

One hundred years ago

The keeping of lunatics in unlicensed houses

ON Saturday, Oct. 4th, Sarah Roach was charged at the North London Police-court with receiving certain lunatics in an unlicensed house and was fined £20 on one charge and £5 on another, with five guineas costs. The credit of putting an end to a disgraceful scandal belongs entirely to our contemporary *Truth*. In the issue of *Truth* of May 29th there appeared a striking article entitled "Nursing Home or Hell", a record of horrors written with a forcible precision that could not fail to arrest attention. As a result of this article the Commissioners in Lunacy communicated with the editor of *Truth*, who at once gave them all the

evidence which he had collected as to the condition of the Alexandra Nursing Home, the "hell" in question, and of the inmates thereof. On June 20th two of the Commissioners in Lunacy, Dr. E. M. Cooke and Mr. Charles Bagot, visited the "Home", and after what they saw the law was set in motion. It moved with its usual dignified pace, so that Sarah Roach did not find herself in a police-court until Oct. 4th, and having got there she escaped, it seems to us, with a light penalty. The serious thing about the case is that there were in all 11 patients in the "Home"; of these nine showed signs of mental derangement but two only were bad enough to be certified as lunatics. In the cases of these two proceedings were taken and legal penalties were exacted, but

if no patient had been certifiable the law would have been powerless against Sarah Roach, except, possibly, as regards some sanitary defaults. This should not be. As *Truth* has remarked in commenting upon the case later, it is only too common for families to be burdened with aged or afflicted relatives of whom they are glad to be rid by boarding them out at the cheapest rate. We have no doubt that the Alexandra Nursing Home is not the only retreat of the kind where helpless senility falls in a terrible environment to a miserable grave.

REFERENCE

Lancet, 18 October 1902, 1069.

Researched by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Epsom, Surrey

Corrigendum

Seasonal variation in suicides: hidden not vanished (letter). *BJP*, 178, 380. The third

sentence of the second paragraph should read: "In this study ($n=2830$) we confirmed

the absence of a seasonal pattern in suicide rates as observed in 28-day intervals".