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[FOR THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.]

ANALYSIS OF MADAME LAFARGE'S TRIAL, WITH REMARKS ON THE MEDICAL EVIDENCE,

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[THE proceedings at the trial of Madame Lafarge, for the murder of her husband, have excited an intense degree of interest, in consequence of the rank and sex of the accused, as well as the enormity of the crime laid to her charge, and the medical evidence has been contradictory in the extreme. We, therefore, feel pleasure in being able to lay before our readers the following valuable analysis of the evidence, but especially the medical testimony, accompanied by a few remarks from the pen of a gentleman who is peculiarly qualified for this delicate and difficult task. We believe, indeed, that this analysis and these observations will prove acceptable to our professional brethren, for many useful hints may be derived from a careful examination of the reports of this cause,—reports contained in several successive numbers of newspapers which many medical men have it not in their power conveniently to consult.—Eds.]

In order to attain quickly a clear notion of this perplexing case, it is requisite to bear in mind that three different groups of analysts gave in as many distinct reports. 1st, The medical men of Brives, Bourdon, Tournadour, and Lafosse, with Lespinatz, of Lubersac, and Massenat, of Paris; 2d, Messrs. Dupuytren and Dubois, of Limoges; 3d, Messrs. Orfila, Bussey, and Ollivier d'Angers. It should also be remembered that Mad. Lafarge, the mother, usually resided with her daughter, Mad. Buffieres.

We shall first relate the chemical evidence, and, reversing the order in which the reports were made, begin by succinctly describing the experiments and inferences communicated by M. Orfila; for these afford the strongest proof of a crime having been committed.

FIRST EXPERIMENT.

One quarter of the stomach, one half of the liquids contained in the stomach, and some liquid which had been vomited, having been returned by Messrs. Dupuytren and Dubois (who had not used them in their experiments), were mixed together and carbonized by means of nitric acid, in the manner suggested for the first time by

M. Orfila; * the carbonized mass was boiled with distilled water, the water was filtered, and the filtered fluid being introduced into Marsh's apparatus, yielded an inconsiderable portion of metallic arsenic.

The mass designated in the indictment (*procès verbaux*) as "the organs of the thorax and abdomen, the liver, part of the heart, and brain," which we, for brevity sake, shall call the visceral mass,—was now boiled for some hours in distilled water, and the decoction filtered so as to separate the undissolved portion from that which had been dissolved and had passed through the filter. The filtered fluid and the undissolved substance were then operated upon separately.

SECOND EXPERIMENT.

The fluid was reduced by evaporation nearly to dry matter; this matter was carbonized by means of nitric acid, and boiled with distilled water, which, being exposed to Marsh's apparatus, yielded arsenical crusts.

THIRD EXPERIMENT.

The undissolved portion was burnt for seven hours with nitrate of potass,—the macerated mass was treated by boiling in distilled water, and the water, being filtered, was submitted to Marsh's apparatus, when a remarkable quantity of arsenic was obtained, amounting to twelve times that procured by the preceding experiments.

Orfila and his associates did not discover arsenic in two pounds of muscular flesh taken from the thigh, in the winding-sheet, or in the earth surrounding the coffin, and concluded that the arsenic detected by them was not the portion naturally existing† in the human body, because this portion is to be found only in the bones. They, moreover, showed clearly that the metallic crusts were really arsenic.

This report, taken in connexion with the symptoms observed during the illness of M. Lafarge, will, we think, convince the most cautious medical jurist that the unfortunate man must have been poisoned by arsenic; nor can we suppose it will be of any avail to call in the aid of M. Raspail or others, to ascertain whether the arsenic could have been that naturally existing in the human frame, for even in the bones (and it can scarcely be doubted that it is

* Mémoire sur un nouveau procédé pour constater facilement dans nos organes la présence d'une préparation arsénicale, qui avait été absorbée. Ann. d'Hygiène, &c. vol. xxii. p. 431.

† See Mémoire sur l'arsenic naturellement contenu dans le corps de l'homme, lu à l'Académie Royale de Médecine, le 24 Sept. 1839. In this little essay, M. Orfila establishes—1st, That arsenic exists in "infinitely small" quantity in the bones of man and several of the mammalia; 2d, That it cannot be detected in the bones of man by the ordinary mode of analysis; 3d, That it can readily be extracted by Orfila's plan of carbonizing. M. Orfila's inferences may be depended upon, as many of his experiments were performed on large quantities of matter (8, 10, or 15 pounds).