

1888.
NEW ZEALAND.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS OF THE COLONY

(REPORT ON) FOR 1887.

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

The INSPECTOR of ASYLUMS to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

Sir,—

16th April, 1888.

I have the honour to lay before you the following report on the lunatic asylums of the colony for the year 1887:—

The number of registered insane on the 31st December, 1887, was 1,695, showing an increase of 83 since the end of the previous year. These are distributed as follows:—

Asylums.	Males.	Females.	Total.
Auckland	247	138	385
Christchurch	214	135	349
Seacliff (Dunedin)	315	186	501
Hokitika	73	31	104
Nelson	57	44	101
Wellington	133	97	230
Ashburn Hall (private asylum)	14	11	25
	1,053	642	1,695

The proportion of insane to the general population in the Australian Colonies and great Britain is as follows:—

New Zealand (including Maoris)	1 in every 381, or 2·63 per 1,000
New Zealand (excluding Maoris)	1 " 360, or 2·78 "
Victoria	1 " 306, or 3·27 "
New South Wales	1 " 375, or 2·67 "
South Australia	1 " 439, or 2·28 "
Queensland	1 " 418, or 2·39 "
England and Wales	1 " 348, or 2·87 "
Scotland	1 " 420, or 2·38 "

In my last year's report I pointed out that, since the burden of charitable institutions and hospitals was laid on the local bodies, a very marked tendency has developed itself to shunt into the lunatic asylums as many as possible of the old and helpless persons who are accumulating in the local charities. The Hon. Colonel Haultain, Deputy Inspector at Auckland, has pointedly called attention to the evil effects of this in his district; and there is no doubt that the general problem must be faced and a solution discovered, unless Parliament is willing to see our hospitals for the insane converted into mere receptacles for the aged and the helpless.

At present every asylum in the colony is overcrowded with persons who are quite incurable, and simply require kindly treatment and safe keeping. The consequence is—and I desire to state the fact as emphatically as I can—that it is impossible to give the recent and presumably curable cases either the care and attention or the accommodation required for their proper treatment. The Medical Superintendents have no power to exclude any person sent under a Magistrate's order, and accompanied by two medical certificates; once admitted, therefore, these cases accumulate at such a rate, as to divert our asylums from their proper functions, for the Medical Superintendents find themselves in this position: Either they must take the responsibility of turning out aged and friendless people, who have no one to look after them, and no where to go (having been already got rid of by the local charities under cover of the two medical certificates), or they must permit them to fill the asylum accommodation required for curable cases.

The following letter from the Resident Magistrate at Auckland illustrates in a very practical way the difficulty I am dealing with.—

"SIR,—

"Resident Magistrate's Court, Auckland, 22nd February, 1888.

I have the honour to forward herewith the depositions taken before me on the 18th instant, in the case of —, who was charged with being a lunatic not under proper care and control.

1—H. 8.