Conflict between Magistrates and Workhouse Authorities.

Wandering lunatics have had a hard time of it. They have been sent from pillar to post—from the workhouse to the magistrate, and from the magistrate to the workhouse—in a manner quite unprecedented, and with results very detrimental to the unfortunate lunatics. We hear of suicides in consequence, and of the insane being locked up in the cells of police stations till a decision is arrived at, the patients in some instances being found in a critical state next morning, as in the instance of Wise, the platelayer on the Great Western Railway. Here, the Acton relieving officer took the usual proceedings before the Court, and obtained an order for his admission into the workhouse at Isleworth. The authorities refused to admit him, and he was detained at the police-station in charge of constables. In the morning his condition was alarming; the divisional surgeon was sent for, and he found him labouring under apoplexy.

The immediate occasion of all this trouble is the judgment delivered by Mr. Justice Wills in the case of Hicks v. Bedford. The plaintiff was confined in the lunatic ward of the Marylebone Workhouse for a fortnight without the formalities required by the 16 and 17 Vict., c. 97, sec. 68, having been observed. The Judge merely gave effect to the strict letter of the law; the workhouse authorities following the customary practice in such cases. The patient was admitted, it will be remembered, with a medical certificate, but without any order from a magistrate. Hicks, of course, gained his action. The consequence was that many patients were at once discharged from workhouses, and, as we have said, many wandering lunatics were refused admission. A German waiter, Knabe, was brought to the Southwark Police Court belonging to this category, and labouring under acute mania. He was brought there because the officials at the workhouse had refused to admit him, on the ground that there was not a full compliance with the Act as laid down by Mr. Justice Wills. Mr. Lloyd, the surgeon to the Lambeth Infirmary, was undoubtedly justified and was prudent in advising that Knabe should not be admitted. Mr. Bridge, the magistrate, took a different view, and held that this case was not similar to that of Hicks. Subsequently Mr. Barker, the assistant-overseer in Lambeth parish, waited on Mr. Bridge. The former was accompanied by Mr. Fraser, the solicitor to the

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Guardians, and by Mr. Lloyd. The patient was admitted at Mr Barker's urgent request, and then sent to Brookwood. Mr. Barker had been to the Local Government Board, and was told that the Government would introduce a clause into the Lunacy Bill, making the law clear in regard to workhouses receiving patients.

It is satisfactory to find that this promise has been fulfilled, another proof that the Lord Chancellor is willing to introduce reasonable amendments into his Bill.

The following is the clause referring to the

Removal of a Lunatic to Workhouse in Cases of Urgency.

"Clause 12:—

"Where a constable, relieving officer, or overseer has knowledge that there is within the limits of his jurisdiction a person alleged to be a lunatic, for whose immediate care and maintenance relief appears to be requisite, and the constable, relieving officer, or overseer is satisfied that it is urgently necessary for the welfare of the alleged lunatic, or for the public safety, that the alleged lunatic should be forthwith placed under care and treatment, the constable, relieving officer, or overseer may remove the alleged lunatic to the workhouse of the Union in which the alleged lunatic is, and the master of the workhouse shall, unless there is no proper accommodation in the workhouse for the alleged lunatic, receive and relieve and detain him therein; but no person shall be so detained for more than forty-eight hours, unless in the meantime the provisions of this Act relating to the detention of lunatics in workhouses have been complied with."

See also Clauses 13 and 14.

The above gives ample opportunities for the examination of lunatics in workhouses. Other clauses (Clauses 5 and 10) give clear instructions to constables and relieving officers how to proceed in the case (1) of lunatics not under proper control or care, and cruelly treated or neglected; and (2) in regard to lunatics dangerous to public order.

Suicides in England and Wales.

We have often had occasion to observe that on this important subject the ideas prevalent in even the medical profession are to the last degree indefinite, and that very few have taken the trouble to obtain information based upon reliable statistics. It is one in which, at any rate, the statistical method of enquiry can be pursued with success;

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