

"A PRIVATE HEALTH ESTABLISHMENT."

The *British Medical Journal* of the 2nd March extracts from the *Caterham Chronicle*, etc., the following particulars of an inquest recently held near Limpsfield concerning the death by suicide of a lady in "a private health establishment" kept by Dr. and Mrs. Sherard. The deceased had been found strangled in bed.

In his evidence, her husband stated that she had seemed better on Sunday, January 20th, and it was arranged she should come to her home on the following Tuesday; but on that day she telegraphed that she thought she had better not come, and wrote a letter to her sister in which she said she felt very bad, and added, "they tell me I'm delivered, though I don't feel it. . . . I wish I could enter into the news about the Queen. Pray for me; forgive all that has passed. Am sorry for my ingratitude." On the following Sunday, a few minutes after arriving to see his wife, he was called upstairs by Mrs. Sherard, who said his wife had a piece of string around her neck. The medical man then called in to see the deceased gave evidence that, in his opinion, the cause of death was strangulation; there were purple lines round her throat, which might have been caused by string; the weight of the head was sufficient to cause strangulation.

In his evidence, Dr. Sherard is reported to have stated that when the deceased came to him "there was no condition made as to her being a patient; she came as a sort of visitor—"

"Do you have any sort of arrangement as to payment?—No arrangement at all.

Of course you expect to get some return?—No doubt Mr. R— may pay. I should think it very likely.

You are dependent upon his generosity, are you?—No; I have not thought about it.

Then you are really going to charge him?—I have never thought about it. No; I do not think so. People give me sums when they are cured.

Have you ever noticed any suicidal tendency in the deceased?—Once I heard her speak of the depression she had.

Was there extra supervision in consequence?—No; there was always the same supervision.

Although she had threatened to commit suicide?—I never heard her threaten to commit suicide. She said she felt disposed to. I always knew that would be the line she would probably take.

A person in that condition, do not you think, would want more looking after than other people?—You cannot do it. You cannot look after a person all day. Of course I had a companion with her—"

Again, at the adjourned inquest:

"You say that something was bearing on Mrs. R—'s mind, and yet you could not certify her as insane?—That is so. She said to me once, 'I feel so bad that I feel I must commit suicide.' However, she made no attempt, and I could not take the statement as a sufficient reason that she was insane. This was two weeks before her death."

The verdict of the jury was "That the deceased committed suicide by strangulation whilst of unsound mind."

In summing up, the Deputy Coroner remarked that some of the witnesses had given their evidence in a way they ought not to have done (indeed, this led to several scenes in the court during the evidence of the husband and Mr. and Mrs. Sherard); and added that it was possible the Commissioners in Lunacy might institute an inquiry.

The above extracts speak with no uncertain sound. From part of the evidence it appears that this is not the first time that a patient under the same care has committed suicide. In view of the remark of the Deputy Coroner concerning the possible inquiry by the Commissioners in Lunacy, we refrain from comment.

The powers and means of the Commissioners for inquiry into, and, if necessary, regulating the care and treatment of persons mentally affected, require to be strengthened.