

ASYLUMS.

Auckland Asylum.—The number of patients in this asylum on the 1st January was 229—156 males and 73 females. During the year 85 were admitted—59 males and 26 females—9 of the males and of the females being readmissions; and the total number under treatment was 314—215 males and 99 females. Of these, 25 males and 15 females were discharged as recovered, 12 males and 4 females as relieved; 15 males and 1 female died; and there remained at the end of the year 173 males and 79 females: in all 252, or an increase of 23. The recoveries give a percentage of 47 on the admissions, and the deaths a percentage of 6·83 on the average number resident. Of the 16 deaths which occurred, 8 were due to cerebral, 3 to thoracic, 4 to abdominal disease, and 1 to gangrene of the foot. My last visit to the asylum was in August, when I reported on it as follows:—

I inspected the asylum at Whau, at present entirely occupied by the male patients, on the 17th, 18th, and 20th August; and the old hospital, in which the females are temporarily located, on the 19th and 24th August. There are now 165 male and 70 female patients, exclusive of 6 males and 3 females absent on trial. The men's quarters, being intended for only fifty patients, are exceedingly crowded; and their sleeping-room has to be supplemented by using as such the chapel, day-rooms, corridors, and part of the Superintendent's house, and for their use during the day there is only one room and a corridor. Great discomfort and difficulty of management result from this state of matters. When the new wing is ready for the men—which, apparently, it will not be till December, although, according to contract, it should have been finished in May—their condition will be much improved, and so will that of the women, who will then be removed from the old hospital to the wing of the asylum now occupied by the men. There will still, however, be a great deficiency of accommodation for the men, whose numbers have much increased within the last two years; and it will be necessary, not only to retain the chapel for their use as a dormitory, but also, as proposed by the Superintendent, to reserve for the same purpose a row of six apartments (intended for officers and servants) which open on to the passage from the chapel to the upper female wards, as well as a room in his own house, and a large day-room on the ground-floor of the new wing. By making these extremely inconvenient arrangements it will be possible to house the present number of patients, and no more. But, if they continue to increase (and what hope is there that they will not?), due regard for their health and proper treatment will render it imperative to extend their accommodation. It will be better to do this, not by adding to the present expensive building, but by erecting a plain substantial wooden one, for quiet, industrious patients, on the recently-acquired farm. By adopting this course much needless expenditure on buildings will be avoided, and the well-being of the patients will in no respect suffer. In the meantime it would be advisable for the Superintendent to endeavour to arrange for the removal of some of the harmless and incurable patients, whose state of mind is not such as to require or benefit by asylum treatment. The mere fact that a person is insane is no sufficient reason for keeping him in an asylum. Any patient having so far recovered that he could be liberated without risk of injury to himself or others should be discharged. On no principle is his further detention justifiable. There are, unfortunately, not the same facilities or inducements for the removal of harmless incurable patients from asylums as exist in Britain. There is no watchful local authority to grudge useless expense, and undertake to provide for inoffensive imbeciles in the absence of relations able or willing to support them. But it would probably be found, on inquiry, that several such patients now in the asylum have relations able and legally bound to maintain them, and who, upon being called upon to do so, would rather take them home. It is matter of common remark at every asylum in the colony that no unnecessary delay occurs in the removal of harmless patients when their maintenance is paid for by their friends. On the other hand, nothing is more natural than that selfish or mean-spirited people should be contented to leave their feeble-minded dependants in a public institution, provided they can do so at no cost to themselves. The growing number of inmates in this asylum is not so much owing to the increase of the admissions as to a falling-off in the relative proportion of the discharges. In 1876 there were 56 admissions and 53 removals, leaving an increase of 3; in 1877, 56 admissions and 36 removals, leaving an increase of 20; in 1878, 73 admissions and 58 removals, leaving an increase of 15; in 1879, 79 admissions and 46 removals, leaving an increase of 33. This does not admit of any remedy if incurable cases are not removed. It appears that payments towards maintenance are only made on account of 27 