

All our existing asylums are full, and the greatest embarrassment that I have to face at the present time arises from the fact that very large sums have been spent at Seacliff and Sunnyside without any proportionate increase of accommodation. A few years ago the state of things at Seacliff, Sunnyside, and Auckland was such as to cause grave public disquietude, and all the money that has been spent up till now was simply sunk in overtaking the leeway of the previous years. Last year a vote for increased accommodation at Auckland was not taken. The cry for retrenchment was too much for us, and we had to do the best we could. Now the question of building the new asylum at Porirua, into which the chronic cases may be drafted, must be decided in full view of all that is involved in the doing of it.

The difficulties of dealing with our criminal lunatics and inebriates are problems still awaiting solution. The presence of these people in our asylums—especially the former—is a source of almost intolerable difficulty and danger. They are often extremely violent and dangerous. Their malignity and revengefulness against those who are responsible for their safe-keeping are almost incredible. And when this spirit accompanies, as it commonly does, an inveterate tendency to delusions of persecution, they will, on the smallest basis of fact, construct the most monstrous charges against the officers and attendants, which they themselves firmly believe, and thus are able to mislead all but experienced observers. As I reported last year, one of our most urgent wants is some means of separating these criminal lunatics from the ordinary inmates of our asylums. A properly-equipped criminal lunatic asylum is so costly that I see no immediate prospect of our being able to afford it, and our present practice of scattering them through our different institutions seriously disorders the organization and management of them all. The treatment in the wards is governed by the worst cases; and the necessity of caring for dangerous criminals by the same means as are applied to the ordinary patients gives much liberty to the one class and compels hurtful restrictions on the other.

ADMISSIONS.

On the first day of January, 1889, the number of insane persons in our asylums was 1,681—males 1,041, and females 640. Those admitted for the first time during the year numbered 304—males 181, females 123. The readmissions amounted to 87—males 49, and females 38.

DISCHARGES.

The percentage of recoveries on admissions was 57·62—males 53·95, females 63·01. In Victoria the percentage was 47·37; in New South Wales, 46·76; in South Australia, 38·47; and in England, 38·56.

DEATHS.

The percentage of deaths on the average number resident was 5·86—males 6·69, females 4·54. In Victoria it was 6·71.

ACCIDENTS AND ESCAPES.

There have been no serious accidents in any of our asylums during the year; indeed, for several years past we have been singularly fortunate in this respect. There have been a good many escapes, but, so far as I know, no harm has resulted.

AUCKLAND ASYLUM.

The past year has been in this Asylum one of peace and goodwill after the long period of turmoil caused by defective accommodation and the discomforts inseparable therefrom. I am afraid, however, that the former evils will recur unless immediate steps are taken to relieve the overcrowding on the male side. Last year it was found impossible to vote the money required both for the proposed extension of the male wing and at the same time for the burnt wing of Sunnyside Asylum. I hope that some help will be afforded by the opening of the Costley Home to enable us to tide over the winter.

The condition of the Asylum, especially on the female side, is very satisfactory, and on the male side the drawbacks are due to defective and insufficient buildings.

The management of the Asylum is in the highest degree creditable to Dr. King and his staff. With regard, however, to the necessity for out-door employment of the patients, which Dr. King so thoroughly impressed upon his staff at Seacliff, I expect a greater improvement during the coming year. Of course, a great deal will depend on the way in which his efforts are seconded by his staff, and I shall watch with a great deal of anxiety their conduct in this respect. I regret to have to record that a serious outbreak of typhoid occurred during my last visit. Mr. Bell, the Engineer for Buildings, has personally made a thoroughgoing inspection of the sanitary arrangements of the building, and plans are now ready for a complete reform of the whole system of drainage and ventilation, including a plan for a proper outfall into the sea.

The Deputy Inspector, Mr. Cooper, and the Official Visitor, Mr. Ewington, are indefatigable in the performance of their honorary duties, and the public have in their presence a guarantee that the patients are well looked after. The congestion of the male side, which they have so often called attention to, will be remedied as soon as the money is forthcoming.

WELLINGTON ASYLUM.

Both this Asylum and the branch at Porirua have been most successfully administered by Dr. Hassell. Nothing has occurred to interrupt their harmonious working, and their condition is very satisfactory. The only exception is owing to the changes among the female attendants, and the inevitable difficulties arising therefrom. This is the weak spot in all our institutions, where it is difficult to tempt marriageable young women to remain long enough after they have learned their business. It takes a good deal of discipline to teach them the necessary patience under their manifold provocations, and I am afraid the patients occasionally suffer in consequence. I am extremely anxious to devise some means by which such a sentiment could be created regarding the honourable