

1934.
NEW ZEALAND.

MENTAL HOSPITALS OF THE DOMINION

(REPORT ON) FOR 1933.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly pursuant to Section 78 of the Mental Defectives Act, 1911.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL to the Hon. J. A. YOUNG, Minister in Charge of the Department of Mental Hospitals.

SIR,—

Wellington, 1st July, 1934.

I have the honour to submit my annual report upon the Department of Mental Hospitals for the year ending 31st December, 1933.

At the close of the year there were 7,637 names on the registers of the Department including 33 patients at Ashburn Hall private licensed institution, and 525 patients out on probation in the care of friends and relatives.

Of the 7,079 persons who were actually resident in Government institutions at the end of the year, 6,761 were detained under Magistrates' reception orders, whilst 318 had been admitted at their own request as voluntary boarders.

During the year 1,117 persons were committed by Magistrates, and 306 entered as voluntary boarders, the total admissions thus being 1,423, an increase of 27 as compared with the previous year.

We were able to discharge 601 persons, including both patients and voluntary boarders, or 42·23 per cent. calculated upon the number admitted, but, of these, only 489, or 34·3 per cent. could fairly be regarded as recovered; the remaining 112 were regarded as "relieved" or "not improved," but circumstances permitted that their care could be resumed by their relatives.

The death-rate was 5·16 per cent. which is the lowest recorded for forty years.

Including voluntary boarders, our mental-hospital population showed a net increase of 443 during the year.

MENTALLY DEFECTIVE CHILDREN.

The care and training of congenitally defective children presents a problem which is essentially different from the treatment and custody of persons suffering from mental disorders, and it has long been the aim of the Department to establish separate institutional accommodation for these defective children apart from the Mental Hospitals proper.

In 1929 Templeton Farm, near Christchurch, was established as a colony school for feeble-minded children, and over 200 children are now in residence there.

Few, if any, of these children have been able to benefit by the ordinary or even special-class methods of education, but with proper training many of the boys have become surprisingly proficient at gardening and farming pursuits, and not a few of the girls have been taught to knit and sew, and to carry out other simple domestic duties with a reasonable degree of competence.

Many of the original child inmates of Templeton Farm are growing into manhood, and it has been decided to proceed with the erection of an adult division of the colony. This will be situated at Jenkin's Farm, which lies next to Templeton.

I had hoped some years ago to set apart the old Nelson Mental Hospital as an institution to be used exclusively for the lowest grades of feeble-minded children, but owing to lack of accommodation at Stoke Farm this has never been possible. With the erection of the new female side at Yorks Valley, I am hopeful that, at any rate so far as Nelson is concerned, this much-to-be-desired separation of the mentally disordered from the mentally defective may be accomplished.

CAUSATION OF MENTAL DISORDERS.

In last year's report I discussed the relative importance of environment and heredity in the genesis of mental disorder, and I expressed the view that environmental stresses do not readily give rise to mental disorder in persons who have inherited a stable nervous equipment.

These opinions, founded mainly upon our experience in New Zealand, receive striking confirmation from certain interesting figures published in the most recent report of the Scottish Board of Control. The tables in that report show a net increase in the number of persons in Scottish Mental Hospitals amounting to 37 per 100,000 of population during the period between 1901 and 1931. An analysis of these figures from the geographical aspect shows that the highest incidence of mental disorder is found in the Highlands and islands which are sparsely populated, rural and non-industrial, whereas the crowded industrial areas such as Clydebank, Port Glasgow, and Greenoch, are at the bottom of the lists.

In commenting on these facts, the Commissioners of the Board of Control say,—

"If, as is generally believed, mental disorders are the result of distressing social conditions, it would be natural in these days of unemployment and resulting depression to expect the industrial areas to show the greatest prevalence of insanity. The conditions of living in the Highlands and islands