

NELLIE BLY LED THE WAY.

THE GRAND JURY REPORTS ON ABUSES AT BLACKWELL'S ISLAND ASYLUM.

Its Eyes Opened by "The World's" Account of the Horrors of the Place—Condemning the Junior Physicians and the Nurses as Incompetent—Recommending the Employment of Female Doctors.

The October Grand Jury finished its investigation of the condition of the Female Insane Asylum on Blackwell's Island yesterday and at noon filed into the Court of General Sessions and made its presentation to Judge Underleeve. The investigation was the immediate result of THE WORLD'S disclosures concerning the mismanagement of the institution. Miss Nellie Bly, who spent ten days in the asylum under the direction of THE WORLD, was the chief aid of the Grand Jury in its inquiry, and on her testimony most of the recommended changes are based. The Grand Jury, accompanied by Miss Nellie Bly, visited the Female Insane Asylum, Oct. 18, inquired into the method of conducting the institution, and examined a number of witnesses, including the physicians and nurses in charge of the asylum. They subsequently took the testimony of the medical superintendent, Dr. McDonald, and the other officers.

From their investigation the body came to the conclusion that the appropriation made to the Department of Charities and Correction for the present year is insufficient to permit the payment of salaries necessary to secure the services of trained nurses and competent junior physicians, and that these branches of the service are consequently not as efficient as they should be; that the present medical staff is inadequate to meet the requirements of over 1,600 insane patients confined in the institution; and that the nurses examined are not qualified for the proper discharge of the important duties entrusted to them.

The food furnished to the patients, the Grand Jury finds, was sufficient in quantity and as good as can be supplied at the present per capita allowance; the inmates in the kitchen were good in quality. The system of cooking and serving the food, the Grand Jury thinks requires to be improved. Concerning the physical and general treatment of the patients, the present arrangements, in substance, that the wards are overcrowded, the accommodation for bathing patients is not adequate. A sufficient supply of towels is not furnished to dry the patients after bathing, and the method of supervising the bathing of patients should be changed. The Grand Jury especially recommends that more care be taken in admitting the alleged insane persons when first admitted to the asylum, and that greater caution should be exercised in the classification of patients in wards, in order to guard against the danger of spreading contagious diseases. To the danger to life in the event of a fire breaking out in the building, owing to the manner of locking the doors, particular attention is called.

In view of these conclusions the Grand Jury commended the action of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment in granting an increase in the annual appropriation for the Female Insane Asylum for the coming year, so as to enable the superintendent to carry out the improvements in the management of the institution suggested in the testimony of Dr. McDonald. And the Board's improvement the Grand Jury called attention to the necessity of furnishing to each ward a cost of 25 cents a day for each patient, to cover all expenses, of about 15 cents a day for the better facilities for the patients, and the necessity so that the patients may receive their meals within a large medical staff and the payment of a salary to secure the services of competent junior physicians. Under the present arrangement Dr. McDonald testified, as soon as the junior physicians become well versed in the treatment and care of the insane, they secure positions at increased pay in other institutions.

The Grand Jury further recommended the appointment of at least three female physicians to superintend the examination, bathing and general treatment of patients in the Female Insane Asylum, that the head attendant in each ward, from whom the physicians receive their information as to the condition of the patients, should be a trained nurse, and the salary paid to the attendants to secure the services of properly qualified attendants, and that simple facilities to visit the wards be afforded to citizens seeking information of missing friends supposed to be confined in the institution. It thinks that the medical superintendent should be empowered to make an appointment on the medical staff as well as of the attendants, without any interference from the Civil Service Board, so as to secure a higher standard of efficiency in those branches of the service.

To guard against the danger from the adoption of the mechanical lock, in use in many prisons, by which the doors can be unlocked simultaneously by pulling a single lever, it urged. Finally the Grand Jury recommended that the law be changed, placing the proof and issue under a different commission from that controlling criminal cases, and ask that the State Board of Charities look into the matter. The presentment was read to the Court by J. C. Mills, foreman of the Grand Jury, and then submitted to the Court, together with the evidence taken before the Grand Jury during the investigation. In discharging the Grand Jury Judge Underleeve said that he was gratified to find that the blame in this instance did not lie with the Commissioners of Charities and Correction, but with the lack of public interest. He thanked them for their attention to matters of such public interest. At the request of the Grand Jurors copies of the presentment will be sent to Mayor Hewitt and the Commissioners of Charities and Correction. The points involved in the Grand Jury's recommendation of the appointment of three female physicians were the subject of a paper read by Mrs. Josephine Shaw Lowell before the Ladies Health Protective Association, at No. 7 East Thirtieth street, yesterday. Mrs. Lowell is a well-known philanthropist and sister-in-law of James Russell Lowell. She has devoted her life to such work and is the first woman appointed to the State Board of Charities. Her paper was in advocacy of a bill to be presented to the Legislature this winter pertaining to a change in the nature of the Department of Charities and Correction. As at present constituted the prison, almshouse, insane asylum, hospital and other institutions, and the duties are so vast and varied that it is deemed to be beyond human possibility for any three men to give satisfactory attention to them all. Mrs. Lowell's idea is that the work should be divided into three departments of that species, and she is appointed to act under the direction of the Commissioners.

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Mrs. Lowell referred to the work done by THE WORLD through Nellie Bly and acknowledged the fruits of her exertions. She had found that the patient clothing she said, were due to the frequent but she admitted that the patients had frequently made to her complaints of cruelty by the attendants and neglect by the physicians. The former were easily exasperated by the trifles of the institution, she said, were overworked and underpaid, and were easily exasperated by the trifles of the institution. She entirely disapproved of the appointment of young physicians, for such a charge. They could not be present during the bathing or dressing of the patients to check cruelty. Mrs. Lowell strongly recommended the appointment of several female physicians, and she suggested that she suggested that THE WORLD'S work had already greatly benefited the unfortunate.