

3. The most serious defect of all is one which, so far as I know, no one has called attention to. A considerable part of the ground-floor is utterly useless from being placed close up against a concrete wall facing a solid bank of clay, on which the kitchen-block and other back premises rest, at the level of the first floor. No doubt this also is due to anxiety to diminish the cost of excavation; but it has the effect of making a part of the ground-floor very damp, and, I fear, incurably so.

I am of opinion that in other respects the building is well adapted for its purpose, and, further, that some of the objections so strenuously urged against it are either inseparable from such large buildings, or are due to the temporarily wretched surroundings, and the merely provisional airing-courts, which had to be erected until the proper airing-courts could be laid out.

As regards the alleged defective workmanship, it is a matter for the experts of the Public Works Department, more especially as it is so covered up or so remedied by recent repairs that I, at any rate, cannot venture an opinion on the matter. There is, however, one point that calls for remark from me—the doors of the single rooms were not properly fastened to the wall, so that several of them were knocked out, and had to be subsequently fastened by iron bands. The responsibility for the great diversity of locks rests with the Lunacy Department. So far as I can judge, some of the minor matters which have been made so serious seem to me to indicate a disposition to magnify trifles and make the most of difficulties. The cracks in the north wing, which were at one time so alarming, appear to be due to settlement. I must state, however, that the cracks have been repaired and the fallen plaster restored, so that it is impossible for one who is not an expert to speak definitely in the matter. Whatever the defects of the building, no one can deny that the greatest care must be exercised in looking after its maintenance. I was very sorry, therefore, to observe the sloppy condition of the lavatories, specially those in No. 3 male ward (refractory), on the second floor. I found that here not one of the basins had a plug attached, and that the screws under the taps were gone, so that every time they were used the water spouted over the floor, which was swimming as a usual thing. The water, accordingly was actually dropping from the ceiling of the room below, and so on to the ground-floor, disfiguring and rotting everything in its course.

I was surprised to find that there was no plumber on the staff so that these expensive tradesmen have to be brought from Dunedin every time a tap or a pipe goes wrong in this extensive building, and often after much damage is done.

The leaky hot-water cistern at the top of the house should at once be replaced by a copper one.

The laundry-boiler is much too small, the furnace is ill adapted for burning wood, and the drying-closets must be made more effective.

I expect, when I next visit the asylum, to find a great deal more despatch in serving out the dinner, that much more rapid progress than hitherto has been made in laying out the grounds, and that a larger proportion of the patients are regularly employed out of doors.

After careful consideration I have come to the conclusion that the storekeeper is utterly unfit for his business. His store-book is absolutely bristling with errors. Not a single column of it can be taken on trust without previously adding it up; so that it is useless except to mislead. I am also of the opinion that one good man can easily perform all the duties of clerk and storekeeper, provided that the stores are methodically issued at a set hour each day.

The magnificent dining and amusement halls are entirely unused, to the great loss of the patients, and the confounding of the whole working of the asylum, owing to there being no provisions made for lighting. I earnestly urge that this matter may be taken in hand without any further delay. I regret to find that no steps have been taken to organize amusements for this large asylum, the reason given being that until the place is lighted nothing can be done. It seems to me, however, that a great deal more might have been attempted; and I would suggest that in choosing members of the staff a preference should be given to such persons as can take a part in getting up entertainments for the patients. I also think that the beautiful billiard-table, now standing unused in the dining-hall, might be brought into use with great advantage, especially on wet days.

I have made a careful investigation into the charge of neglect in the case of J— C— brought against Dr. Neill by ex-warders Dundas and Sutherland. I can find no evidence in support of their allegations, while they are directly contradicted by Chief Warder McDonald and Warder Fuller, as well as by Dr. Neill himself and the evidence of the "case-book." The fact that Dundas was under notice of dismissal before the charge was made, and that Sutherland has been dismissed since, taken together with the length of time—nearly three months from now—that has been allowed to elapse, leads me to conclude that there is nothing in it.

31st May, 1886.

D. MACGREGOR,
Inspector.

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