

Fire practices are held regularly, in order to keep the brigade and appliances efficient, and to familiarise the patients with the alarm and means of escape.

In my opinion, the most pressing needs of the present time are—(1) A building for the isolation and treatment of cases of tuberculosis; (2) more sleeping-accommodation on the male division, or the removal of some of the male patients elsewhere; and (3) the lighting of the building by electricity, as urged in a former report.

As in previous years, I have pleasure in acknowledging the able and willing co-operation of my fellow-officers in the discharge of my duties.

I have, &c.,

EDWARD G. LEVINGE, M.B.,

Medical Superintendent.

The Inspector-General of Asylums, Wellington.

#### PORIRUA ASYLUM.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit to you the following report on the Porirua Asylum for the year 1899:—

The average number of patients resident during the year was 364 (196 males and 168 females). Four males and forty-four females were admitted, all of whom except one were transferred from Mount View Asylum. Thirteen patients were discharged as recovered. The small proportion of recoveries at this Asylum, as I have on previous occasions pointed out, is due to the fact that the inmates who have been sent here from other asylums are mostly suffering from insanity of a chronic and incurable type.

The physical health of the patients has on the whole been good, and the death-rate has been remarkably low, less than fourteen per thousand on the average number resident in the Asylum. This death-rate is much below what is generally found to exist among the insane. Considering the number of aged and infirm among our patients, the low mortality is a satisfactory indication of their healthy surroundings.

During the year building operations to complete the female department have been in progress. The ward for the more troublesome patients, consisting largely of single bedrooms, has been finished, and is now occupied, and the final block, including the new female dining-hall, will soon be out of the hands of the workmen. Taking the female-accommodation as a whole, I find that the general arrangements are convenient for administration, as well as cheerful and comfortable for the patients. The arrangements in the ward for the more troublesome patients are particularly satisfactory and complete, but now that acute cases are being admitted I fear the number of single bedrooms will at no distant date be found too limited. What appears to me the chief want is suitable accommodation for sick patients. Under present circumstances invalids have to occupy beds in large dormitories, where they are very apt to be disturbed or annoyed by others, or have to go into one of the few single bedrooms in the older part of the building, which are badly lit, cheerless, and exposed to the south. Ultimately I hope the small auxiliary asylum may be used as a hospital for the sick; it would, I am sure, be well adapted for such a purpose.

In the engineer's department considerable additions are required to the plant, which in the first place was not altogether planned on a scheme in accordance with modern ideas, or with a due sense of proportion to the service required of it. Now that the Asylum has increased so much in size, the two small tubular boilers are found to be quite inadequate, and are overtaxed, especially in the winter-time, when, in addition to the kitchen, laundry, and electric lighting, steam has to be generated for the radiators heating the wards. An additional steam-boiler of large size is absolutely necessary, and should be installed at once. An auxiliary electro-motor is also required. At present there is no "stand-by" to the engine in use, and consequently no proper provision against a breakdown or in case of repairs being required. Furthermore, the electric storage-cells for the all-night lighting circuits, being of inferior quality, are fast deteriorating, and will soon be of no service. A new battery of cells will therefore have to be procured, and should be of the best quality obtainable.

During the latter part of the summer the prolonged drought caused the water-level in the reservoir to fall within a short distance of the outlet, and I felt some anxiety as to our water-supply, but ultimately a heavy fall of rain saved the situation. The stream that runs through the Asylum property takes its origin from two branches which are almost equal in size, and from one of these our water is drawn. The water from the other branch could with little difficulty be led in pipes around a spur of the adjacent hill into the reservoir, and so double the supply. If this work were done, it would be a safeguard against failure of water in a dry season, and should, in my opinion, be undertaken.

The irrigation-works in connection with the disposal of the sewage have not yet been completed. One great difficulty we have to contend with is the nature of the ground, which, having a rather stiff clayey subsoil, is not sufficiently absorbent. It requires close subsoil tile drainage, and to be further loosened by deep trenching, and this necessitates much labour. The present concrete settling-tank retaining the solid constituents of the sewage is designed on a principle which is now somewhat out of date. It could without much expense be converted into the more modern septic tank to liquefy the solids by bacteriolytic action, and this alteration would enhance the value of the effluent for irrigation, and do away with such nuisance as is inseparable from the present arrangement.

Every effort is made to induce as many patients as possible to employ themselves in some useful occupation. Work is, and doubtless always will be, the chief curative agent in mental alienation. This fact is, of course, well known to those who are responsible for the care and treatment of the insane, but is probably not yet fully recognised by the general public. The improvements being made on the farm and around the Asylum do not progress with such pace as I should like.