

NEW WORKS REQUIRED.

The contract for the central block of Porirua Asylum was begun in 1891, and I expected the whole asylum would have been finished years ago. It will be October next before the female division is completed. Then there will still remain the terminal block of the male division. This will cost £7,000, and ought to be proceeded with at once.

A doctor's residence is urgently needed at Porirua.

The danger from fire at Seacliff is very great, owing to the use of kerosene lamps for lighting. The electric light should be introduced without further delay. The estimated cost is £2,500.

The time has come when the Wellington Asylum must be condemned, and reduced, as has been intended for years, to a receiving-house. The risk of fire is so great that nothing short of rebuilding it will make it even tolerably safe.

A new asylum must be built somewhere in the neighbourhood of Palmerston North, or Woodville, and completed within the next five years, if the colony is not content to let our asylums lapse into a worse condition than they are in at present.

The new asylum ought to consist of detached blocks of buildings, for the purposes of proper classification and treatment of patients. Models for this new departure in asylum construction are to be found at Kankakee, in America, and at Alt Scherbitz, in Germany. I have in my possession reports on Kankakee Asylum, and Mrs. Neill has made for me a translation of Dr. Paetz's work on Alt Scherbitz, including the plans of the separate blocks. Mr. Campbell, of the Public Works Department, has made estimates of the probable cost of such buildings in this colony for five hundred patients. There are, however, many other things to be considered before adopting this system—as, for instance, the large increase in the number of attendants, whose wages are twice as high here as in Germany, and the fact that it would be quite impossible to get asylum attendants to sleep in common dormitories with the patients, as is done in Alt Scherbitz. We should, therefore, have to face a large increase of cost for the building of separate rooms for them.

At Seacliff a beginning has been made on this new system of detached buildings. We have three auxiliary buildings—one of which has been in use for many years, having been built when I was in medical charge of Seacliff. A second, to accommodate eighty patients, will be ready for occupation in six months; in the part already built thirty men are comfortably accommodated. We have also now in use a beautiful cottage, where convalescent and curable female patients can be specially treated. This has been very cheaply constructed by Dr. King, under whose guidance the head attendant, Mr. Farrant, has built it with our own labour. The new farm auxiliary, Dr. King estimates, can be built and occupied for a cost of £20 per bed, not including water-supply, as against £200 per bed in the main building. All this has been done by our own staff, and it is a beginning of the new system which ought to be adopted in all future asylums. With such men as Drs. Levinge, King, Hassell, and Beattie in charge of our large asylums, there ought to be no hesitation on the part of the Public Works Department in continuing to intrust us with the erection of our own subsidiary buildings. Dr. King has demonstrated that this can be safely and economically done. The chief objects to be gained by this system of grouping cheap subsidiary detached buildings round the main institution are: (1) The cheapening of the cost of building, in order that a larger number of the insane may be provided with proper quarters, attendance, and medical oversight; (2) the application of the principle of graduated restraint, and differentiation in the treatment of the insane, so as to allow to each patient the largest measure of personal liberty of which he is capable. Other advantages of this system are: Comparative exemption from the risk of fires; improved sanitary conditions in the detached buildings; diminished pressure and friction among the inmates; the elimination of a great deal of the irritation caused by rigid confinement under lock and key behind grated windows; a larger and freer open-air life; increased sense of responsibility on the part of attendants, and, finally, more individual treatment and less routine.

In designing a new asylum on this system regard should be had to the following fundamental considerations: The amount of land of good quality should never be less than an acre for each inmate. The first step ought to be to lay out the ground with the aid of a skilled engineer in such a manner as to insure thoroughly efficient sewerage and a good water-supply. A systematic distribution of water-pipes, steam-heating pipes, and electric-lighting appliances, all so arranged that they can be directly connected with each building, and the buildings should be laid off with reference to this system of pipes.

The Porirua Asylum was designed to carry out this system so far as that could be done without departing further than experience then warranted from the accepted English and American practice.

What I now propose is simply going a step further, in the belief that it is impossible for this young country to continue the building of expensive blocks connected by long corridors, and making it necessary to provide expensive accommodation for incurable patients, who can be made much more comfortable in cheaper structures.

The question as to whether these separate buildings should be of wood or brick and be made fire-proof will turn on the possibility of getting Parliament to vote money for the more costly brick erections, and on the discontinuance of the costly co-operative system.

A Bill was passed last session dealing with inebriate homes, but no money was provided. If only Parliament find the money, the Lunacy Act as it stands meets all necessary requirements. Receiving homes for the reception of doubtful cases under examination for admission to the ordinary asylums, a special institution for the training and treatment of idiots, imbeciles, and epileptics, as well as a separate institution for criminal lunatics, and a home for the after care of discharged convalescents, are all desirable, and should be undertaken as found possible.