

1865-6.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

NEW SOUTH WALES.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

(MANAGEMENT OF TARBAN—REMOVAL OF DR. BRERETON.)

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be Printed, 27 March, 1866.

RETURN to an *Order* made by the Honorable the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, dated 27 February, 1866, That there be laid upon the Table of this House,—

“Copies of all Reports or Recommendations of the Medical Board or Visitors to the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum, or any of them, to the Government, during the year 1865, having reference to an improved system of managing that Establishment, or treatment of the Insane; also, all Correspondence connected with the removal of Dr. J. Le Gay Brereton from the office of Medical Visitor to the Tarban Creek Asylum.”

(Mr. Tunks.)

SCHEDULE.

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LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

No. 1.

DRS. COX AND BRERETON to COLONIAL SECRETARY.

Sydney, 7 June, 1865.

SIR,

We, the undersigned Medical Visitors of Lunatic Asylums, understanding that a large sum of money has been voted by Parliament for the erection of a new Asylum, consider that we should be neglecting a public duty, were we not to point out the many errors and deficiencies in the construction and management of the present Asylums—errors which have been again and again repeated, especially in the numerous additions to the Tarban Asylum; and also to direct attention to the means of avoiding them in future operations; as any money spent in erecting buildings similar to those now in use would be worse than thrown away—being made unintentionally the means of increasing those sufferings which it is the object of such institutions to alleviate.

We beg therefore respectfully to offer the following suggestions for the erection and management of a new Asylum:—

1st. That all rooms be airy, of a cheerful aspect, and commanding views beyond the walls of the building.

2nd. That the building should be thoroughly drained, and a sufficient supply of water be provided to flush the drains when necessary.

3rd. That suitable water-closets be erected, so that no foul accumulations can take place in the wards or yards, and that all cesspools be beyond the limits of the building and on a lower level.

4th. That the building be supplied with a chapel and an hospital.

5th. That workshops be erected for the employment of male patients, and tools and materials be supplied for their following various handicrafts—such as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, upholsterers, smiths, &c.; and that the women, so far as is practicable, be engaged in needlework and various domestic employments.

This regulation has been attended with the most satisfactory results in the English Asylums, where gardens and farms are cultivated, household work performed, and a great part of the furniture, clothing, bed and table linen, &c., made by the patients on the premises.

In the Asylum at New Norfolk, Tasmania, most of the shoes and clothes of the establishment are supplied and kept in repair in the same manner.

6th. That every facility be offered for the patients taking exercise both in wet and dry weather, and that suitable out-door shelter be provided for their use in hot weather.

7th. That a proper kitchen be erected in the rear, not in the front of the building; that the dining rooms be sufficiently large to accommodate the inmates; that their food be decently served up and comprise the various common fruits and vegetables in their season. These could easily be cultivated by the patients on the premises, which would not only be a benefit to those so employed, but be also a great saving to the public purse.

8th. That suitable accommodation be provided for the patients washing themselves at least once a day; that commodious bath-rooms be erected, and that every inducement be held out for frequent bathing; that the body linen of the patients be changed at least twice a week, and that their clothing be of a varied and cheerful appearance.

9th. That the rooms be so furnished as to present a home-like and comfortable aspect.

10th. That the dormitories have wooden floors, and be supplied with all necessary furniture; that each patient be allowed a separate bed, and that no beds be permitted in the passages on any consideration whatever.

11th. That every facility and encouragement be offered, not only for the relations and friends of the patients, but also for the public, frequently to visit the Asylum—a practice highly recommended by the Commissioners in Lunacy in England.

12th. That games and exercises be encouraged out of doors, and various amusements in doors.

That there be a sufficient supply of books, periodicals, and illustrated papers; that drawing and writing materials, and other means of innocent and useful recreations, be supplied to such as desire them. How welcome these would be to many, may be inferred from the fact that patients in Tarban have been known to make hats and baskets with the weeds growing in the yards, and have drawn heads and other figures on the walls, with variously coloured stones picked up in the yards.

13th. That music and singing be encouraged among the patients, which we think would supersede much of the howling and cursing with which the unoccupied and closely pent lunatics now vent their excitement.

14th. That there be daily readings of a varied character, and that occasional public entertainments be given, such as magic-lantern exhibitions, concerts, balls, &c.

That

That the patients be encouraged in the cultivation of flowers, either in garden plots or flower-pots, and in keeping birds and pet animals. There is a pretty garden in the Parramatta Asylum, called the "green yard," which was laid out and is kept in order by a dangerous and incurable lunatic. Any innocent means of diversion have been found in the English Asylums to avert violent paroxysms in incurable lunatics, and to expedite the recovery of those who are curable.

If the above suggestions be carried out in the contemplated new Asylum, we believe it will be not inferior to the best in England; but in the meantime, considering the long interval which must elapse before such a building can be completed, we deem it imperative that immediate steps be taken to palliate the worst evils in the construction and management of our present Asylums, which are a disgrace to the Colony, especially that of Tarban.

We therefore recommend—1st. That all privies and cesspools be removed beyond the walls of the building, so that their foul contents cannot soak into the yards and bed-rooms, as is now the case, especially at Tarban.

