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T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

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**GENERAL HOSPITAL, HOBART TOWN:**

**LETTER OF HOUSE SURGEON IN REPLY TO STATEMENTS  
REFLECTING ON MANAGEMENT.**

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Laid upon the Table by Mr. Chapman, and ordered by the Council to be printed,  
September 9, 1875.



## THE GENERAL HOSPITAL.

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*MEMORANDUM handed to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY by the Hon. W. L. CROWTHER, August 31st, 1875.*

Your particular attention is kindly referred to the subjoined memorandum, extracted from to-day's *Mercury* :—

As the management of the Hospital is to-day likely to occupy the attention of the Legislative Council, the following report of a recent visit, the truth of which will be vouched by indisputable authority, may prove of interest. We preface it with the remark that no reflection is made on the medical staff. On the contrary, they are credited with doing the best the circumstances will allow.

1. A delirious patient was keeping a whole ward awake, and had done so through the night.
  2. In wards crowded with patients there were some bad cases of erysipelas, thus not only endangering the lives of those near them, but poisoning the wards for months.
  3. The private patients' ward is nothing but a dirty empty room, and such as would not be tolerated in an English Union Workhouse, much less in an Hospital, in the United Kingdom.
  4. Nothing can be more disgusting than the condition of the cells. A statement of their contents will show this : a mattress on the floor ; a leather bucket for a urinal ; a human being.
  5. Hot water is not laid on to the bath-room, thus nullifying important treatment, and in urgent cases risking human life.
  6. The nurses' quarters is one small room, which has to do for sitting and sleeping room.
  7. The walls are bare. There are no pictures nor texts, such as cover the walls of the smallest hospitals in England.
  8. The foul and clean patients are mixed together. This is peculiar to this Hospital.
  9. There are no means of separating the dying from the living.
  10. The general condition of the old building is disgraceful. Condemned as unfit for human habitation, it contains numerous patients and helpers in the establishment. Some of the unused rooms are full of straw, filth, and sundries.
  11. The condition of the surroundings of the old building is in several instances disgusting.
  12. The recommendations of the Select Committee touch on, and would remove, these blemishes.
- P.S.—Since the above notes were taken a strong effort in the whitewash, soap and water, and other lines, has been made to render the place, at any rate, more decent for inspection, even to the extent of clearing out the cow-house, *alias* Christians' water-closet.
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*General Hospital, 6th September, 1875.*

SIR,

I HAVE thought it desirable to address you on the subject of the charges as to the condition of the Hospital, made by Dr. E. Crowther, published in the *Mercury* of the 24th ultimo, in order that there may be placed upon record my denial of those charges, some of which are wholly untrue, whilst others are grossly exaggerated.

I may premise my remarks by stating, that Dr. Crowther went to the Hospital, visited the whole of the wards, and questioned the patients without the slightest reference to any member of the Hospital staff; a proceeding devoid of the common courtesy practised among gentlemen, a flagrant breach of professional etiquette, and a step which he would not dare to take at any hospital in the United Kingdom or in the other Colonies.

“ 1. A delirious patient was keeping a whole ward awake, and had done so through the night.”

This is an annoyance to which the inmates of all hospitals are liable—patients becoming occasionally delirious, groaning, or crying out with pain. In these cases it would scarcely be advisable to take them from their beds in the middle of the night, and place them in other wards.

“ 2. In wards crowded with patients there were some bad cases of erysipelas, thus not only endangering the lives of those near them, but poisoning the wards for months.”

This is a gross exaggeration. Except in *one* ward, in the whole of the main building there were no cases of this kind; the ward was *not* crowded, as it contained only the usual number of patients, viz., twelve; all the cases but one were medical; and the Honorary Surgeon in charge of the ward was, to say the least, as well able to judge of the advisability of removing the case as Dr. Crowther could be. Two females had some time ago been admitted, and, as there were several patients with open wounds in the female wards, the former were at once removed to a separate apartment, and were convalescent at the time of Dr. Crowther's visit.

For the last seventeen years solitary cases of erysipelas have been treated in the common wards, but in no instance has the disease spread; this period includes the nine years that Dr. Crowther's father was one of the Honorary Surgeons, and nothing was then said about isolating them.

