

Legal Matters.

THE HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TRAGEDY.

Not even a ripple of excitement moved the quiet little county town of Hertford on Saturday last, as one wended one's way to the Shire Hall. Yet within, justice was being administered by Mr. Justice Lawrance, one of the Justices of our Lord the King, assigned to deliver the Gaol of the said County; twelve good men and true were listening first to the Judge's Charge, and then anxiously deliberating as to whether true bills should or should not be returned in the several cases committed for trial; and out of sight nineteen accused persons, in poignant trouble, in the custody of the representatives of the law, were awaiting their summons to the dock to answer to charges varying from theft, criminal assault (of course), embezzlement, and uttering counterfeit coin, to manslaughter.

It was the second of the two charges of manslaughter in which the writer was interested, for as the nursing world knows, a young woman, first on the Coroner's warrant, and then on that of two magistrates, had been committed for trial on the shameful charge of "feloniously killing and slaying Edward Allmond at Hemel Hempstead." It is difficult to comprehend the distress of mind through which Nurse Bellamy must have passed during the last few weeks. First the shock of the death of the patient, then the inquest, followed by her committal on the charge of manslaughter, then her appearance before the Hemel Hempstead magistrates, and finally the journey to Hertford to await the summons to the presence of the Judge before the miscellaneous crowd which filled the Shire Hall, there to hear the whole terrible story discussed by counsel on either side, and to await the verdict of the jury.

The shadows, however, lifted somewhat after the Judge's Charge.

After dealing with the first charge of manslaughter, his Lordship said: As regarded the other manslaughter charge, it was preferred against a woman, May Rose Bellamy, who was charged with feloniously killing and slaying Edward Allmond. It appeared that Allmond was admitted to the Hemel Hempstead Workhouse, not into the Infirmary. After being there two or three days it was reported that he was unwell, and he was removed to the infirmary ward. It was stated that what he wanted was rest. He was treated by the nurse in charge in the usual way, having a bath as an ordinary inmate. Two or three days passed, and no notice was given of anything being untoward with the man, that was to say he was not suffering from any disease, or being medically prescribed for, or subjected to any peculiar treatment. No card intimating ill health was placed over his bed, nothing of the kind was done. The man remained over Sunday, when he seemed to have been taken unwell, and suffered from diarrhoea, becoming so dirty and filthy that the question arose as to whether he should have a bath. Now, had the man been under the doctor's orders, inquiries would have been instituted before a bath was administered, for no

one had a right to give a patient a bath without the consent of a doctor. No special information had been conveyed to the nurse, and she therefore handed the man over in a filthy state to the porter who was entrusted with taking the temperature, etc., and the man had the bath, the effect being such that on the same day he died. The doctor says the man was suffering from bronchitis, but no notice to that effect had been given. The question was whether Bellamy was guilty of culpable negligence in ordering an ordinary bath for this man. The doctor said that in all probability the bath accelerated the unfortunate man's death, but he repeated the question was entirely one as to whether, by reason of a fault in the system of the workhouse, or from any other cause, no notice having been given the nurses as to this man's condition, one of them caused his death by such personal negligence as would constitute a *prima facie* case of manslaughter against her.

The Grand Jury then retired, and Nurse Bellamy's friends were encouraged by the Charge of the Judge to hope for her eventual acquittal. The question was, would the Grand Jury throw out the bill, or would she still have to stand on trial.

After a considerable period had elapsed, during which a man who pleaded guilty to a charge of theft was tried and sentenced, and other business done, the Grand Jury filed into their box and were sworn in, each of the twelve jurymen taking the oath separately. Then the trials proceeded, business being suspended from time to time for a few minutes, when, from a gallery on the left hand of the Judge, there fluttered down to an official sitting directly below him, on the forked end of a long iron rod, a folded blue official sheet, on which was inscribed that a true bill had been returned against some prisoner, and the offence of which he was accused. This was read to the Court, and then the proceedings continued, as if there had been no break. When the folded paper on which the name of May Rose Bellamy was inscribed fluttered down there was a moment of suspense; then it was made known that the Grand Jury had returned no bill, and as the Crown offered no evidence against her, on the Coroner's Inquisition she was found not guilty.

Public opinion outside the Court heartily endorsed that of the Judge and Jury, and, indeed, within its precincts, when it rose for lunch, officials expressed themselves warmly in accord with the verdict.

Nurse Bellamy was fortunate in having as her legal advisers a firm of such high standing as Messrs. Kimbers and Boatman, of 79, Lombard Street, E.C., who were prepared with a complete defence, and who took the wise precaution of securing expert nursing opinion on the various points involved.

LEGAL DEFENCE FUND.

Contributions to assist Nurse Bellamy in defraying her legal expenses will be gladly received by the Rev. W. M. Aste, 1, Ballingdon Road, Battersea, S.W. We hope a generous response will be made to this appeal.

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