

1904.

NEW ZEALAND.

# HOMES FOR INEBRIATES

(REPORT ON THE).

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

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF ASYLUMS to the Hon. the MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 24th August, 1904.

I have the honour to report as follows in relation to the Orokonui Home for Inebriates :—

The whole idea of the organization of this institution was based on the fact of its connection with Seacliff Asylum in the hands of Dr. King, and the facilities thus offered for the complete and remunerative development of a very valuable estate. These plans had to be abandoned because of the irrational objection of some of the inmates to the presence of harmless chronic insane persons, however indispensable their work might be.

The public mind in this colony is filled with the idea that a cure for inebriety can be effected without any effort on the part of the inebriate, that there exist certain specific drugs, boomed by interested syndicates, which produce miraculous results, and it is impossible to disabuse the public mind of this delusion. No statistics exist upon which any such generalisation can be based, and we as a Department, with the means at our disposal, have made a most thoroughgoing effort under one of the most able men in the colony to carry out a rational system of treatment for this disease.

A complete statement of the position of this institution, and a very able exposition of the principles underlying its administration, were furnished by Dr. King last year, and fully approved by me. Dr. King and I have discussed this subject in all its bearings on many occasions. More recently, at a meeting of the British Medical Association, a complete account of the whole experiment was given—for it has never been regarded otherwise than as an experiment, and a very costly one. Following Dr. King on that occasion, I expounded the difficulties we had to face in the working of this institution, and pointed out to the medical profession the part they themselves had played in hindering our efforts to make the experiment successful. That it seemed impossible to get the profession as such to refrain from sending us cases whom they might have known to be incurable before they sent them, that they have sent cases there who were incorrigible drunkards—persons who should have been sent to jail or some other place more fit for their reception.

No man, in the state of public opinion in this country, could dare to exercise the discipline required to compel the co-operation of these people in their own cure.

Experience has already demonstrated that persons who are compelled by pressure of relatives, or the action of the police, to go to such a place are all but hopeless from the start; and that, whenever success has been attained in England or America, it has almost always been confined to the cases of persons who were anxious to co-operate in the treatment of their own disease. Drunkenness is a disease of volition, and can only be cured by the exercise of the subject's will. To aid and foster this—to make the exercise of the volition a possibility—the best means at our disposal is to enforce abstinence; to put the patient under healthy conditions; to make him lead a quiet, regular life; to provide him with wholesome food; and to do our utmost to secure regular employment in the open air, always stopping short of bodily exhaustion and fatigue. These indications have been fulfilled, or, to put it better, this treatment has been carried out at the Orokonui Home. But, as I have stated above, the treatment is practically worthless without the co-operation of the patients, and that co-operation is not to be expected from the majority of the cases which have come under our care.

Dr. Gault is evidently a good physician and a kindly man. The patients have no personal complaint against him. He is cautious, and knowing the nature of his charges is careful to keep within the letter of the law in dealing with them. He has consulted the Crown Solicitor in Dunedin regarding powers of compulsion, and is advised that he has practically none. The punishments at his disposal would rather hinder than promote the general harmony, and therefore it would not be fair to visit on the man the want of efficiency of the system. With regard to projected works and requirements he is alive to their necessity, and his intelligent interest therein is on record in the office files. Dr. Gault recognises that the Orokonui Home in its present state is experimental, and, with this in view, exercises a wholesome economy.