2nd. That a small engine, such as that now in use at the Abattoirs, be erected at Tarban, for the purpose of raising water from the Parramatta River so as to flush the drains, and that all the privies and cesspools be connected with such drains.

The drain at Tarban requires also to be reconstructed, being connected with the top instead of the bottom of the cesspools. The fall from Tarban renders an efficient drainage very easy.

3rd. That the piggeries in the immediate vicinity of the wards at Tarban be removed.

4th. That the large paddock in front of the Tarban Asylum be appropriated for the exercise and recreation of the patients, and the garden for the growth of vegetables and fruits for their use. The paddock alluded to is admirably situated for a pleasure ground, and requires enclosing on two sides only—a work which the patients might themselves easily carry out under proper superintendence.

The want of such grounds is one of the worst features of our Asylums. In the 16th Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy, occurs the following remark on the Stafford County Asylum:—

"We are inclined to attribute much of the excitement we observed among the women to the gloomy character of the wards in which the more refractory patients are placed, and to the confined nature of the airing ground provided for their exercise."

It would be difficult for man to devise more gloomy dens than the wards of our Lunatic Asylums—especially that of Tarban, or more confined and dreary yards for exercise.

5th. That larger dining-rooms be used at Tarban, where at present two rooms of 19 feet by 16 feet are made to accommodate 120 patients daily.

6th. That seats be provided in the yards of the Asylums, so that the patients shall not be compelled to sit on the cold stones and in the privies, as is at present the case.

7th. That the dormitories of the Asylums be dimly lighted at night; and that a warder sleep adjoining every dormitory at Tarban, as is the practice at Parramatta, so that refractory patients cannot fight and injure each other unknown to the keepers, as occurs in Tarban.

8th. That only one person be allowed to sleep in the locked cells, where now two sleep.

9th. That two washstands be allowed to every seven patients at least; and that fresh water be supplied to each patient.

10th. That all the regulations recommended in the management of the proposed new Asylum, be carried out, as far as practicable, in those now in use.

We consider it highly important that a Minute-book be kept of the transactions of the Visiting Board, and that not less than three form a quorum of such Board, and that every member of the Board be duly apprised by the Chairman of each intended meeting.

It is our opinion that the present Visiting Board is inefficient, for want of a Board of Control to carry out its suggestions. We, therefore, deem it advisable that it be constituted a Board of Suggestion, with greater power than it at present possesses; and that a Board of Control be instituted, with power to direct the Manager in all points except in that of medical treatment, in which department his authority should be uncontrolled.

If this arrangement should be deemed too complicated, we suggest that the present Board should be enlarged by additional members—not necessarily medical men—of business knowledge and habits, and be constituted a Board of Control, with powers as above recommended.

Finally, we regret that we are unable to visit the Tarban Asylum, as in duty bound, at night, and at uncertain hours, on account of its inaccessibility by land.

We have, &c.,

JAMES C. COX.

J. LE GAY BRERETON, M.D.

No. 2.

UNDER COLONIAL SECRETARY to DRS. COX AND BRERETON.

Colonial Secretary's Office,
Sydney, 15 September, 1865.

GENTLEMEN,

Drawing your attention to the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper of the 2nd instant, in which is printed a copy of your letter to the Colonial Secretary of the 7th June last, relative to the management of the Lunatic Asylums,—I am directed by Mr. Cowper to inform you that he considers the act of publishing that communication, by whomsoever committed, to be officially irregular, and inconsistent with the position which you hold under the Government.

I have, &c.,
WM. OWEN.

No. 3.

DR. COX to UNDER COLONIAL SECRETARY.

130, Phillip-street,
18 September, 1865.

SIR,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 15th instant, addressed to Dr. Brereton and myself; and in reply, as far as regards myself, beg most respectfully, but decidedly, to state that the document referred to, as published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the 2nd instant, was published without my knowledge and without my sanction; and further, that the contents of that document were never communicated by me to any one, either verbally or by writing,—but shall make it my duty (should the Government require) to ascertain from the proprietors of that journal, from whom, or from what source, the contents of that document were communicated to them.

I have forwarded your letter to Dr. Brereton.

I have, &c.,
JAMES C. COX.

No. 4.

DR. BRERETON to UNDER COLONIAL SECRETARY.

Sydney, 19 September, 1865.

SIR,

In reply to your letter of the 15th instant, received by me yesterday, referring to a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the 2nd instant,—I beg to state that the same was not published by my authority, and that on inquiry made to-day at the *Herald* Office, I was assured by one of the proprietors, and by the Editor of that journal, that the document in question was published with the consent of Mr. Cowper.

I have, &c.,
J. LE GAY BRERETON.

No. 5.

UNDER COLONIAL SECRETARY to DR. BRERETON.

Colonial Secretary's Office,
Sydney, 22 September, 1865.

SIR,

I am directed by the Honorable the Colonial Secretary to inform you that his attention has been drawn to the fact of your being a contractor for certain matters connected with the Asylum at Tarban Creek, of which you are a Visitor; and that, in the opinion of the Government, your position as contractor disqualifies you from retaining that of Visitor to the Asylum.

I have, &c.,
WM. OWEN.