

Owing to the artisans having been much employed in works in connection with the new water-supply, dairy, &c., their labour has not been available for many desirable improvements about the building and courts, but during the year a large portion of the inside of the building has been repainted and decorated.

On the farm steady employment has been found for a large number of men, and a good deal of work has been done in reclaiming hitherto useless country for cultivation.

A serious item in connection with the farm was the necessity for destroying a large number of unhealthy cattle. At one time it appeared desirable to destroy the whole herd, but by judicious weeding carried out with the assistance of Mr. Park, of the Stock Department, and care in buying new stock, the herd is now looking exceedingly well, and is, I am informed, second to none in the province in point of health and freedom from constitutional taint.

There were several changes in the staff during the year. I succeeded Dr. Hassell in January, Dr. Craig exchanged with Dr. Beattie as Assistant Medical Officer in March, while Miss Erskine replaced Mrs. Skillen as matron, the latter having been obliged to resign at the beginning of the year on account of ill-health. Dr. Craig resigned his position at the end of the year, much to the regret of those with whom he had been associated. Dr. R. A. Fox, who has been for some time relieving at Seacliff, succeeds him.

I desire to thank the officers of the Asylum for their loyalty and for the manner in which they have faced with success the many difficulties which had to be encountered during the year. I also desire to recognise the courtesy and zeal of the local officers of the Public Works Department in carrying out the works they have in hand in connection with the institution.

I have, &c.,

The Inspector-General of Asylums.

ERNEST E. FOOKS, M.B.

CHRISTCHURCH ASYLUM.

SIR,—

I have the honour to forward my annual report on this Asylum for the year 1896.

There were 78 admissions during the year, inclusive of 16 readmissions—namely, 55 males and 23 females—which shows a reduction of 7, omitting those transferred from the Wellington Asylum in 1895, as compared with the previous year.

The discharges “relieved” or “recovered” amounted to 44—viz., 34 males and 10 females; three others were discharged under “transfer” to other asylums or on “bond,” “not improved,” and one after escape, under section 158 of the Lunatics Act, making a total of 48. If to this latter number is added the deaths, numbering 18, we arrive at the comparatively small increase, 12, of the year’s insanity in Canterbury, as shown by the Asylum population at the end of 1896.

Of those admitted during the year 24 were discharged—viz., 20 males and 4 females; while 4—viz., 3 males and 1 female—died.

The death rate has been low, especially compared with that of the previous year, but there was no epidemic of influenza or other unusual cause to augment it, and with one exception, referred to later on, the verdict of the Coroner’s jury, held in all cases, was death from natural causes, or, in other words, from those usually found in asylum statistics.

A case of typhoid fever developed in a female patient shortly after admission, but, owing to the measures adopted, the disease was confined to her, and she ultimately made a good recovery from it.

I regret to have to record that my hitherto good luck in freedom from serious accidents, extending over a period of nearly thirteen years’ service, has at last been broken, for within a day or two of the close of the year a male patient met his death by misadventure—whether suicidal or accidental it is impossible to say—by falling from a height on the floor of his room, whereby he fractured his skull. He had been put to bed in the padded room for his own safety, as he had some marks on his head which indicated that he had been butting it against the wall. The attendant, one of the oldest and most experienced in the service, had visited him regularly, and had only just given him some nourishment, when, on returning in about twenty minutes, he found him lying dead on the floor. The Assistant Medical Officer was at once summoned, and resorted to artificial respiration, but life was quite extinct. There were indications which proved that he had managed to climb up to the window, and had fastened his counterpane to the iron-wire grating by which it was protected, but for what purpose, whether to break the glass, which he had done wantonly on one or two previous occasions, to effect his escape, or for the purpose of self-destruction, must remain a mystery. The grating, however, gave way, which no doubt was the cause of his fall and death. At the inquest the jury evidently took the view that the death was purely accidental, and I may add that he had not at any time, either before, as far as I know, or subsequent to his admission, shown any disposition to suicide.

I had been confined to my house for some time owing to illness, and was so still when the accident occurred, but I made careful inquiry into the circumstances surrounding it, which were fully reported to you at the time, and it is only right I should add that no blame seemed to be attachable to any one. The jury recommended that the floor of the room should be padded like the sides; there are, however, grave objections to this, but their other recommendation—viz., that the pads should be carried up to the ceiling—is much more practical, and if this had been so the patient could not have reached the window with the same facility.

With this exception, and one or two minor fractures caused by falling in fits or blows from fellow-patients, the accidents were of a trivial nature.

In connection with this subject, however, I should mention that a patient who escaped from a working-party eluded all efforts for his recapture, and, though the police got timely notice that he was at large, he was only brought back to the Asylum by a private individual after the expiration of