocent little children.

Her frequent conversations and her prediction of the death of others would not be indicative of strong intellect. Very little reason would have revealed the folly and danger of such a course. And yet, how few there are who can conceal within their own bosoms so great a secret? It would almost seem to be a decree of Heaven that the horrid crime of murder should be exposed, and often by the very means resorted to for its concealment. Some of the shrewdest and most intelligent assassins, whose awful secret was confined to their own breasts and to their God, have not been able to conceal their guilt from human tribunals, and have been the unconscious instruments of their own exposure and condemnation. Blood, as pictured in Scottish tragedy by the great dramatic bard, will haunt the murderer, and even in the dead stillness of midnight, when nature is in repose, trumpet to the world by the very lips of the sleeping assassin the charge of guilt. It will be recollected that, before the first of these conversations was held, one innocent woman had received her death at Nancy's hands, and another had partaken of a dose of the fatal drug. In this first conversation she did not positively threaten; she "*thought* she would fix her," but concealed the fact that she had already entered upon the execution of her fearful design. To throw out absolute threats might betray her, but to conceal the nature of the act already commenced, and simply drop an unguarded word upon the subject most prominent in her mind, was no more than often happens with the most hardened criminals and the

strongest minds. In two other conversations which occurred before Mrs. Forest's death, she compared the sickness of the patient to that of Mrs. Green. There was no insanity in this. Mrs. Green had survived the first dose of arsenic two months, had received the attendance of two physicians and the consulting advice of a third, and had gone to her grave without the least suspicion of Nancy's agency in her death. Could she now impress the friends of Mrs. Forest with the belief that her disease was the same as that of Mrs. Green, she might await the result without any uneasiness of her own safety. Before her next conversation Mrs. Forest and her youngest child were added to the list of her victims. While making the shroud for the latter, she and the former servant girl had the first conversation about the deaths. She might, not unreasonably, now think herself secure. At least three persons had died through her instrumentality, and, so far as she knew, no suspicion of her guilt was harbored in the mind of any one.

It is certainly difficult to reconcile the subsequent conversations, in which she predicted the death of the remaining members of the Forest family, with sound intellect. They were not commenced by her, and the allusion to the deaths of those whom she had nursed, by others, might well have induced her to ponder upon her danger and halt in her career of destruction, had she possessed the most ordinary degree of intelligence. But it did not. She had formed a dreadful plot; a part had been executed, but still a portion remained unfinished. And with a blindness no less common among persons steeped in crime and hardened in vice than among monomaniacs bent upon a certain object, she determined to complete her work. In one of these conversations she predicted the death of James only, without giving any reasons; in the other, she not only predicted the death of the whole family, but stated the order in which they would die, and named consumption as the disease which would carry them to their graves. To attribute the predicted death of the children to a hereditary disease, by one who would overlook the manner in which phthisis terminates life, might not be inconsistent with sanity. That a person should even think this disease could be communicated by the wife to the husband, would not establish unsoundness of mind. I have met with persons who were fully convinced that they had contracted consumption from their partners in life, and have been consulted by others as to the probability of such an event. Whether the reason assigned for the fulfillment of her prophecy was such as might have been given by a sane person or not, it was undoubtedly evidence of a fixed determination on her part to conceal her own agency in the tragedy. These predictions are certainly the strongest evidences of insanity in the whole history of the

case ; and unless they might reasonably be expected to proceed, unconsciously, from a mind intensely absorbed in the contemplation of an intricate and horrid plot, they would go far to justify the verdict of the jury.

That she should make a pair of drawers and have a shirt washed before the death of James, to "lay out" the body in, is not surprising, when she knew the neighbors considered him dying of the same disease that carried off his mother and brother. Neither was it wonderful that she should grieve after their death. Remorse often rises and smites the guilty in the midst of crime, although it may not arrest the progress of their wickedness. The remark that the consulting physician in Mrs. Green's case was the best to have in that of James, betrayed no weakness of mind, in my opinion, as she had remained as free from suspicion after his visit as before. And the scene at the fireside, after she had been detected, might well have been presented by one accused of her fearful deeds, and who was so overpowered at the exposure as to be at a loss how to escape the difficulty in which she found herself.

Through the progress of the poisoning there is consciousness, design, cunning, concealment. The purchase of the arsenic under false pretences, and the subsequent denial of any knowledge of such an agent ; the care observed in preventing the use of the poisoned articles by others than those for whom they were designed ; the comparing of Mrs. Forest's sickness with that which in the case of Mrs. Green had excited no suspicion ; her contradictory statements, when interrogated by different parties, as to the cause and nature of the disease in some of the sufferers ; the apparent attempt to reconcile the symptoms of some of the patients with natural causes ; the studious concealment of her agency in all the conversations, except the secret one with Mrs. Bazley, and the careless one with the former servant girl ; the excitement and anxiety manifested after the discovery of arsenic in the stomachs of the diseased, and her suspected participation in their deaths ; the refusal, at the trial of Mrs. Bazley, to furnish any evidence that would implicate her in the murder of Mrs. Green, are indicative of a degree of intelligence that argues deliberation, determination, care, circumspection, consciousness of danger and knowledge of wrong. But does the manifestation of these qualities contradict the verdict of insanity ? The future development of undoubted insanity would throw little more light upon her case, as she is probably predisposed to the disease, and such an event might not unreasonably be expected. Is she now, or was she at the time these harmless women and children were sent to untimely graves, insane ? To determine this, an acquaintance with Nancy, a knowledge of her history and life, are all that is neces-

sary. With this acquaintance and knowledge, as furnished upon the trial, was Nancy Farrer, at the time of committing this outrage upon human life, an imbecile or a monomaniac? Was she laboring under moral mania or homicidal insanity? To what particular form, if any, of mental infirmity or disease did her case belong?

Note.—Since the above was written, Nancy Farrer has been under the care and daily observation of the writer for eight months. During that time she has been remarkable for cheerfulness, amiability, neatness and industry. She has proved herself cleanly in her person and habits; attentive to all her duties; faithful to every trust reposed in her; respectful to those under whose charge she has been placed; sympathizing in her feelings toward her unfortunate associates; obliging and kind, yet firm and resolute, to those she has been required to watch over. Blended with these traits in her character, appear to be those of sincerity, candor, frankness, and truth. She is grateful for kindness toward her; sensitive, with judgment to control her emotions; affectionate, without that familiarity and obtrusiveness that often characterize a weak mind. How, or in what manner, a life in society under other circumstances and other influences would affect these traits in her character, can only be a matter of conjecture. She has evidently desired the respect of those around her, and designedly studied to deserve it.

During the eight months she has been under the writer's observation, the closest scrutiny has been unable to detect the least evidence of mental weakness,—of intellectual or moral impairment. So far from being simple or imbecile, she has displayed an intelligence above the mediocrity of uneducated girls. Her mind has certainly been sound during that period; and yet it is difficult to reconcile the poisoning of so many innocent and harmless persons with her amiable, kind-hearted, and affectionate disposition, without supposing the presence, at the time, of an irrational motive or insane impulse. That she *now* has a full knowledge of the heinousness of murder, and a proper consciousness of the punishment due it, both in this life and the next, with the intellectual power of controlling all her actions, the writer cannot entertain a doubt.—*Western Lancet*.