

1154. Give them a sort of task-work, and enable them to earn a few shillings to give them a start when they come out of gaol?—Most certainly. I have advocated that in the public Press, and consider it would be a great help towards the reform of prisoners. That is done in New South Wales, and, according to papers in the Library, which I could show, has been attended with the best possible results. Facts which speak volumes are reported. They, in New South Wales, have a Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, under which a system of lending prisoners money for tools is carried out. The Society see them to the railway station, and otherwise give them a fair start up country, where they can obtain work. Instances are reported to show that the loans are often repaid, accompanied by letters of thanks for the assistance received, and accompanied often also by donations to enable the system to be extended. I think the facts go to show that even apparently the most incorrigible offenders are subject to reclamation.

1155. Could you suggest anything to make the gaols self-supporting?—I have inspected Darlinghurst, Pentridge, and Dunedin Gaols, and also the Invercargill Gaol. The plan adopted at Dunedin seems the best, where the men are employed on public works. I believe, however, the model gaol of the colony is Lyttelton for industrial pursuits or trades.

FRIDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 1878.

Mr. Sherrin.

20th Sept., 1878.

Mr. R. A. A. SHERRIN in attendance, and examined.

1156. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Sherrin, you wrote to the Committee on the 17th instant stating that you were willing to give evidence?—I wish the Committee to understand that I have no grievance about the treatment I received in Timaru Gaol; but I desire to give evidence in order that the system prevailing may be altered. I have no personal feeling about the matter at all.

1157. When was it you had experience of the system in operation at the Timaru Gaol?—I was imprisoned for a newspaper libel from March to September, 1877.

1158. You are a journalist, are you not?—Yes. I wish to direct the attention of the Committee to one matter first. During the six months I was imprisoned not even a Visiting Justice visited the gaol. I also heard, but cannot speak from my own observation or knowledge, that there had been no inspection made during the six months previous to my imprisonment.

1159. Who told you that?—One or more of the prisoners. To my own knowledge, on two or three occasions—I am uncertain which—complaints were made by prisoners and the attendance of the Visiting Justices was required, but they did not come.

1160. Complaints made by the prisoners?—Yes; by the prisoners.

1161. Did they ask to see the Visiting Justices?—Yes.

1162. Have you any means of knowing whether or not the message was sent to the Visiting Justices?—I do not know.

1163. But it is within your knowledge that application was made to see them?—Yes; on two or three separate occasions.

1164. And they did not come?—They did not come. The Visiting Justices came on two separate occasions, I am certain. They may have come on three, but the only business they transacted when they came was to punish prisoners that were brought before them; and having done so they went away without inspecting the gaol. I think I ought also to say that such a state of things most probably exists from the general opinion held that the Gaoler is well adapted for his position, and that he generally manifests fair-play; but it is the absence of inspection to which I wish to draw the attention of the Committee.

1165. While you are on that subject, had you any reason to complain while you were there?—No.

1166. Did you wish to see the Visiting Justices?—I never asked to see them. Referring to the accommodation and the treatment of prisoners, I may say that the accommodation there is very limited. For instance, I was frequently locked up with lunatics.

1167. In the same cell?—Yes; in the same cell. Men were sent there for medical treatment, and kept there a week or a fortnight before they were remanded to Sunnyside, or discharged. On three separate occasions I was locked up with lunatics. At one time I was locked up with a man named Fitzgerald. He stayed there a fortnight before the medical officer sent him to Sunnyside. That man was particularly offensive. He talked morning, noon, and night; and, to speak plainly, he was about as lousy as he could crawl.

1168. How many prisoners were there?—At one time, to the best of my knowledge, some twelve or thirteen men were imprisoned, but the number increased at other times to as many as thirty or thirty-five.

1169. How many were locked up in one cell?—There was one large cell in which, I think, they put eight; but, in the ordinary cells, three or one.

1170. Were there any young men or boys there at the time?—Occasionally there were young men.

1171. Were they put with the elder men?—Yes. I would also like to say something about the condition of the cells. Of course, I had nothing to do when I was imprisoned; but occasionally I used to take a brush after the prisoners went out in the morning, and sweep out some of the cells. It sometimes happens that a man is brought in at night, and locked up in one of the cells until the morning, when the effluvia and stench is then almost intolerable. As to making provision for cleanliness when a man is brought in, there is none; he is locked up for the night; and when he changes his clothes in the morning, he has not got to take a bath, or wash, or be scrubbed; and the consequence is that people come in there who are infested with vermin, and the vermin spread among those who have to sleep in the same cell.