

PARLIAMENTARY INTELLIGENCE.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Suicides.

Sir Matthew White Ridley, in reply to Mr. William Corbett, said he was not aware that any useful purpose would be served by continuing the return as to the insane who committed suicide which was granted last year, and as it proved a very troublesome one to prepare he was afraid he must decline to do it. The number of insane persons generally who committed suicide would, of course, appear in the judicial statistics in the ordinary way.

Reformatories for Inebriates.

The Home Secretary, in response to Mr. Hobhouse, said—I cannot say when the Bill for the establishment of reformatories for inebriates is likely to be introduced. The Bill has been for some time in a forward state, but there are still remaining some important points which require to be settled.

The Case of Mrs. Beggs.

Mr. Murnaghan asked the Secretary for Ireland whether his attention had been called to the verdict of the coroner's jury recently given at Belfast at the inquest on the body of Mrs. Beggs, who died in the Belfast Lunatic Asylum. Whether he was aware that the eminent doctor who conducted the post-mortem examination found a number of her ribs and breast bone broken, and that the jury found that the bones were not broken at the time she was taken from her home to the asylum. Whether the doctors of the asylum had at any time, and, if so, at what date, discovered that her bones were broken. And whether, considering the facts disclosed at the inquest, the Government would, in the interests of inmates of Lunatic Asylums, have further enquiry made into the matter?—Mr G. Balfour, in reply, said that the facts were as stated in the first and second paragraphs of the question. The verdict of the coroner's jury was that the injuries were not received at the patient's house, and that there was no evidence to show when and how they had been received. Deceased was admitted to the asylum on January 5th, and on January 21st the asylum doctors discovered the injuries. An enquiry had been held into the matter by the Inspectors of Lunatic Asylums, who would forward their report to the Board of Governors of Asylums.

Private Lunatic Asylums.

Mr. Field asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any regular inspection regarding the management of private Lunatic Asylums and their inmates was made and reported on by responsible Government officials; and whether the system and working of Private Lunatic Asylums would be inquired into and reported to the House.—Sir Matthew White Ridley replied that all licensed houses were regularly visited by the Lunacy Commissioners—those in the metropolitan area six times a year, and those outside that area twice. The latter are also visited six times a year by three justices and a medical practitioner appointed for the purpose by Quarter Sessions. He was not aware of any necessity for such an enquiry as the hon. member suggested.

Beri-Beri in an Irish Asylum.

Dr. Carew asked the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland whether his attention had been called to the present alarming condition of the Richmond Lunatic Asylum in Dublin; whether he was aware that, with accommodation available for only 1,000 patients, 1,714 were housed there in October last, and that in consequence of this over-crowding, beri-beri, a loathsome disease hitherto confined to the densely populated and filthy quarters of Chinese and other Eastern cities, has appeared, and of 113 patients attacked last year seven died up to December last; would he explain why, notwithstanding the repeated protests of two of the members of the Board of Control against overcrowding, no practical steps had been taken by that body to stamp out the disease, and whether, in the circumstances, the Government would see that immediate precautions were taken to prevent its spreading.—Mr. Gerald Balfour replied that the Irish Government

had been giving close and constant attention to the accommodation at the Richmond District Asylum and to the outbreak of beri-beri there. The number of patients on the asylum register at the end of 1896 was 1,728, of whom 59 were at Portrane. The present accommodation of the Richmond Asylum was for 1,993 patients, in addition to which provision had been made for 80 patients at Portrane and for 40 in the residence of the Resident Medical Superintendent (surrendered for that purpose), thus bringing up the present accommodation to 1,518. Further temporary accommodation for 220 patients was now being provided at Portrane. The number of deaths from beri-beri at Richmond during 1896 was eight, as against 123 deaths from various other causes. He might observe that the general death-rates in this asylum for 1895 and 1896 were the lowest recorded since the opening of the asylum. In 1895 the percentage of deaths from all causes was only 7.1 and in 1896 7.8, and comparing these rates with the death-rates in the principal English Asylums during 1896 he found that, with two exceptions, the rates in the English Asylums were much higher than at Richmond. Every effort had been, and was being, made by the Board of Control to stamp out the disease known as beri-beri and to provide adequate accommodation for the patients.—Mr. Carson (Dublin University): Is it proposed to make any permanent enlargement of the asylum? The right hon. gentleman spoke of a "temporary arrangement."—Mr. Gerald Balfour: I understand that a private Bill is in course of preparation or of being passed through the House for the purpose.

Proposed Conference on Insanity.

Mr. William Corbet has given the following notice of motion, viz.: "To call attention to the annually increasing numbers of the insane not only in the United Kingdom, but in every civilised country of the world; and to move that it is desirable in the interests of humanity that steps shall be taken to convene an International Conference to enquire into the cause of such increase and to report whether any and what measures can be adopted to arrest the spread of the disease."

