

Insanity in Its Legal Aspects

BY

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A Word with Alienists.

Early one morning a doctor and a policeman going along the street found a man lying opposite a store. Enquiry soon disclosed that he had a broken leg. To the medical man, the sufferer at once became the patient, but to the policeman, he remained only a possible burglar. To the doctor, it made no difference whether the man was the most hardened criminal in the world; his art and science are wholly at the disposal of a Bill Sykes as of a Seth Pecksniff or a Ned Cheeryble. To the policeman, it made no difference whether the stranger had one broken bone or fifty, whether there could be a cure without shortening or whether he could ever expect to walk with ease again. What the policeman was concerned with was, "had the man been breaking the law? and, if so, what was the available evidence?"

They both took part in conveying him to the hospital, the doctor that there might be a better chance of perfect recovery, the policeman that he might the better know where to put his hand upon the suspected. Had a clergyman happened along, he would probably have been anxious about the poor man's spiritual condition and the salvation of his soul; these to the physician were only of importance as they bore upon the treatment and prognosis (and that would be almost if not quite infinitesimal), while the policeman, as policeman, would care nothing about it at all, and would not be inquisitive even as to whether the