

1890.
NEW ZEALAND.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS OF THE COLONY

(REPORT ON) FOR 1889.

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

The INSPECTOR of ASYLUMS to the Hon. the MINISTER of EDUCATION.

SIR,—

15th April, 1890.

I have the honour to lay before you the following report on the lunatic asylums of the colony for the year 1889 :—

The number of registered insane persons on the 31st December, 1889, was 1,761, giving an increase of eighty for the year—males 33, and females 47. These are distributed as follows :—

	Males.	Females.	Total.	Previous Year.
Auckland	261	128	389	385
Christchurch	223	145	368	349
Seacliff	282	214	496	501
Hokitika	75	30	105	104
Nelson	56	42	98	101
Wellington	160	112	272	230
Ashburn Hall (private asylum) ...	18	24	42	25

The proportion of the insane to the population is—

New Zealand (exclusive of Maoris) ...	2·84 per 1,000
New Zealand (inclusive of Maoris) ...	2·66 "

At the end of 1887 the proportion per 1,000 in the colonies was—

New South Wales	2·71 per 1,000
Victoria	3·39 "
South Australia	2·31 "
Tasmania	2·50 "
Western Australia	2·84 "
New Zealand	2·63 "
Queensland	2·38 "

I have been obliged, year after year, with painful iteration to call the attention of Parliament to the results of the peculiar system of admission to our asylums which prevails in these colonies. In Great Britain, the United States, and Canada a standard is fixed, and no further admissions are allowed till more accommodation is provided. Here patients are admitted whether there is room or not, and the accumulation goes on until some scandal calls public attention to its consequences. What with the difficulty, on the one hand, of getting money to provide asylum-accommodation for the acute cases as well as for the chronic and harmless insane, and, on the other hand, the determination of the Charitable Aid Boards and their officers to have nothing to do with destitute persons that are mentally weak, especially if they give any trouble, the responsibility of preventing overcrowding is almost too much for any man to face, and therefore I think in our circumstances it would be wise to so amend the lunacy law as to fix a minimum day-room and dormitory space per patient. It would then become necessary for the country either to face the whole question frankly, or to take the alternative and refuse admission to all those whose friends could afford to provide for them elsewhere, thus practically confining our public asylums to the pauper class. So long as public feeling will not tolerate the discharge of any harmless incurables when they are no longer dangerous to themselves or the public unless the officer discharging has made sure that a suitable refuge is ready to receive them, so long will this accumulation go on to the injury of all who are inmates of our asylums. It is time that we realised the fact that a State system of public asylums for all classes, provided at a minimum cost to the patients and their friends, and free of charge to the large majority who are either unable or cannot be made to pay, is a very onerous undertaking. When to this we add the further undertaking to keep all who are once admitted until they either recover or can be removed to refuges provided out of local taxes, and that with the consent of the representatives of the ratepayers, it is evident that the Government must provide refuges for all the mentally infirm if they would prevent every asylum in the colony being turned into a workhouse.