

*The Carmarthen Matron.*

At the Carmarthen Borough Police-court, on Monday, 26th August last, before the Mayor (E. B. Jones, Esq.), J. Bagnall, Esq., and Dr. Lewis, Miss E. H. Lewis, the matron of the Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum, situate near Carmarthen, appeared in answer to a summons charging her with having unlawfully assaulted, on 1st of August last, a lunatic patient confined in that asylum.

The particulars of this case as they appear in the 'Carmarthen Journal' are of a very painful nature. It is hardly conceivable that such a thing could possibly have occurred in the present day in one of our much and justly lauded public asylums; and it is certainly unique in the records of lunacy for the last twenty years. It cannot be wondered at if ordinary attendants, ill-educated and often men who have failed in life in other respects, do occasionally, under the great provocations to which they are subjected, so far forget themselves as to strike or abuse a patient entrusted to their charge; but that one of the chief officers of a county asylum, who had previously held an appointment in one of our most modern and best English county asylums, could so far forget all sense of decency and humanity as to allow four nurses to hold a patient down whilst she proceeded to chastise her with a stick a yard long, procured from a neighbouring hedge for the purpose, is indeed incomprehensible, and most mortifying to all disciples of the gentle teachings of Conolly and Pinel.

The facts of this case, as given in evidence by the medical superintendent, the assistant medical officer, and four nurses, appear to be much as follow:—On the 1st of August last two patients, named Jones and Bowers, began quarrelling, and on a nurse going to interfere Bowers struck her; Miss Lewis then came up, and on Bowers trying to strike her she ordered the nurses to take her to bed. Bowers then became very violent, and it required four nurses besides Miss Lewis to undress her. Bowers had hold of Miss Lewis during the scene, and Miss Lewis struck her twice, in self-defence one nurse says, and in struggling to get from Bower's grasp her jacket was torn. "After Bowers was in bed Miss Lewis struck her several times with her fist on the chest; she then went out, brought back a bunch of keys, and knocked Bowers with them across the thighs until blood came. Then she went out again, brought in with her a stick out of the hedge, and about the size of a walking-stick, and beat Bowers with it across her thighs, legs, and back." When they were about to leave the room poor Bowers sat up in bed and asked Miss Lewis to give her a kiss. But instead of doing so, it was said that she turned back, kicked the patient twice in her stomach, spat

in her face, and called her a nasty old brute. On the 4th of August one of the nurses reported this circumstance to the medical superintendent, Mr. Wilton, who immediately examined Bowers, and "found that she was extensively bruised on the front and back part of both thighs, that there was a slight bruise on each calf, a slight mark across the lower part of the loins, and a bruise on the lower part of the chest, but that was a very slight one." The above facts were sworn to positively by the four nurses, and the counsel for Miss Lewis did not venture, apparently, to cross-examine them.

For the defence Miss Lewis's counsel said—"I have been instructed by Miss Lewis to plead guilty of having assaulted that unfortunate woman, Miss Bowers, and at the same time to say that she is exceedingly sorry that anything of this kind has happened. However, as you have seen by the evidence, there was a cause of provocation, and Miss Lewis lost her temper. She cannot further account for it, and very much regrets her fault. But whilst admitting so much, Miss Lewis yet denies that she spat in the woman's face, or kicked her, or called her a nasty brute. She has, however, now put herself into this sad difficulty, and I can only leave the case in your hands, hoping that you will deal with her as leniently as possible."

In answer to the bench, Mr. Hughes, the clerk to the magistrates, stated that Miss Lewis had been suspended from her duties and would be dismissed from her post. The mayor, addressing Miss Lewis, then told her the magistrates had concluded to fine her £10 and costs, with the alternative of three months' imprisonment.

It was thus clearly proved, even by Miss Lewis's own confession, that she was guilty of an assault on a lunatic with a stick, and we were hardly prepared, therefore, to find the clerk to the visitors, who appeared to prosecute on their behalf, endeavouring, during the inquiry, to excuse Miss Lewis's conduct and to obtain a mitigation of her sentence by expatiating on her great sorrow and contrition for what she had done, and the excellent testimonial she brought with her from the Cambridge Asylum. Such conduct as she had been guilty of surely deserved severe punishment; she was the senior female officer, had had considerable experience in the proper treatment of the insane, and was, it may be presumed, a person of education. Had the offender been a poor, rough, uneducated country girl, there would have been more reason for showing mercy. But, perhaps, the most surprising part of the affair was the fact that four women could be found in the limited sphere of a small lunatic asylum, so lost to all sense of common fairplay, as to be willing, not only to witness, but even partially to assist at such a disgraceful scene without interfering, or reporting the subject until four days afterwards.