

The general health of the patients at the Asylum has for many years been very good. The only epidemic of any kind I have seen happened last October, nearly all the female patients being attacked with influenza, and a few of the males. It resulted in the death of an old patient, Mrs. Slow, in the seventh year of her residence. Others have only lately recovered from its effects, and the health generally of the patients is again good, in spite of much crowding in the sleeping rooms.

CHARLES FRANCE,
Medical Attendant.

CHRISTCHURCH.

No. 8.

Mr. J. W. HAMILTON to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Lunatic Department, 1st November, 1872.

I have the honor to report that I inspected Sunnyside Lunatic Asylum this day, in accordance with the directions of "The Lunatics Act, 1868."

1. All the books were closely written up and in good order, excepting that the Medical Journal has for five weeks past been kept upon loose sheets or forms made up in manuscript. I think that the records of the Asylum ought to be kept in bound books and on printed forms, and that a new journal ought to be supplied as soon as possible.

2. The number of patients was 113—viz., males, 79; females, 34; none secluded or under restraint.

3. I found everything in the same excellent order and cleanly condition as usual.

4. On examining the certificates of discharge, I found that patient No. 378, admitted 20th September, 1872, on the order of two Justices sitting in the Court at Christchurch, had not been discharged "by writing under their hand." (Clause 71, Act 1868). The assent of the Deputy Superintendent, holding the Colonial Secretary's authority, had been duly given, October 24th, to the discharge, which, however, was signed by the Resident Magistrate for the Christchurch Court, the one in which the committal was made out. The committing Justices reside in the place, and it did not appear that they were "incapable" (clause 72) of signing the order. The matter does not seem to be of much moment in the present case, as the spirit of the Act was no doubt complied with when the ordinary presiding magistrate of the Court in which the evidence was taken and recorded, on which the committal was based, signed the discharge. He must consequently have been in possession of, or had access to, any information, documentary or oral, in reference to the patient being brought before the Court.

5. The circumstances of this case, however, lead me to suggest for your consideration the necessity for modifying clauses 71 and 72 of the Act, in the direction of lessening the difficulty of obtaining discharges. I think that at least it might be permitted that any Resident Magistrate should be empowered to discharge a lunatic who has been committed by any other Justice acting in his own Court; and that any Justices sitting in a Resident Magistrate's Court should in like manner be empowered to authorize the discharge of patients committed by him. It often happens that Resident Magistrates have to attend two or three Courts at considerable distances from their principal one, and near which they reside. Relatives of patients fit to be discharged may in such cases have to make several expensive journeys, and be subjected to great delay before they can obtain the necessary signature to a discharge. These delays and expenses are the more likely to be greater, if the signatures of two unsalaried Justices require to be obtained; because these officers only occasionally attend the Court, and it is very difficult ever to get them together again promptly. A patient retained in the Asylum for any time after recovery is complete might suffer considerably in health of both mind and body.

6. A female patient, No. 334, had been discharged since my last inspection, the year having expired for which she had been placed by Judge's order under "curative treatment" as an habitual drunkard. The patient was drunk on the very morning of the day she was released. I am of opinion that her case is a hopeless one, and that she ought never to be placed in the Asylum again for habitual drunkenness; at all events, not until "curative" patients can be kept entirely apart, and separately treated. This person had been more than once previously admitted and discharged, and had always resumed her drunken habits. Unless there seems to be some reasonable prospect of dealing successfully with this class of patient, they ought not to be placed in the Asylum, as they are mostly likely to do harm amongst the ordinary patients.

7. Since my last report was written, I have had the advantage of inspecting Sunnyside in company with Dr. Paley, the Inspector of Asylums of Victoria, and of obtaining from him much valuable information on the management of Asylums. I find that he attaches the greatest importance to abundance of and varied recreation, as the most valuable agents in the recovery of patients. I had mentioned to him my idea that a cricket ground would be a valuable addition to the means of recreation at Sunnyside. He informed me that he considered cricket one of the most useful amusements that could be introduced, inasmuch as all the inmates could share in it either as players or spectators; and that the game is constantly played at the Asylum near Melbourne, of which he has more immediate charge. He also informed me that the frequent arrival of visitors at the Asylum was beneficial both to patients and attendants alike, creating a useful break in the monotony of daily routine, as neighbours could, and I have reason to say would, readily come and join in cricket at Sunnyside; and as their presence would be beneficial to convalescents, I would urge the necessity for levelling a ground this autumn, so as to be fit for play next summer. In the mean time, a few pounds' worth of bats, balls, and other cricket gear might be ordered from home. After what Dr. Paley has stated to me, I attach very great importance to the early introduction of so healthful an amusement as cricket. I trust that the small sum required to set it going will not be objected to.