

PART IV.—HOSPITALS.

INTRODUCTION.

HISTORICAL.

The founding of the Colony of New Zealand in 1840 brought with it an early realization by the white settlers that there was necessity for the organized establishment of places for treatment of ills both of Native and white people.

The collecting of authentic information regarding the earliest steps taken in this direction has been attended with some difficulty. Many valuable Government papers and public documents which may have thrown more light on attempts made were lost in the wreck of the "White Sean" when she was conveying the appurtenances of Government to Wellington in 1865 on the removal of the seat of Government from Auckland. This, in some measure, has had the effect of making it difficult to obtain a sequence of events.

It is, however, evident that in 1840, both at Kororareka, in the Bay of Islands, and at Wellington, the establishment of hospitals were considered.

On 19th June, 1840, a public meeting was called at Kororareka for the purpose of discussing the establishing of a general hospital. Captain Hobson, it would appear, was in favour of Russell, but did not wish to offer opposition to Kororareka. In spite of the support of the clergy and the willingness of the Government to assist, the attempt proved abortive.

Dr. J. Fitzgerald, who came to settle in Port Nicholson, was the first of the medical profession to stress the urgent need of such an institution being established in New Zealand. Speaking on this matter, he said :—

"A powerful reason apart from the fast increasing population, which should have weight, is the benefits that such an institution might extend to the Natives, who certainly have a claim on the cause of humanity, for it is truly deplorable to witness the frightful ravages disease has among them."

At this time the only provision for sickness was a temporary infirmary humanely provided by the New Zealand Land Co. for the reception of those members of their staff in need of medical attention.

In July, 1841, mention is made in the *New Zealand Government Gazette* of the appointment by the Government of the first Colonial Surgeon, with Auckland as his headquarters. Apparently there was some institution in existence, for European patients obtained admission by applying to the Colonial Secretary, who was the only person having this authority. In the case of Natives it was different; all that was required of them was to present themselves at the institution. Seamen off merchant vessels visiting the port were often treated for fractures and trusions, though more commonly for delirium tremens, but the majority of patients in the early days were working-people, and, although a nominal hospital fee of 1s. 6d. per day was charged, it was not until 1860 that even the small amount of £30 was collected for one year's maintenance. All convalescent patients were expected to assist with ward duties and the serving of meals, under pain of dismissal.

The Municipal Corporation Bill, passed in Auckland in July, 1842, embodied a useful clause which made it necessary that the good order, health, and convenience of the inhabitants be provided for. Leading citizens then interested themselves in the welfare of their sick, and for this purpose called a public meeting on 10th November, 1842, when Lieutenant Willoughby Shortland took the chair. The idea of establishing a mixed hospital gave rise to much discussion, the propriety of providing for the reception and entertainment of Maori patients being the stumbling block. It was then decided to form a committee, from those present, to go into the question thoroughly. The acting Governor, anxious that provision be made for both sections of the community, promised to donate twenty guineas to a fund, if such were established, "for the purpose of founding a dispensary and hospital, and affording surgical assistance to all classes of Her Majesty's subjects in New Zealand."

In 1844 the necessity of some organized establishment in which the Natives could be treated for their ills must have been felt by some of the Maori Chiefs, for in April, 1844, Jabez Bunting, Kati, and several other leaders petitioned the Governor to assist them to improve the conditions of their people by founding English hospitals.

It was not, however, until 1845, when Lieutenant-Governor Grey was appointed, that the matter of providing for the welfare of the sick was again considered by the Government. Captain Grey, who was a great friend of the Maoris and beloved by many of them, offered material support to a scheme for providing mixed hospitals throughout New Zealand, as he considered that such institutions would have a beneficial effect on the Natives.

Consequently it was due to Governor Grey's efforts, which were at first criticized by many, that in 1846 the Government consented to grant sufficient money for the erection of hospitals in each of the four centres—Auckland, Wellington, Wanganui, and Taranaki—for the treatment of sick and destitute Europeans, and free treatment for all Natives.

On 11th November, 1846, the foundation stone of the first of these institutions was laid by the Superintendent of the province on a Native reserve at Thorndon, Wellington. Tenders for the erection of a hospital at Auckland Park were first called on 10th October, 1846, but it was not until 4th January, 1847, that they were finally accepted.