

1877.

NEW ZEALAND.

REPORT OF THE AUCKLAND GAOL COMMISSIONERS AND
CORRESPONDENCE THEREON.*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

No. 1.

The GAOL COMMISSIONERS, Auckland, to the Hon. F. WHITAKER.

SIR,—

Auckland, 30th May, 1877.

We have the honor to report that we have inspected the Gaol, taken the testimony of numerous persons, and obtained such other information regarding the management of kindred institutions in this and the neighbouring colonies as we considered necessary to enable us to express our opinions regarding the present condition of the establishment, and to offer suggestions for its future management, in terms of your letter of instructions.

The buildings, as shown on the accompanying tracing, consist of a number of old wooden structures, within a well-built scoria wall of 18 feet high, and another wooden erection outside, termed "the new division."

The space within the wall is divided—one part being appropriated to the use of the hard-labour men, containing dormitories, &c.; a second to the penal men, with similar accommodation; and a third, outside an old wooden wall which surrounds the two former portions, to a building occupied by the officers, &c., and a small wooden erection used as a workshop. In respect to the two first enclosures, we found them in a very cleanly condition, in marked contrast to the officers' quarters, which were both untidy and dirty.

We deem it unnecessary to remark at great length on these buildings. It is our belief that they are not only unsuitable in construction and faulty in arrangement, but utterly inadequate for even the present number of occupants. As already stated, the constructions are wooden. Prisoners admittedly have at times matches in their cells. It appears to us difficult to contemplate calmly the consequences of a fire in the dead of night, with no provision for water. Without calculating upon the absence of the warden for ever so short a time, even if present, the smoke in such confined passages would render it next to impossible to liberate the inmates.

The defective arrangement is noticeable in its most objectionable form, in that the food is entirely prepared in an apartment immediately underneath that used as the hospital; whilst the lack of room is painfully apparent when the necessity is reluctantly imposed on the Governor of adopting associated sleeping cells.

We strongly urge that the Government do not entertain the question either of extending or attempting to improve the existing buildings, and submit for their consideration whether they might not instruct the Governor to proceed forthwith in the execution of the plan herewith forwarded, and which offers one strong recommendation: that a great portion of it can be erected without materially interfering with the present structure. In support of our views in respect to the present buildings, we have pleasure in directing your attention to the accompanying report from Architect Mahoney.

It appears to us that herein the management has been chiefly defective, in that, with a large amount of the kind of labour required, and a valuable stone quarry at its disposal, energetic steps in this direction have not already been commenced—a work that could not be considered otherwise than remunerative, and which, on completion, would enable it to extend and increase the beneficial application of the prison labour. Doubtless this reflection may apply more to the impecunious condition of the late Provincial Government—obliging them to look rather to immediate before distant returns—than to the officers in charge, to whom we should do an injustice did we withhold the praise due to them for producing the satisfactory results, which the accompanying comparative statements disclose, under such disadvantageous circumstances. But, while anxious to accord to them the fullest amount of credit, we feel that we must also in no small degree attribute these important results to the system in operation, introduced in 1871; otherwise it is difficult to account for the fact that with eighteen warders and one matron and assistant in a divided institution, this large amount of actual labour could be extracted from an average of 162 prisoners.

It seems as if the theoretical difficulties raised against the "task" system have no practical existence, or are easily surmounted by relying on hope as the active agent in influencing the mind of the prisoner. The system is what is termed the reformatory or progressive principle. It demands from the prisoner his utmost efforts in some industrious and remunerative employment, offers in return partial remission of his sentence, and, after the performance of an allotted task, supposed to represent a