

1886.
NEW ZEALAND.

SEACLIFF LUNATIC ASYLUM.

(COPY OF ENTRY MADE IN INSPECTOR'S BOOK BY DR. MACGREGOR, INSPECTOR.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

EXTRACT FROM INSPECTOR'S BOOK.

I MADE my first inspection of Seacliff Asylum on the 20th, 24th, 26th, 27th, and 28th days of May. On the day of my last visit the number of patients in the asylum was 453—males, 297; females, 156: 1 male and 3 females were out on trial, and there was 1 dipsomaniac in the asylum.

I made a careful individual inspection of all the inmates, and made a special examination of any cases that seemed to require particular attention.

I found no one improperly detained. There was one old man of eighty, suffering from senile decay, placed here by the Judge merely because he could not be properly managed at home.

I found no one in actual seclusion, and only a few who, at intervals and for short periods, required to be confined to their rooms. One female patient was wearing locked gloves, for reasons that seemed to me sufficient. All the inmates of this asylum are well and kindly treated, being well fed, well clothed and well lodged, while their medical treatment is carefully attended to by Dr. Neill and his assistant Dr. Macandrew.

There are, however, great defects, which at present, and for some time to come, must greatly detract from the undoubted advantages of this asylum. These advantages, which in the present state of feeling about the asylum are apt to be overlooked, are nevertheless such as very few of the institutions of the kind possess. There is a magnificent estate of nine hundred acres of first-class bush-land, unsurpassed in fertility, beauty of situation, and accessibility when we consider the province as a whole.

There is a railway-station at the gate; and the only difficulty arises from the fact that the trains are run at hours very unsuitable for the wants of the asylum.

The drawbacks, with which the public mind is so occupied just now, arise from two sets of circumstances: First, the whole external aspect of the place is inexpressibly dreary and dispiriting, because it is dense-bush land just in process of being cleared, and the laying-out of the grounds about the building is at present in a state of chaos. Second, the building itself has become the subject of such an embittered controversy that there exists great doubt and anxiety regarding its actual condition.

Concerning the former point, I have no hesitation in saying that in a very few years, when this asylum is surrounded with beautiful grounds and fertile fields, the present feeling of disgust and indignation will give place to one of satisfaction; for in judging of this asylum it must not be forgotten that what was meant for a farm-asylum, the great majority of whose inmates should be all day occupied in out-door work, is for the present unavoidably transformed into a closed asylum, with dismal surroundings, and sunless, high-walled airing-courts, where none such were ever meant to be.

The drawbacks arising from the character of the building must be owing either to bad plans or bad workmanship. The plan, I believe, is on the model of the Norwich County Asylum, built, I think, in 1877. It is defective chiefly in these respects:—

1. The day-rooms are too much narrowed, under a desire to provide the great number of sleeping-rooms required by the dislike of associated dormitories among the well-to-do population of this colony, without greatly increasing the cost.

2. The dormitory window-sills are so high that no view is possible. There is no doubt that in this matter the architect blundered—at any rate, he sacrificed the usefulness to the appearance of the building. He is entitled, however, to the admission that the inmates are seldom or never in the rooms except when they are in bed, and that the loss of the view, therefore, is no great matter.