

CHRISTCHURCH MENTAL HOSPITAL.

4th February, 1908.

I visited this Mental Hospital daily from the 29th January to the 4th February. Miss McLean made an inspection on the 17th April last, and between these dates the Deputy Inspectors and Official Visitor paid altogether twelve visits. The statistics hereunder will refer to the distribution of the patients on the 30th January, and the interval reviewed will be for the period of nine months since Miss McLean's inspection.

I find the institution maintained in a satisfactory condition. The promptitude with which the domestic arrangements were readjusted after the recent fire is highly commendable.

I investigated the matter of the fire to get some clue to its causation, to judge the value of the fire appliances and the work of the Hospital Brigade, and to estimate the cost of the damage. The fire was confined to three sides of a square (made up of the L-shaped store, the storekeeper's office, and the bread-store), the roof, floor, and contents of which were destroyed, and the three adjacent passages, the flooring of which was saved. The bakery, which fills the remaining space, completing the square, escaped with insignificant damage, the fire being arrested at the gable which was bricked in when the horizontal ceiling was removed some years ago. The Hospital fire appliances were in good order, and the pump was brought into action with as little delay as possible. The Hospital Fire Brigade was promptly at work, and to their tactics must, in the first place, be credited the limiting of damage to the area between the administration building and the kitchen-yard. Smoke carried along the corridors and plaster ceilings hiding the flame, disguised the locality of the fire zone, and the expert way in which the ceiling was cut through and the fire located demonstrated the value of ex-fire-brigade men on the staff. In the triangular funnel formed by the roof and ceiling the flames could have had a clear run to the main dining-hall, and how nearly this may have been is shown by the smoke-stained walls and blistered paint at a considerable distance from the damaged portion. A letter of appreciation of the timely and intelligent work of the staff conveying the thanks of the Government has, I understand, given great satisfaction to the recipients. It is noteworthy that there was complete absence of panic among the patients, one of whom was probably the first to give the alarm, and happily no person was injured. The splendid services of the Christchurch, Railway, and Spreydon District Fire Brigades followed very quickly and effectually the first aid of the staff, and their arrival allayed all anxiety as to the spread of the fire. The thanks of the Department is due to them and to the police, who assembled in force to assist the staff with patients should the necessity have arisen. It is unfortunate that the cause of the outbreak must be left unsettled. The storekeeper, a non-smoker, locked up the store-room at 6.30 p.m. on the 27th (in daylight), and smoke was seen issuing from the roof at 1.40 a.m. Many persons, including Dr. Gow, had passed the store as late as 10.30, and did not observe anything amiss. There were no electric wires to fuse, and the usual spark theory is practically excluded, because of the number of hours during which there had been no fire in the locality. Even the possibility of the ignition of a wax match in the nest of a mouse or rat is more than commonly remote, because the staff use only safety matches. It is estimated that about £800 will meet the cost of reconstruction, and about £600 cover the loss of stores.

During the visit I have, with Dr. Gow's co-operation, concluded the *viva voce* part of the examination for the registration of mental nurses. The average of the twenty-three candidates from this Hospital is satisfactory, and, as a rule, they did better in the oral than in the written examination, some of the candidates answering very well.

The following is the proportion of the full nursing staff (no allowance for holidays) to patients:—

Day attendants	...	...	...	...	...	1 to 9'86
Night attendants	...	...	...	...	...	1 to 143
Day nurses	...	...	...	...	...	1 to 10'62
Night nurses	...	...	...	...	...	1 to 127'5

Thirteen attendants (41'9 per cent.) and three nurses (11'5 per cent.) have been in the service for upwards of five years, exclusive of three attendants whose experiences outside the Dominion added to their service within brings them up to that standard.

The following changes have taken place in the population since Miss Maclean's visit:—

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Resident on 17th April, 1907	263	254	517
On probation on 17th April, 1907	16	1	17
On register on 17th April, 1907	279	255	534
Admitted since 17th April, 1907	75	28	103
	354	283	637
Discharged recovered	16	18	34
Discharged unrecovered	3	...	3
Died	33	9	42
Total discharged and died	—	—	52
On register on 30th January, 1908	302	256	558
On probation on 30th January, 1908	16	1	17
Resident on 30th January, 1908	286	255	541
Accommodation for	285	238	523
Patients in excess of accommodation	1	17	18