

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Narrow Escape of a French Alienist

Whilst engaged seeing fresh patients recently Dr. Charpentier, physician to the Bicêtre Asylum, Paris, had a wonderfully narrow escape from assassination. Soon after he had taken his seat a man, whose appearance afforded no indications of excitement, advanced to the table and said, "Good morning doctor, do you remember me?" "Yes," replied Dr. Charpentier, "you are Recq, a former—." The other, however, did not wait for the conclusion of the sentence. Raising his right hand, which hitherto he had kept concealed in his coat pocket, he aimed a revolver point blank at Dr. Charpentier, so that the muzzle almost touched his breast and fired. Happily the bullet impinged on the victim's sternum, which it failed to penetrate; while with admirable presence of mind M. Siegel, who was standing by, threw himself upon the would-be murderer and prevented him from discharging the other barrels of his weapon. The missile caused a contused wound with slight haemorrhage, and became flattened against the bone; but Dr. Charpentier was able to continue his service and

has not felt any bad effects. It seems that Recq was formerly an inmate at Bicêtre under Dr. Charpentier, and that he has also been confined in other asylums. When he was interrogated as to the motives that induced him to commit such a crime he replied with great coolness that he had been unjustly imprisoned and consequently wished to kill someone in order that attention being thereby drawn to his case he might obtain justice. The certificate, drawn up by Dr. Charpentier, on the strength of which Recq left Bicêtre in 1890, was couched in the following terms:—"A lunatic, persecuted, troublesome, who under the influence of prolonged sequestration has become calm, industrious, submissive; he has abandoned his frenzied ideas and seems to be actuated by good intentions. We are of opinion that he may be set at liberty, but we cannot affirm that he is free from risk of relapse, or that he may not again become dangerous."

Reference

Lancet, 27 February 1897, 630.

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