

Mr. V. Pyke.
13th Sept., 1878.

1144. You would not be in favour of giving long sentences to first offenders?—Not unless the offence were of a very grave character. Every opportunity should be given a man to redeem his character, but long sentences would have a tendency to debase and harden.

1145. Do you know whether men have suffered after imprisonment by being pursued by their associates in gaol?—I do not know that, but I have known instances where men have suffered by being classed as what the police call "suspects," and being chased about from place to place till they could not get employment. I may add that my experience has been confined entirely to minor offences, and I do not think there is a criminal class of thieves and burglars. If the evil you suggest does exist, then the remedy is not to allow short-sentenced men to come into contact with the more hardened criminals.

1146. *Mr. Swanson.*] But the difficulty is that a man who may be a first offender in one place might have committed fifty offences in some other place?—No doubt; but no system can be perfect.

TUESDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER, 1878.

Mr. MANDERS, M.H.R., examined.

Mr. Manders.
17th Sept., 1878.

1147. *The Chairman.*] I believe, Mr. Manders, you have some evidence you would like to give the Committee?—Yes. I have to say the gaols in the Wakatipu District are totally unfit to hold prisoners. Prisoners cannot be sentenced for any period, not even for a month or less in the Queenstown Gaol. The two gaols are situate fifteen miles apart. One is at Arrowtown, built of stone at the suggestion of Mr. Commissioner Weldon, but built so badly that prisoners can easily escape therefrom. The defects of this and the Queenstown Gaol were pointed out to the Chairman of this Committee when he was in the district two years ago. It was intended to have been a kind of bridewell, where prisoners whose sentences extended to six months should be confined, but none can now be so confined, owing to its defective construction. Indeed it is hardly ever used, it is so imperfectly built. The other gaol is situated at Queenstown, and was built in 1863–64. The Colonial Legislature, at the instance of the present Minister for Public Works, has recognized the importance of having a gaol built in the district, and £1,000 was granted to the Provincial Council for the work, but Mr. Weldon thought the gaol should be built at Arrowtown, and the new gaol was built there. The consequence is that at Queenstown, where the large Government buildings are, and where the District Court is held, there is an uninhabitable gaol. Yesterday I received a telegram from the Mayor of Queenstown, Mr. Warren, who is also a Justice of the Peace, and sits as Mayor regularly on the Bench, in which he says, "Nothing new. Same old story. Floor and foundations gaol rotten. Cells unfit for any human being, so damp that last week prisoner sentenced to six months' imprisonment had to be sent to Invercargill. Hope Gaol Committee will endeavour to remedy disgraceful state." A sentence of one month's imprisonment involves removal. I may mention that Justices of the Peace sitting on the Bench, rather than put the Government to the expense of removing the prisoners to Lawrence or Invercargill, or even sentence them to go to this prison for fourteen days during the winter months, simply impose a fine or discharge them. Thus the condition of these gaols leads to evasions of the law. It is almost impossible for the Gaoler to safely look after a number of long-sentenced prisoners in such insecure gaols. They cannot be placed under proper discipline. They do almost as they please. If a woman is sentenced to confinement, she has to be taken into the Gaoler's quarters and do her sentence chiefly in the kitchen. The whole of the time of the police is taken up in looking after the prisoners if any number are confined. Thus, the administration of justice is affected, and the police discipline injured. A better gaol is necessary, because assaults are becoming more frequent, people knowing that for such offences there is only a fine. I hope the Committee will consider the matter, and see that such gaol accommodation is provided as will enable Magistrates to send prisoners to gaol for six months.

1148. About the Arrowtown Gaol, do you mean that that is also unfit for people to be confined in?—Unfit for long-sentenced prisoners; that is, for men sentenced to more than a month, because the Gaoler is also constable in the place, and here the police is not a large department. Men cannot be locked up and left, because all the stone walls are open. The gaol is of no use except for very short-sentenced men. It has been condemned by the Justice Department, by the police authorities, and by the Magistrates. It is a pity the place was built in such a manner.

1149. That was done by the Superintendent?—It was done by the Superintendent at the instance of Mr. Weldon. We are obliged to send prisoners down to Invercargill Gaol, but the Magistrates feel this difficulty: that if they send down persons convicted of first offences to do short sentences, they are almost sure to be associated with older offenders, penal-servitude men, and become contaminated. Besides, a small gaol is wanted where these men can be put.

1150. You mean that a local gaol is wanted for ordinary first offenders?—Yes; and, in the absence of such a gaol, Magistrates are moved by mercy rather than by justice. It is impossible to send men to such a place. In the case of persons sentenced on fraud summonses, they beg and pray to be sent away when they are unable to pay—and there are a good many such cases now in consequence of hard times in some districts. All pray to be removed out of these cells, and would prefer to be placed in the stable rather than stay in the cells. Of course the removal of prisoners entails great expense, and a good deal of that might be saved were such a gaol erected.

1151. Is there any point on which you would like to speak?—I think it is desirable to have a system of prison classification all through the gaols of the colony.

1152. *Mr. Swanson.*] Could you suggest anything to the Committee as a good means of dealing with first offenders, so as to prevent them coming back?—It has struck me that it would be well to send men to the local gaols, in preference to the large gaols, where possible, and employ them on local public works—that is, prisoners sentenced up to six months.

1153. Do you think it would be a good thing, and lead them into industrious habits, if there was an endeavour to teach these men trades?—I think in large establishments they should be taught trades.