“ 3. The private patients' ward is nothing but a dirty empty room, and such as would not be tolerated in an English Union Workhouse, much less in an Hospital, in the United Kingdom.”

This is untrue. The ward has always been as clean as when seen by yourself on Wednesday last. In answer to my question, the patient who occupies the room stated that it had never been in a dirty state; and (to use his own words) “it was fit for any one to live in.”

“ 4. Nothing can be more disgusting than the condition of the cells. A statement of their contents will show this :—a mattress on the floor; a leather bucket for a urinal; a human being.”

Beyond the cells being gloomy there is nothing disgusting about them; they afford a fair area of breathing space, and are well ventilated. They are, however, (although useful for some cases), not at all adapted for treating the insane, and this has been pointed out for many years.

They contain no bedsteads, as it would be dangerous to give the insane inmates an opportunity of procuring weapons wherewith to injure themselves or others. Utensils made of crockery or metal would not be desirable for the same reason. Not many years since a clergyman was murdered in one of the adjacent Colonies by means of a weapon broken from a bedstead; if such a case occurred here, the Hospital authorities would be severely censured for allowing the possibility of such a mishap.

“ 5. Hot water is not laid on to the bath-room, thus nullifying important treatment, and in urgent cases risking human life.”

There are four bath-rooms, each supplied with the means of procuring hot water in from thirty to forty minutes; and I cannot call to mind any disease in which human life would be risked by deferring the administration of a warm bath for that period. If, however, a bath should at any time be urgently required, a supply of hot water could be obtained from the large boiler in the kitchen.

“ 6. The nurses' quarters is one small room, which has to do for sitting and sleeping room.”

The nurses sleep in the wards, and there is usually a room vacant in which they can take their meals. This, however, is a matter which does not affect the patients, and the nurses do not complain. The room into which Dr. Crowther so unwarrantably intruded is the private apartment of the Head Nurse, with which she is quite satisfied.

“7. The walls are bare. There are no pictures or texts, such as cover the walls of the smallest hospitals in England.”

Covering the walls with pictures would no doubt (if they were of any value) add to the *appearance* of the wards, but would, I believe, have no beneficial effect upon the class of patients who seek relief at this Hospital.

“8. The foul and clean patients are mixed together. This is peculiar to this Hospital.

Although I have never seen any evil result from the treatment of venereal cases in the male wards, it would be advisable to separate them; and this has been for some time recommended by the medical staff. The separation of these patients has been carried out in the case of females.

“9. There are no means of separating the dying from the living.”

There are, and always have been, means of separating the dying from the living which are constantly used, a number of screens being available for this purpose.

“10. The general condition of the old building is disgraceful. Condemned as unfit for human habitation, it contains numerous patients and helpers in the establishment. Some of the unused rooms are full of straw, filth, and sundries.”

“11. The condition of the surroundings of the old building is in several instances disgusting.”

I need not describe to you the condition of the building at the back of the Hospital, as you have but lately inspected it. It is old and dingy-looking, but I deny that the wards in which the patients are placed are dirty. Some of the unused rooms contain clean straw, empty cases, and old furniture; but that they contain filth is not true. Dr. Crowther did not even enter one of these rooms: had he done so, he would have found nothing which could in the slightest degree affect the health of the patients.

In a published letter of Dr. Crowther's he asserts, that at daylight on the Monday morning after his visit all the available strength of the establishment was set to work to whitewash and clean the walls and floors.

If any whitewashing had been done, it could at once be detected. With regard to other cleaning I can positively assert that I gave no directions for that purpose, and, to the best of my belief, no unusual cleaning was effected. As I visit all the wards every morning, and am frequently at the Hospital during the day, if any unusual cleaning had been going on I must have noticed it. I am perfectly willing to verify this statement upon oath, if it be considered necessary.

The charges in the *Mercury* could not have produced the alleged cleaning on Monday, as they were not published until Tuesday morning.

I have questioned some of the inmates of the three occupied wards in the old building, who state that the wards are kept clean, and have always been so.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

GEORGE TURNLEY.

*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*