

NEW MARKETS—EXPANSION OF TRADE.

So far back as 1897 I have drawn attention to the necessity for extending our trade in various directions. It must be satisfactory to members to know that we have secured a steamship service to three west coast ports of the United Kingdom, with direct trade to and from the colony.

It is also a pleasure for me to be able to inform members that there is a probability of the Union Steamship Company providing a service between this colony and Noumea for the amount mentioned—*i.e.*, £2,400 a year.

The suggested eastern service is still kept steadily in view, and when the time is opportune something should be done so as to give equal possibilities to the producers of New Zealand with their more favoured neighbours in Australia.

On making further inquiries I am more than ever satisfied that along the route from Brisbane to India, up the Queensland coast, calling at Thursday Island, Batavia, Singapore, &c., to Calcutta, a good market would be found for our tinned meats, horses, fruits, grains, &c.; and in return we should be able to get corn-sacks, indiarubber, tapioca, tobacco, spices, &c., and a practically new and suitable trade would be established.

Negotiations have been opened up with a view of establishing a trade steamer-service as between Candalla and this colony, and in accordance with appropriations a steamer subsidy under satisfactory conditions as to efficiency, freights, &c., of £10,000 per annum was offered. This was not accepted; a much larger sum being asked and declined, and there the matter stands.

HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE AID.

In my Budget last year I drew the attention of honourable members to the unsatisfactory position of the hospitals and charitable institutions. We are granting subsidies annually of over £100,000, and have no control, check, or say in the expenditure of so large a sum. The position of the Inspector-General is almost farcical. He may inspect, report, and point out what is required, but there is no power to compel the trustees to give effect to his recommendations.

The law in respect to hospitals charitable aid requires amendment, and the sooner Parliament undertakes reform in this respect the better it will be in the interests of the ratepayers and the patients in the institutions of the colony generally.

HOSPITALS FOR THE MENTALLY AFFLICTED.

I again desire to point out the necessity for accommodation being provided for those mentally afflicted requiring first treatment on the lines of the Bethlehem Hospital. I also urge again—and with all the force in me—the necessity for the classification of the inmates in our hospitals for the insane. The result of the appointment of a Royal Commission whose duty it would be to classify and to report on the number of persons in the asylums who are simply suffering from senile decay would cause a sensation.

The enormous expenditure on building and maintaining our mental hospitals, and the alarming increase of patients, are matters demanding your most serious attention. During the last five years no less than £79,306 was spent in erecting buildings and furnishing the same; in salaries, allowances, cost of maintenance, £300,233 was expended. This year you will be asked to provide £72,169 out of the Consolidated Fund, and to this must be added a considerable expenditure out of the Public Works Fund.

INEBRIATES HOMES.

Honourable members will naturally expect, considering the controversy that has recently taken place, that something should be said concerning inebriates homes. I will here briefly state the position: The Home at Waitati is on Government land of some 900 acres in extent, the original cost, together with improvements, being £2,596 12s. 11d. The first year's salaries and provisions amounted to £260 2s. 7d., and the total expenditure for the first year was therefore £2,856 15s. 6d. During the year 1902–3 the total expenditure was £6,691 10s. 2d., the receipts being £446. For the next year, 1903–4, the expenditure was £5,172 13s. 5d., and the receipts £1,103 7s. 11d.