

(No. 13.)



1860.

T A S M A N I A.

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**HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE, NEW NORFOLK.**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION TO THE COLONIAL  
SECRETARY WITH REFERENCE TO BISHOP WILLSON'S COMMUNICATION  
RESPECTING THE HOSPITAL.

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Laid upon the Table by Mr. Henty, and ordered by the Council to  
be printed, 1 August, 1860.



## HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE, NEW NORFOLK.

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EXTRACT from the Proceedings of a Meeting of Commissioners of Lunacy, held at the Hospital for the Insane, New Norfolk, on the 4th day of January, 1860.

REPORT of Sub-Committee with Letter in reply to Bishop Willson's Letters to the Colonial Secretary of 6th and 17th August, 1859, brought up and adopted, and directed to be forwarded to the Colonial Secretary, with a request that it may be printed and distributed in the same manner as Parliamentary Papers.

A true Copy,  
G. F. HUSTON.

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SIR,

WE have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 27th August, enclosing the correspondence in reference to the New Norfolk Hospital, ordered to be printed by the Legislative Council.

2. In that correspondence we observe two additional letters addressed to you by Bishop Willson, under date of the 6th and 17th August, which we feel ought not to pass unnoticed, and on which we deem it our duty to address to you, in reply, the following remarks.

3. In the communication which we had the honor of transmitting to you on the 6th July, in reply to Bishop Willson's appeal of the 8th March, we readily acknowledged the good spirit by which he was actuated, and, without reserve or hesitation, at once admitted that to some extent his strictures upon the Asylum were not unfounded.

4. We continue to accord to the Bishop the credit of being influenced throughout by conscientious motives of a high and benevolent character,—but we feel bound to say, that having, as it seems to us, adopted the most decided opinions on the subject, he regards it only from his own point of view, fails to argue it with that dispassionate fairness and impartiality which the gravity of the various interests involved absolutely demands, and, we are compelled to add, places a construction upon the statements and admissions of our letter which we never intended to convey, which they are not in our opinion calculated to bear, and which, therefore, we are imperatively called upon to correct.

5. In what particular instances His Lordship has, in our opinion, so erred, we now propose to show by passing under review the different paragraphs of his letter.

6. The Bishop here, at the very outset, misinterprets the meaning of our letter. We did not admit that the condition of the patients at New Norfolk is a "sad one," nor, on the most careful examination of that letter, will any passage capable of such a construction be found therein.

Bishop Willson's letter of August 6th, par. 3—"the sad condition of the patients."

Par. 4—"that out of 65 male patients who occupy those dolesome yards 50 are perpetual inhabitants of them."

7. The Commissioners did not admit that these yards were "dolesome;" on the contrary, they distinctly stated that, although limited, they are well open to both air and sunshine, a quality the very reverse of dolesome. In this paragraph, moreover, the number of patients constantly confined in these yards is misquoted, the number given in the return appended to our letter being 30 instead of 50. We think it right also to point out, that it is wholly incorrect to characterise even these 30 as "perpetual inhabitants of them," since, although that is the average number confined during the day, it is very rarely composed of the same individuals, the external employment and restraint of the patients varying according to their mental and bodily condition.

Pars. 5, 6, 8, and 10.

8. These paragraphs all refer to the buildings of the Hospital, and on this subject the Commissioners desire to remark, that they distinctly and fully abide by the opinions they expressed in their former letter; they do not stand forward as the apologists of the accommodations afforded by the Asylum in its present condition; they freely acknowledge, as they have ever done, the want of amendment and considerable alteration, and they recognise the urgent necessity of immediate improvement. But they cannot lend their sanction to statements which, in their opinion, convey an undue depreciation of the Establishment under their control; they cannot concur in the views set forth by the Bishop, or agree that the yards, buildings, and cells are past "all remedy," "calculated to produce the largest amount of gloom in the smallest given space," that the Asylum is a place "far more calculated to disturb the brain, increase disease, and confirm insanity, than relieve it;" and they feel bound to record their protest against the reception by the relatives of those who may now be inmates of the Institution, and by the public generally, of gloomy descriptions which, however conscientiously made, appear to them to be drawn in a great measure from prejudice. Doubtless the cells are gloomy, and the yards in some instances confined in extent; but the last are, as we have shown, but partially occupied, and the first, it will be seen from the accompanying return, are so little used during the day-time (when alone their gloominess can be material), that, on an average, only about one patient per diem is confined in them throughout the Establishment. It is also perfectly true that the cells and yards on the female side are equally faulty, and that in one portion of those buildings (in consequence of the wood-work with which they are lined) bugs abound; but we have no hesitation in saying that all these defects may, to a great extent, be easily remedied and removed. If the Commissioners are supplied with the necessary funds, and are permitted to carry out, under the advice and assistance of the Director of Public Works, the plans which they had determined upon before this correspondence had even commenced, they undertake, at a moderate cost, so to ameliorate the buildings as to render them (by the exercise of judicious internal improvements) comparatively well arranged,—to provide, in short, sufficient and really comfortable accommodation to meet the requirements of the Colony. And although the Commissioners deprecate most strongly the idea that class distinctions should in any degree enter into the system of management of the Asylum, they cannot but feel that in estimating these requirements justly it is necessary to take into account the former life and previous habits of the present, and probable future, patients.

