

592. *The Chairman.*] The Gaoler, I understand, is rather a pensioner of the province than anything else?—He is an old man. *Mr. Seymour.*

593. Practically, I understand, he is incapable of work?—He is incapable of hard work, but he is able to fulfil the duties of the position he occupies. 16th Aug., 1878.

594. I suppose the idea in this is, he is an old officer, and may as well stay there and give his experience?—He is quite able to take charge of the gaol.

595. Are two warders necessary if there are only three or four prisoners?—There must be two, I should think.

596. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.*] Is there a warder on duty at night as well as during the day?—Yes.

597. *The Chairman.*] In your experience prisoners have had to be sent away for safe custody?—Yes; that only took place lately. In former days we had to do the best we could, and they sometimes escaped.

598. Do you consider it necessary to have a central establishment for long-sentenced prisoners?—Yes; for there must be many places in the colony where there are small gaols suitable enough for light cases, but quite unfit for the proper detention and care of long-sentence prisoners; besides, there is the question, the important question, as to mixing up long- and short-sentence prisoners promiscuously, which has been done in all these smaller gaols. You were speaking just now of two warders; of course whenever a gang goes out it is necessary that a warder should go out with them, and one must be left to take care of those inside.

599. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.*] What sort of a gang could go out when there are only three men in the gaol?—They would have to go out.

600. *The Chairman.*] Could you not find work for them in the gaol?—No; they have been engaged for a long time in forming a cemetery out of a wilderness.

601. They could do stone-breaking?—Yes.

602. Is there not stone near the gaol?—No.

603. Do you now think it advisable to keep up that gaol at all, seeing the prisoners could be accommodated in Wellington or Nelson Gaols?—I do not see how you can do without it; it is also used as a lock-up.

604. Yes, make it a lock-up, and nothing more. Of course you must have a good lock-up; but, once a prisoner was sentenced, would it not be better to send him across to Wellington or Nelson?—What length of sentence would you send for?

605. Anything over six months.—Well, it would be inconvenient to keep prisoners in a lock-up even for a month; you could not give them hard-labour without interfering with the police, and I do not see how it could be managed with a less staff than at present.

606. There are four men in, and out of these one is a long-sentence prisoner—what are the others?—I do not know; they are short-sentence prisoners, I think.

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Mr. CURTIS, M.H.R., a member of the Committee, examined.

*Mr. Curtis.*

607. *The Chairman.*] We wish, Mr. Curtis, to take your evidence in reference to the Nelson Gaol, about which, as you were Superintendent, you doubtless know something. You are also a Visiting Justice, I believe?—I have not had much experience as a Visiting Justice. I have only been Visiting Justice for some months. As Superintendent, I had a general knowledge. 16th Aug., 1878.

608. With respect to the building, is it a good gaol, so far as construction goes?—It is an old building, but, apart from the question of classification, it is sufficient for its purposes.

609. Of what material is it built?—Of wood.

610. Is there any means of classifying the prisoners?—None.

611. Is there any means of keeping long-sentence and first offenders apart?—No; the boys are kept apart. That is the only classification attempted.

612. On the female side is there any classification?—None whatever.

613. Then if a girl commits a simple larceny she is put in with the prostitutes?—Yes.

614. And I suppose she does not come out the better for that?—I should think not.

615. In your opinion, is it advisable to separate long-sentence prisoners from the others by drafting them out of the gaols into one central prison?—I think it is of the utmost importance that they should be separated.

616. In your opinion are Visiting Justices able, from their position, to check all that goes on in the gaol sufficiently?—I think so, if they really do their duty, so far as the supervision of the gaol is concerned.

617. Do you think that skilled inspection from the Government of all gaols, so as to keep up a certain standard of discipline, is necessary?—I certainly think that exceedingly necessary, in order to keep all gaols upon the same footing. I was referring rather to the ordinary routine.

618. Are you aware that the discipline of various gaols differs considerably?—Yes.

619. And that certain specified punishment does not mean the same thing in all gaols?—Exactly; I can point out one instance where there is an essential difference in the interpretation of the law. The Act provides that Visiting Justices may give punishment, in the way of adding to sentences, by a term not exceeding one year. The Visiting Justices in Nelson construe that to mean that for an accumulation of offences they cannot give more than one year's additional imprisonment. In other gaols, in Dunedin, for instance, I know that Visiting Justices take an opposite view, and give as much as a year and a half, or more, additional imprisonment. They consider there is no limit.

620. So long as they do not give more than a year in one sentence?—So long as they do not give more than a year for one offence. I believe that is a wrong interpretation of the law. I cannot conceive it should be intended by the Legislature that the Visiting Justices should have power to extend a sentence without limit.

621. Are the Gaol Regulations enforced in the Nelson Gaol?—Yes.

622. Are they found to work well?—Yes, very well, on the whole.