Children in the Darent Asylum.

Mr. Chaplin, in reply to Mr. Pickersgill, said—I am informed that there are no children in the Darent Asylum who are feeble-minded but not imbecile. The children at the asylum are legally paupers. It is not the intention to remove the children from there.

Lunacy in England and Wales.

The Home Secretary, replying to Mr. Hobhouse, said—The enquiry into the causes of the increase of lunacy in England and Wales has been made, and the report laid on the table of the House. I am informed that copies of the report will be delivered almost immediately.

Lunatics and the Irish Workhouse.

Mr. Clancy asked the Secretary for Ireland whether he had received a copy of a resolution of the Rathdown Board of Guardians as to the insufficiency of accommodation for children and the lunatic poor in the Rathdown Union Workhouse and other workhouses in Ireland; whether it was the intention of the Government to comply with the wish expressed in that resolution that legislation should be proposed at an early date dealing with that subject; and, whether the Government intended to reintroduce, and make an effort to pass into law, this Session its Bill of last Session dealing with the reform of workhouse management and the amalgamation of unions.—Mr. G. Balfour: The reply to each of the three paragraphs of this question is in the affirmative.

Irish Lunatic Asylums and the Board of Control.

In reply to Mr. Shee, Mr. G. Balfour said that the whole question of Lunacy Administration in Ireland was one requiring attention, though he could not promise that he would be able to deal with the matter in the immediate future. The fullest opportunity was uniformly afforded the local authorities to submit their views on any plans proposed for improved or increased accommodation, and these views receive the most careful consideration of the Board of Control, with the utmost desire to adopt them, so far as might be found practicable.

Habitual Offenders in Scotland.

Sir Charles Cameron gave notice that on this day four weeks he would call attention to the Report of the Departmental Committee on habitual offenders in Scotland, and move a resolution.

ABSTRACT OF THE LUNACY ACTS AMENDMENT BILL, 1897.

Section 1.—(1.) In subsection six of section eleven of the principal Act (which limits the time during which an urgency order is to remain in force) “four days” shall be substituted for “seven days.”

(2.) “Every urgency order shall be accompanied by a statement, to be made and signed by the person who signs the urgency order, and by the medical practitioner who signs the medical certificate on which the urgency order is founded, that it is necessary for the safety and proper treatment of the alleged lunatic or for the safety of others, that he should be forthwith placed under care and treatment, and showing fully and specifically the reasons why an urgency order is required.”

“Section 2.—(1.) It shall be sufficient for the purposes of section eight of the principal Act, that a patient be taken before or visited by the judicial authority who made the order for his reception as a patient.”

(2, 3, 4.) Provide that any person who is *ex-officio* a Justice of the Peace may be appointed as a “Judicial Authority”; that lists of the names and addresses of Justices appointed to act (sec. ten) shall be sent to the Commissioners and Masters in Lunacy and that no fees shall be payable for proceedings before a “Judicial Authority.”

Section 3.—Provides that the asylum need not be named in a reception order when there is more than one asylum in a county or borough.

Section 4.—Refers to the suspension of summary reception orders.

Disqualifications for Signing Medical Certificates.

“Section 5.—Whereas it is expedient to extend the disqualifications for signing medical certificates in support of a petition for a reception order, there shall be added to the end of subsection one of section thirty-two of the principal Act, the words, ‘(e) The person who makes the reception order,’ and at the end of subsection three of the same section the words, ‘or any officer or servant in the employment of such committee, or in a licensed house under an order made on the application of or under a certificate signed by a licensee of any licensed house, or any person in the employment of any such licensee.’”

Section 6.—Provides that particulars are to be specified in case of leave of absence of patient for health.

Section 7.—Makes sections sixty-four, sixty-five and (sub-section six of) one hundred and five of the principal Act apply to Borough Asylums.

Section 8.—Facilitates the removal of a lunatic from a Workhouse by a justice of the area from which the lunatic was sent.

Jurisdiction in Cases of Small Property.

“Section 9.—(1.) If it is proved to the satisfaction of a Judge of County Courts that a person within the District of that Judge is of unsound mind and incapable of managing his affairs, or is through mental infirmity arising from disease or age incapable of managing his affairs, and that his property does not exceed five hundred pounds in value, or that his income does not exceed fifty pounds a year, the Judge may, in relation to that person, exercise all the powers (relating to the management and administration of property) which are by sections one hundred and sixteen to one hundred and thirty of the principal Act conferred upon the Judge and Masters in Lunacy.

(2.) The jurisdiction conferred by sections one hundred and thirty-two and three hundred of the principal Act on a Judge of County Courts may be exercised also by a Court of Summary Jurisdiction.”

Section 11.—Extends the power given by section two hundred and five in regard to special enquiries as to the care and treatment of lunatics, &c., and gives power of fine up to fifty pounds for non-compliance with an order to attend such enquiry.