Printed in the Parliamentary Papers—A Report of the Joint Committee on the New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane.

The accompanying return will show that the present inmates of the Institution consist almost exclusively of the labouring class, for whom a high order of accommodation is not only not needed, but to whom it would be from habit unsuited, and most probably irksome: of the timid, nervous, and vividly susceptible patients there are at present very few indeed in the Hospital, and we feel assured that the Bishop will join us in earnestly hoping that the number may not hereafter increase: in the meantime comfortable rooms have been provided for the male unfortunates of this class, and are now occupied; and the Commissioners sincerely trust that the delay (certainly not of their creating) in the erection of a like building on the female side will be of short continuance.

Par. 9—"In 32 County Asylums in England in the years 1854-5-6 on an average of the daily strength the number of recoveries per annum was nearly 40 per cent.

9. The remarkable contrast shown in this paragraph between the number of cures effected here and in England could not fail greatly to startle the Commissioners; and they felt it to be their duty to institute some research into such authorities as were open to them on the statistical question thus brought forward in condemnation of our Colonial Establishment. The result of our enquiries has been to convince us that the Bishop has fallen into a most grave misunderstanding in this matter; and that he has erroneously substituted the per-centage of recoveries upon the annual admissions into the County Asylums, for that upon the daily strength under treatment. We have not been able to obtain an insight into Mr. G. Hill's work, but we have had before us the official reports of three large County Institutions for the year 1855, viz.—Lancaster, Presswick, and Rainhill, all situated in Lancashire, all conducted upon the most modern principles, and all of which the Visiting Commissioners of Lunacy described as "being in good condition," "clean," "well ventilated and comfortable," "in a very satisfactory state," "under very careful and judicious management." From these reports it appears that the aggregate number of patients cured in these three Establishments was 10·91 per cent. upon the daily average strength under treatment, and 40·30 per cent. upon the number admitted during the course of the year. We have also found in the *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review*, January 1858, the following remarks and statistical tables:—"In considering the per centage of recoveries in any Institution it is essential to bear in mind the time in which the cure is accomplished. In some Institutions the cases are of a more chronic character than in others.

Thus, while there has been an average of 25 per cent. of recoveries at Hanwell, of all the cases received into the Asylum the recoveries per annum of the cases under treatment amount to an average of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., so that the average time the cures require is between four and five years."

The cures per annum in different Asylums is computed in page 32 of the Parisian Report, and is thus given:—

	<i>per cent.</i>		<i>per cent.</i>
Hants .....	1·23	Kent .....	7·81
Colney Hatch .....	2·01	James Murray's .....	9·05
Hanwell .....	2·63	Oxford .....	10·35
Cheshire .....	4·60	Rainhill .....	10·59
Birmingham .....	5·47	Yorkshire .....	11·18
Prestwich .....	5·62	Lincolnshire .....	13·09
Wilts .....	6·36	Lancashire .....	15·79
Worcester .....	6·38	Parisian Asylum .....	13·27
Bedford .....	7·70		

The cures per annum, of course, will vary considerably, according to the chronicity of the complaint; thus, at the Hampshire Asylum, the cases are known to be mostly of a very chronic character, and those at Hanwell are similar.

