

DEATHS.

73 males and 22 females, in all 95, died during the year 1885. No death occurred from any infectious disease. One man, who had committed two murders, succeeded in strangling himself by attaching a piece of linen to the sash-cord of an ill-constructed shutter in his single room. An epileptic male patient was drowned by accidentally falling into a shallow stream during a fit. A third male lunatic, during a struggle with a fellow patient, sustained a fatal rupture of the kidney. All the other deaths were from ordinary causes, not requiring comment.

The death-rate, calculated upon the total number treated in all the asylums, was 4·98 per cent.; and, upon the average number resident, 6·36. The proportion of deaths to admissions (including transfers) was 20·92 per cent. These figures compare favourably with those of the previous year.

CAUSES OF INSANITY.

Intemperance is given as the cause in 45 of the admissions; but must be looked upon, in many of these, as a result rather than a factor of mental disease.

Hereditary predisposition and previous attacks account for 55 of the admissions; the number being, in reality, much larger than here stated from these causes.

COST OF MAINTENANCE.

The Asylum Superintendents collected during the year 1885 the sum of £4,408 2s. 10d. for maintenance of lunatics. This, in the face of defective legislation, is, in my opinion, a very creditable amount, though somewhat less than in the previous year.

Produce and other articles sold realized £403 16s. 6d.

The amount of £186 5s. 10d. was earned at the Wellington Asylum by contracting to perform the laundry-work for the adjoining hospital. This sum represents only the work done during a portion of the year.

The average cost per annum of each patient throughout the colony was in the year 1885 £24 5s. 3¼d., after deducting repayments for maintenance, &c. This sum is less than that of the previous year by the sum of £2 3s. 4¼d., and must be regarded as very satisfactory. Rigid economy is practised at all the asylums, but is not allowed to interfere with a liberal dietary and other matters absolutely necessary for the well-being of the insane. The expenditure on surgery and dispensary amounted only to £144 3s. 1d. during the twelve months; while wines, spirits, ale, and porter cost only £92 4s. 8d. The authorities of some of our colonial hospitals might well take a hint from these last figures, for feeble and helpless lunatics might be supposed to require alcoholic stimulants equally with the majority of hospital patients. I am perfectly satisfied, however, from experience in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic treatment, that they suffer nothing from the comparative deprivation in this respect which they undergo in our asylums.

There is a decrease in the cost of maintenance of the patients in all the asylums, with the exception of those at Napier and Wellington, in which some increase has occurred.

In the first-named establishment the prodigious increase of £58 7s. 3d. per head is to be noted. As long as the asylum exists the present staff must be retained—namely, Deputy-Inspector, Visiting Medical Officer, Superintendent, and two attendants—man and wife. The cost is, of course, shared by the “remanded persons,” who cannot be included in the returns as lunatics, never having been so certified; but the advantage of transferring such a disproportionate expenditure to a new establishment at Porirua ought to need no arguing.

At Wellington the increase of 15s. 5¼d. per head is due to a diminished number of patients, the result of transferring a large party of males to Seacliff, and to no corresponding diminution in the staff. The vacancies will speedily be filled again. At this establishment a great deal of work has recently been done in the way of repairs and alterations, the cost of which has been defrayed out of the Lunacy vote, instead of the Public Works vote, which could not be drawn upon for the purpose. The increase is thus more apparent than real.

It is satisfactory to find, as regards the asylums taken collectively, that in every item, except one, the estimated expenditure for the year was not reached. The excepted item was exceeded through the repayment by the Government to the relatives of a female lunatic of a large sum collected in past years for her maintenance. Over this repayment I could have no control.