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THE DEFENCE OF INSANITY IN MURDER CASES— DEMENTIA AMERICANA.

"The long nightmare of the Thaw trial" as it has been aptly called, has at length come to a close, and it is to be hoped that the daily papers will no longer be filled with the nauseating details of the case. Three months of time and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent without producing, so far as at present appears, any notable contribution to the elucidation of the knotty problems connected with the defence of insanity in murder cases. The trial will probably be longest remembered for the cynical boldness with which the counsel for the defence, after spending weeks in the examination of medical experts, and expressly disclaiming the intention of resting his case upon anything but the "written law," chose in the closing sentences of his long and impassioned address to the jury, practically to change his plea to one of justification, defining his client's insanity as a species, which though it may be unknown to "learned alienists," "has been recognized in every court in every State in this Union from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Texas." "It is," he tells the jury, "the species of insanity which if you desire to give it a name, I will ask you to label it 'dementia Americana'."

It is unnecessary to state in detail how the orator imported by the defence from the Pacific slope proceeded to elaborate his definition, the general scope of which may be gathered from the astounding peroration in which he spoke of his client as being "an instrument in the hands of Providence," and with that lack of good taste and reverence which are everywhere conspicuous in his address compared him to Jonathan who wrought "great salvation in Israel!"

The counsel for the prosecution, as might have been expected, commented in very severe and sarcastic terms upon this extra-