

Mr. Sharp.

30th Aug., 1878.

1090. Is the mark system working well?—Yes, but we can hardly apply it so strictly as we would wish to do.

1091. For want of appliances?—Yes; still the prisoners endeavour to obtain their marks.

1092. To what labour are the prisoners generally put in Nelson?—If there are any tradespeople competent to carry out work they are set to work at their particular trades. Otherwise, hard labour generally means work on the public works, within a reasonable distance of the gaol; that is, from a mile to a mile and a half. They work on the roads.

1093. Is anything paid by the local bodies for such labour?—I could not say; my own impression is not.

1094. What is your opinion as to the scale of rations; is it satisfactory?—I know what the scale used to be, but I am not very well acquainted with it at present. I have asked the question as to whether there were any complaints, but I have heard none whatever. We have heard no complaints from the prisoners.

1095. You do not think the scale is too liberal?—No; I do not think so, if the prisoners are to do their work properly. I know other people who are of a different opinion; but my opinion is it is not too liberal.

1096. Are the prisoners healthy as a rule?—Yes.

1097. I suppose there are more than one man in a cell in the gaol?—I could not answer that question. We have not very many prisoners. We have been very free from crime, latterly particularly.

1098. Is there any religious instruction, or instruction of any other kind, in the gaol?—Ministers of the different denominations visit occasionally; but there is no instruction that I know of in any other way.

1099. Are there any books or any library in the gaol?—No library.

1100. No instruction in reading and writing?—No instruction given that I know of beyond that the prisoners instruct each other sometimes.

1101. Do you find the system of punishment in Nelson deterrent? Are there many recommitments?—That is a difficult question to answer. As a matter of experience, there are a few people who seem always to be in the gaol; but I otherwise think it is deterrent.

1102. On the women's side, is there any means of keeping first offenders from old prostitutes?—There is a small room in which, I think, first offenders, or, at any rate, females sentenced for a short time, are kept separate. I think that room is used for that purpose, but I am not very certain.

1103. What do you do with boys?—Well, I have hardly known of any instance of boys being sentenced. On one or two occasions, as Resident Magistrate, I have sent boys to gaol, but only for a few hours. They were then kept apart from the others, whipped in the presence of the doctor, and turned adrift.

1104. Is there any Prisoners' Aid Society in Nelson?—No.

1105. Do prisoners, on being released, find any great difficulty in getting work?—I have not heard of any complaints.

1106. Have you heard of any complaints, or have you noticed any breaches of discipline on the part of the gaol officials?—No; not since I have been a Visiting Justice. There was one instance some years ago.

1107. Was it a serious one?—It was not serious, I think. It was merely a disturbance between two warders, which ended in one of them being dismissed. I think I was a member of the Board of Inquiry, as Resident Magistrate.

1108. If the long-sentence prisoners were drafted out of the Nelson Gaol, would there be room then for classifying ordinary offenders?—Not without some additions were made to the Gaol.

1109. Is there room on the ground for additions?—Yes; we have three-quarters of an acre, I suppose.

1110. Could the prisoners be profitably employed in themselves making these additions to the building?—I think so, under proper inspection. Of course, we have sometimes in gaol mechanics who would be quite capable of doing the work.

1111. Are there any special allowances given to prisoners for extra work?—I have not heard of it.

1112. Is tobacco allowed?—It is allowed under the doctor's orders.

1113. But it is not served out to every one as a matter of course?—No. I do not think, during the whole time that I have been visiting the Gaol, I have ever seen smoking; but I have heard of one or two prisoners who have been allowed tobacco by order of the doctor.

1114. *Mr. Swanson.*] The Visiting Justices have power to order the allowance?—Yes; I think that tobacco was ordered in the case of some asthmatic prisoners.

1115. *The Chairman.*] Have you any suggestion you would like to make to the Committee on the subject of gaol discipline, classification, or management?—I think the Gaol is shorthanded.

1116. Nelson Gaol?—Yes.

1117. As to warders?—As to warders. For instance, if we happen to have twenty prisoners there, there is **only** one warder to go out with them, and, in the event of anything being attempted in the way of escape, it would be quite impossible for him to prevent it. Supposing a prisoner escaped, he would have to bring back the other prisoners to the gaol before he would be free to attempt a re-capture. As to classification, I have given my opinion. There is not at the present time sufficient accommodation. I do not think there are any gaol regulations as to debtors; there used to be.

1118. When the present regulations were framed it was supposed that imprisonment for debt was a thing of the past. You said it would be desirable if penal-servitude men could be put in a separate gaol; have you any suggestion to make as to the locality of a gaol for that purpose?—No; that is a very difficult question to answer. I have myself for a long time thought the prisoners could be profitably employed at New Plymouth in the construction of harbour works, and that it would be a very good place for the prisoners; but it is really a very difficult question to answer, because a