

1887.
NEW ZEALAND.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS OF THE COLONY
(REPORT ON) FOR 1886.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of ASYLUMS to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.
Sir,— 15th March, 1887.
I have the honour to lay before you the following report on the lunatic asylums of the colony for the year 1886 :—
The number of registered insane on the 31st December, 1886, was 1,613. These are distributed as follows :—

Asylums.	Males.	Females.	Total.
Auckland	235	129	364
Christchurch	207	133	340
Dunedin (Seacliff)	301	171	472
Hokitika	70	29	99
Napier	0	0	0
Nelson	57	42	99
Wellington	122	90	212
Ashburn Hall (private asylum)	17	10	27
Total	1,009	604	1,613

The returns for 1886 from the United Kingdom and the Australian Colonies are not yet obtainable, but at the close of 1885

New Zealand had	...	1 lunatic for every 401 of the population.
New South Wales	...	1 " 374 "
Queensland	...	1 " 416 "
South Australia	...	1 " 439 "
Victoria	...	1 " 297 "
England and Wales	...	1 " 339 "

This year in New Zealand the proportion is 1 in 370 of the population.

Before any useful idea of the proportion of lunatics in any country can be gained from statistics other considerations must be admitted. By referring to Table IX. it will be seen that there is a very large accumulation of old people in our asylums. Many of these are harmless chronic cases, and in many more mental weakness is simply a manifestation of senile decay. In England these people would be accommodated in poorhouses or other refuges, with a great saving both as regards expensive buildings and costly attendance. Here, if these persons were got rid of, there would be a great difference, not merely in the total population of our asylums, but also in the annual admissions, the recoveries, and deaths. The rapid accumulation of these helpless and friendless people in our asylums is mainly due to two causes: first, to the fact that their maintenance is thrown on the General Government, instead of being a heavy local charge as in England; and, second, to the disproportionate numbers of our population who at this stage of our history have grown old without contracting family ties. As might be expected from the similarity of conditions, the Victorian asylums are greatly hampered in the same way.

I have noticed also, that, even in the short time that has elapsed since the burden of hospitals was laid on the local bodies, there is growing up a tendency to shunt as many as possible of their chronic paralytics into the asylums. These people have always, more or less, mental weakness often just enough to enable the doctors to sign certificates, and they are very troublesome to nurse. I heard with great satisfaction when in Auckland that the Costley trustees mean to provide in the Old Men's Home, which they are going to build, a ward for such cases as I have been speaking of—harmless and friendless old people, who are merely suffering from senile decay.

Having thus called attention to the way in which the number of our lunatics is increased by the accumulation in our asylums of chronic lunatics who are harmless and easily managed, and old persons who are merely friendless, I would point out that the number of those who are annually judged to be insane will naturally tend to increase, though there be no absolute increase of insanity. Our increasing knowledge of the physiology and pathology of mind is rapidly widening the professional and popular conceptions of mental disease. It is being steadily recognized that insanity