"In round numbers then," says Dr. Thurnam, "of ten persons attacked by insanity, five recover, and five die sooner or later during the attack. Of the five who recover, not more than two remain well during the rest of their lives, the other three sustain subsequent attacks, during which at least two of them die." And if any further confirmation of the correctness of our position be needed, it is supplied by the Report of the Commissioners of Lunacy for the year 1858, from which it would appear that on the 1st of January, 1859, there were under restraint in the Public Asylums of England and Wales 15,842 Lunatics, of which 1673 only, or as near as possible  $10\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., were deemed curable. The number of admissions during the year 1858 was 4985, and the number cured 1965, or not quite 40 per cent. We therefore consider ourselves warranted in assuming the enormous disproportion in the number of cures between the Asylum at New Norfolk and those at home, set forth by the Bishop, to be unreal and the result of error; and if this be so, and the true per centage of recoveries upon the numbers treated throughout the whole of England does not exceed 10 per cent., whilst in many first-rate institutions it is far less, we consider ourselves fully justified in reiterating our former statement; that the Hospital under our supervision has not failed in a curative sense; and even in going further, to say that, taking into account the hopeless and chronic character of the great majority of cases under treatment, to which we alluded in our former letter, the result (6 per cent. per annum) is comparatively satisfactory, and certainly not indicative of the hopeless, wretched picture which the Bishop has drawn.

10. Upon this subject, viz., the cost of erection of a new Asylum, we do not feel called upon to enter upon any lengthy argument: it appears to us a matter more in the province of the Executive Government than our own. Nevertheless, we may state this much, that the cost of the improvements we contemplate in the present buildings will not, in our opinion, exceed £10,000, whilst we are under a strong impression that any estimate for the erection of a new Asylum based upon English data will prove utterly fallacious, and that the real sum required will not fall short of the amount mentioned in our former letter, viz., £65,000.

Pars. 11 & 12,  
and letter of  
17th August.

11. In reply to these paragraphs, we desire first to observe that, if new Norfolk be not peculiar in the cheerfulness of its scenery, it at least possesses as much of that quality as any other country locality. The fogs to which the Bishop alludes are not of frequent occurrence, even in the winter months, and, when they do occur, are early dispelled, and are not prejudicial to health. With reference to the remoteness of the present Asylum from proper inspection, we would remark, that the Bishop himself has admitted that, as regards the management of the Institution (in relation to its capabilities) and the general treatment of the patients, there is little left to desire; and if this be so, we have a right to assume that the supervision at present exercised over the Superintendent and other Officers is sufficient to secure to the unfortunate inmates humane treatment and proper attention. Moreover, the Bishop seems to forget that four of the Commissioners, two of them Medical men, reside at New Norfolk, and are in the daily habit, one or the other of them, of visiting the buildings. As regards the facilities for visits to the patients from their relatives, we would remark that the present situation of the Asylum is sufficiently accessible to any one really desirous of visiting it: but whilst we should be sorry to place the smallest difficulty in the way of patients being seen by their relatives, we really may be permitted to doubt whether such visits, instead of being beneficial, are not rather, in many cases, productive of injury to their progress to mental health; the excitement of the meeting, the desire to depart with their friends, the regret and despondency occasioned by parting from them, must, we believe, in very many instances be highly prejudicial; and as to strangers (whether they be Medical men, Clergymen, or Magistrates,) we still hold to our formerly expressed opinion that such a constant stream of desultory visitors would most materially interfere with that quiet and seclusion which is oftentimes necessary to many of the patients,—would draw away from their duties the

Pars. 15, 16,  
and 17.

Officers of the Establishment,—and would certainly not tend to increase the efficiency of such an establishment in a curative sense. If the monthly visit of the Commissioners (familiar as they are to most of the patients) is productive, in the opinion of the Bishop, of mischief, we cannot conceive how he can consistently advocate the influx of numbers of strangers into the buildings.

12. Having thus, Sir, reviewed such statements in the Bishop's letters as we conceived it our duty to notice, we only desire, in conclusion, to assure you that in what we have advanced we have been actuated neither by any hostile spirit to the Bishop—whose benevolent motives we fully recognise, nor by any desire to stand obstructively in the way of progress towards the better care of a class of afflicted fellow-creatures possessing such peculiar claims on our sympathies. We are not obstinately wedded to the present buildings, nor even to the present site,—we are most anxious for improvement, but we do desire that this important subject should be viewed, discussed, and decided upon dispassionately, fairly, without prejudice, and with a practical regard to the interests alike of the poor sufferers themselves, and the public whose duty it is to maintain them.

We have the honor to be,  
Sir,

Your obedient Servants,

For the Commissioners,

E. S. P. BEDFORD, *President.*

*The Honorable the Colonial Secretary,*  
*&c. &c. &c.*