

## A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

### Wandering Lunatics

As reported in the *Daily News* of May 18th, the case of a wandering lunatic was brought before Mr. Haden Corser, the magistrate at Dalston Police-court, on the previous day. The magistrate took exception to the police order on this subject conveying the instruction "that all wandering lunatics are to be taken before a police magistrate and charged"; and he said they should go first to the workhouse and be examined by the doctors before coming to the police-court. Inspector McCarthy said the workhouse authorities were not bound to take lunacy cases from the police. The magistrate put the following remarks upon the charge sheet: "It appears to me that the police order as to wandering lunatics is inconvenient. There is a discretion in which persons so wandering could be taken to the workhouse under the Lunacy Amendment Act, 1885, when a person brought before a justice charged with wandering, and the justice has no medical evidence, but must commit for examination to the workhouse. In my opinion their examination ought to be made there in the first instance." It may well be that a magistrate under such circumstances feels that he is somewhat in a fix; for either he ought to constitute himself a judge of the insanity of the individual, and deal with the case in accordance with the conclusion at which he arrives, or else he must remand the alleged lunatic until a medical examination has been made as to the state of

his mind, and this is a cumbrous mode of procedure. A magistrate is well advised in refusing to take upon himself the responsibility of a decision in such cases. Mr. Haden Corser thinks the wandering lunatic ought to be taken to the workhouse for examination by the doctor there before he is taken into court. While we agree that a medical examination of the man ought to be made before he is brought into court, we think the medical officer of the police division is the proper person to make the examination at this stage. So long as the case is a police case, the investigation ought to be carried out by the police officials.

This course is not only advisable in itself as a matter of routine, but it would have the further merit of relieving the workhouse official of the invidious duty of having to certify to the insanity of an individual who, upon that certificate, would very likely be relegated to his care as a lunatic. The confinement of a lunatic in the workhouse at which the certificate of insanity was granted would scarcely fail to set up a feeling of irritation and of antagonism against the authorities there, which would be avoided if the primary certificate were to be signed by the police medical officer of the district.

### Reference

*The Lancet*, 1 June 1889, 1100.

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