

ASYLUMS.

Auckland Asylum.

The number of patients in this establishment on the 1st January, 1882, was 253—viz., 174 males and 79 females. During the year 86 were admitted—56 males and 30 females—10 of the males and 8 of the females being readmissions. The total number under treatment was 339—230 males and 109 females. Of these, 13 males and 12 females were discharged as “recovered;” 7 males and 9 females as “relieved” or “not recovered;” 19 males and 5 females died; leaving, at the end of the year, 191 males and 83 females: total, 274. The recoveries show a percentage of 29·06 upon the admissions, and the deaths a percentage of 9·16 upon the average number resident.

The asylum was visited by me on March 21st, 22nd, 24th, and 29th, when I made the following entry in the Inspector’s Book:—

I have, on the 21st, 22nd, and 24th March, made a complete inspection of the asylum, with the whole of the outbuildings and the estate.

There are at present 273 patients on the books—viz., 189 males and 84 females—all of whom I have seen, with the exception of two men who are absent on trial, and another, E. K., who escaped on March 17th ultimo, and has not, at present, been recaptured.

The orders for admission and the medical certificates have been duly examined, together with the following list of books, all of which were found to be properly and carefully kept: The Medical Journal, the Book of Admissions, the Register of Discharges and Deaths, the Case-books. The Patients’ Book was signed by me, and the various statutory inquiries duly made.

There was almost entire absence of excitement amongst the patients, particularly in the female division. No complaints whatever were made to me, but a few requested to be released from detention.

On the 22nd I found one patient (a man) in seclusion; he was in a state of maniacal excitement, and had stripped off all his clothing. The medical records show that this form of treatment is not unduly resorted to, and no other form of restraint is in use but the occasional wearing of locked leather gloves to prevent or remedy destructive habits.

The whole establishment I found very clean, but requiring in many parts some repairs to the plastering of the walls, and a good deal of painting and colouring. The men’s dining-hall should have a wooden dado about 4 feet high; and strips of wood secured to the floor would prevent any further injury to the walls by forms or tables. In two of the wards the mantelpieces require refixing. A good deal of the furniture is old and unsuitable, and might gradually be replaced. The box bedsteads with metal bottoms are not old, but are certainly obsolete in a modern asylum, and tend to encourage neglect on the part of the night attendants.

The whole of the bedding appeared to be clean and in good order. I hope to see the proportion of hair mattresses to those of straw gradually increased. There were a great many beds on the male side which were made up with one sheet only, and I was informed that the stock of these was very insufficient. The soiling of the blankets which results certainly entails additional wear and tear, and therefore expense. I also found that a second suit of clothes is not provided for the male patients, and that there is an insufficient supply of underlinen. These wants ought to be at once remedied.

The wards have a comfortable appearance, but are singularly bare of any objects of interest or ornament; and, though one or two newspapers were seen, I saw no books. A special grant for these objects would be money judiciously expended.

The bath-rooms have floors of stone or of wood covered with zinc or lead. A wooden grating of simple and cheap construction should be provided for the patients to stand upon.

A good many patients occupied the airing-courts. That for the females should be laid out and planted, the paths being covered with asphalt. A portion of the high wall might with advantage be removed, so as to enable the surrounding country to be seen. The old sheds behind this court should also be pulled down, and new ones for their purpose erected in a more suitable position.

The asylum is greatly overcrowded—273 occupy the space which was intended for 157 only. The chapel contains thirty beds, very closely placed. One of the day-rooms in the male division has been taken for a dormitory, causing great inconvenience to the patients during wet weather, as they have then only a small and narrow corridor for their use. Beds and shakedown are to be found in all sorts of unsuitable places, the offices of the Clerk and the Superintendent also being used as bedrooms. This state of things is detrimental and dangerous. There was an increase last year of 21 in the number of patients, and immediate provision for a large additional number is necessary. The wooden buildings now in course of erection will accommodate 60 only of the male patients, leaving still an excess of 22 of this sex. A number of the females are housed in rough and unfurnished rooms, built for workshops, but capable of being made much more comfortable; while an adjoining range of six single rooms, destitute of any windows, are totally unfit for use.

It is quite evident that an extension of the asylum is necessary. The estate is large enough and well situated; and it would be much more economical to manage a larger number of patients here than to provide an additional asylum elsewhere. The additions should also comprise a dining-room for females, which is now much needed; a visiting-room for each sex; a recreation-hall, which might also serve as a chapel; and a residence for the Medical Superintendent. The kitchen appears to have been left in an unfinished state, and would require rearrangement.

The erection of the wooden building for 60 quiet male patients has just been commenced. It will, I think, be well suited for the purpose. One or two modifications of the plan are desirable, such as a fireplace and chimney for the large dormitories, and outside venetian shutters to the windows in