

Legal Matters.

"MATRONS' CHRONIC."

An extraordinary tale was told at an inquest held recently, at Brighton, by the Borough Coroner, Mr. J. E. Bush, concerning the death of a middle-aged woman, named Miss Mary Louisa Perkins. The Saturday previous Miss Perkins had committed suicide at the Nursing Establishment, at 95, Western-road, Brighton.

The deceased, it appeared from the statement of her nephew, a Mr. Perkins, of Croydon, had been subject to fits of depression and excitement, and about two years ago she attempted to take her life by swallowing laudanum. In June last she was admitted to the Nursing Establishment in Western-road, and the Matron was informed of her attempt to commit suicide.

The Matron of the establishment, Miss Annie Lloyd, bore out Mr. Perkin's statement as to the deceased being subject to fits of excitement and depression. It was true, too, that before she came to the Home the witness had been told she had tried to cut her throat with a pair of scissors. She seemed to get better until September, when she had a relapse, and on one occasion announced her intention of cutting her throat with a razor which she had upstairs. This razor witness took away from her. During the last fortnight, Miss Lloyd continued, these fits of depression and excitement grew somewhat more frequent, but she did not think it necessary to have Miss Perkins watched, except that she did not wish her to go out alone. After pointing out that her room and that of the deceased joined one another, the Matron said that shortly after ten o'clock she spoke to the deceased, but without going into her room. The deceased was then quieter than she had been. Having had a "wearing out" time lately and not wanting to be disturbed early in the morning, the witness let the housemaid occupy her room that night.

AMAZING ADMISSIONS.

"Early on Saturday morning, about 6.15 or 6.30," Miss Lloyd went on, "the maid came to my room and told me that Miss Perkins had said she had taken carbolic acid. I did not go to see her. I knew that she had often threatened to take it, and I also knew there was none in the house. The servant told me Miss Perkins had brought up a cup of oxalic acid, but that she (the servant) had thrown it away. I went down to my room between ten minutes and a quarter to seven, and deceased, hearing me, called out in a full, strong voice, 'Miss Lloyd, I have taken carbolic acid.' I said, 'Nonsense, Miss Perkins, there is no carbolic acid in the house.' About ten minutes later she said, 'I have taken carbolic acid, and am dying,' and I again said, 'Oh, nonsense, there is none in the house. You will have your tea directly, and you will be better after it.' The cook took her her tea between seven and five minutes past, and she came to me and said Miss Perkins was lying on the floor."

Amid exclamations of astonishment from the Jury, Miss Lloyd went on to say that she did not go into the deceased's room then, as the deceased often used to throw herself on the floor.

The Coroner: Didn't that rouse you?

"I asked her to have her tea," continued the witness, "and she gave no answer, and then I went in about 7.25. I saw the deceased lying on her side, and at once sent for the doctor. I knew at a glance she was dead, for I felt her pulse, and so on. Then Dr. Davis came and informed me she was dead."

In reply to questions, Miss Lloyd said that there was a small quantity of oxalic acid in the scullery, used for cleaning brasses. She considered Miss Perkins as a mental patient, and she had no other mental patients under her care.

A Juryman: Did you consider yourself responsible for patients under your care?

The Matron: Well, I should not consider myself responsible for a mental patient unless she was certified. I have no authority unless the patient is certified.

The Juryman: You were given notice when she was brought into your establishment that she had attempted to commit suicide. Would not that lead you to suppose that she might try again?

The Matron: Then I ought to have had the protection of her being certified.

In reply to a further question, Miss Lloyd said that the medical attendant of the deceased said that she was not of unsound mind. It was also stated that after Miss Perkins's attempt to take laudanum she had been examined by Dr. Savage, the great specialist, and he refused to certify her as out of her mind.

By another Juror: I had no real belief that she had attempted her life. My knowledge of such patients is that they never apprise you of what they are going to do. They do it secretly.

OH, IT'S HER WHIMS.

The housemaid who slept in the room next to that of the deceased, Mary Hughes, said that she complained to witness of pains early on Friday morning, and an hour later, about 4 o'clock, came into her room again, saying she was going to get some milk. Whether she got the milk or not the witness could not say. About a quarter-past six, when witness got up, deceased came into her room from the door leading from the passage, and said she had taken some carbolic acid and had got some more if that were not enough. The cup must have been filled with oxalic acid, and witness, after a struggle, succeeded in getting possession of it, and throwing it away. The witness did not believe that the deceased had taken poison, but she told the Matron of what she had said. The Matron said, "Oh, it's her whims," or something like that.

The medical man who had attended the deceased, Dr. Davis, of 35, Montpelier Road, said that he considered her as a mental patient. At times she wanted watching, but frequently when he visited her, she was perfectly sane. She went about like a sane person, and visited her friends. "I should look upon this as a very puzzling case, and it is only due to Miss Lloyd to say that she showed excessive kindness to this patient." He had since made a post-mortem examination, which showed that death was due to corrosive poisoning from oxalic acid.

In reply to further questions, Dr. Davis said they were trying to restore Miss Perkins to a state of mental health, and, in doing so, they wished to avoid all appearance of taking care of her.

The Coroner, in summing up, said that the Matron had known the full history of the case, and thus it seemed a most extraordinary thing that she had not taken more precautions. She had shown herself, utterly unfitted to be in an institution of this kind.

The jury, after some deliberation, returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, and, at the same time, desired the Coroner to censure Miss Lloyd.

In doing so, the Coroner told her she should have taken some steps to guard against the rash act which the deceased committed.

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