out of the 235 patients now in the asylum. In only two cases does the amount paid cover the entire cost of maintenance, which is over £29 per annum. In some of the others the sums contributed are got with difficulty, and are hardly worth collecting. In two cases, 12s. a week is paid; in fourteen, 10s. 6d.; in one, 10s.; in another, 7s. 6d.; in six, 6s.; in one, 3s.; and in two others, 2s. 6d. The Relieving Officer who collects these sums states that in some cases the persons who pay them are in a position to afford much more. Since last inspection a large part of the asylum has been internally painted by asylum labour, and the work has been very well done. The wards are very clean and in good order; they are, however, still almost entirely without furniture, and have a bare uncomfortable look. At present there is simply no room for furniture owing to the excessive crowding. A great deal of the plaster of the restored portion of the asylum is disfigured by innumerable blisters which have broken out on the surface. This result of bad workmanship should be put right as soon as possible, so that the patients may get on with the painting of the walls. Very good wooden beds have been got for the dormitories, but many of the surplus patients are still unavoidably placed on "shakedown," and this, especially in the day-rooms, leads to rapid spoiling of the bedding. The patients, both male and female, are as a rule very quiet and orderly. Their clothing is in good condition, and due attention is paid to cleanliness. The general health is good. One female is at present wearing a camisole during the night on account of her unflinching determination to commit suicide, but restraint and seclusion appear to be used only on rare occasions. Two paralytic patients, an old man and an idiot child, were found in bed. Some 26 of the women are restricted for exercise to the small airing-yard attached to the old hospital; the others enjoy the use of the pleasant grounds in the vicinity. Generally about 80 of the men have latterly been confined to their two airing-courts, but during the summer months the number so confined was much less, varying from 20 to 30, and the others got the full benefit of the extensive grounds now belonging to the asylum. About 70 men are entered in the journal as industrially employed in various ways, and of that number from 30 to 35 work in the farm and garden. Unless there is something very unusual about the patients in this asylum—the result, perhaps, of their having been so long confined to the airing-courts—it should be possible to induce a much larger number of them to engage in outdoor work. It is extremely gratifying to see the increased attention which is now paid to industrial employment, and the good effect which it has on the patients; but steady perseverance will probably produce still better results. The percentage of male patients industrially occupied is about 42; whereas in the asylum at "Sleepy Hollow" it is about 88. What is the cause of the difference? Upwards of 40 of the women appear to be generally employed—26 in needlework, and the rest in the kitchen and wards. A large number of both sexes are very helpless, 26 men and 17 women being registered as "unable to wash, dress, or feed themselves," and 12 men and 6 women as being of dirty habits. The patients are now supplied with knives and forks, and eat their meals in a civilized manner. Their food is abundant, but in the male department there is a great sameness in the cooking, the meat being almost invariably boiled, whereas the women have theirs roasted or baked three or four days in the week. The farm has already proved an immense acquisition to the asylum by allowing the patients to have abundance of open-air exercise, and affording the means of interesting and healthy employment. Hitherto it has all been in grass; at present eight and a half acres are being sowed with potatoes, three with oats, and two with mangold, turnips, and carrots; four more are being cleared of stones, fenced, and got ready for the plough, and about an acre is being added to the vegetable garden. As yet only five cows have been got, but it would require about fifteen fully to supply the wants of the asylum. There is far more than sufficient food for that number, and meantime milk is being bought. Dr. Young appears to have secured the services of an experienced and hard-working overseer, in whose capacity to manage the farm in an economical manner confidence may be placed. It would be well to give him a good deal of liberty of action, and endeavour to manage this farm as little as possible from Wellington. The condition of the principal airing-court has been much improved by laying down fresh scoria; and the closets and urinals situate in it, which, from their construction, used to be an insufferable nuisance, have been altered and put in much better order. The sewage is now collected into a drain which passes through the kitchen garden, and admits of its being utilized or not, according as may be desired. The old piggery, whose proximity