

1882.
NEW ZEALAND.

REPORT OF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of JUSTICE.

SIR,—

Office of Inspector of Prisons, Wellington, 1st May, 1882.

I have the honor to report, for your information, that I have visited the different prisons in the colony during the past year, on the dates stated on the annexed return marked A, and have generally found them clean and in good order, the prisoners healthy, and the sanitary arrangements properly attended to.

2. My visits having been made at uncertain times, and in many cases, perhaps, when I was least expected, leads me to conclude that this satisfactory condition and cleanliness prevail at all times.

3. There has been some overcrowding at Napier which was unavoidable, but the difficulty has been overcome by the removal of prisoners, and steps have been taken to prevent any excess of the numbers which can be properly accommodated being located there in future.

4. The conduct of the prisoners generally has been good, and there are no really serious prison offences to report.

5. The washing and bathing arrangements, which I reported as defective last year, have been considerably improved.

6. All complaints made by prisoners have been duly inquired into, and their petitions invariably submitted to His Excellency the Governor for his consideration.

7. The much-needed work of prison reorganization and management is proceeding steadily and systematically; and, taking into consideration the fact that it has been necessary to contend with the old and, it may be said, disorganized state of things (the growth of many years), the rearrangement has progressed as well as could be expected; and I am gratified to be able to report that most of the drawbacks incidental to the preliminary steps of remodelling are now in a fair way of being overcome.

8. At the outset, very naturally, the question arose how, with the resources at command, to initiate that reformatory treatment of convicts most likely to be attended with the best possible results; but here, unfortunately, a difficulty presented itself in the condition of the existing prison buildings, which do not possess adaptability for the classification of prisoners. Nevertheless, so far as it is possible, and pending the erection of penal-servitude ones, the present prisons are being utilized to the best advantage.

9. This, of course, necessitates the reconstruction of many of them. That reconstruction is now in gradual progress, and it is hoped will in most cases be continued, at comparatively small cost, by the employment of prison labour.

10. That all-important subject, the classification of prisoners, is receiving due attention, in order that juvenile offenders and adults convicted of comparatively trivial crimes, and those convicted of more serious offences, but not habitual criminals, may, for obvious reasons, be kept apart from the habitual or hardened criminals, and subjected to such corrective treatment as will be calculated to produce the most beneficial results, special consideration being given to the inculcation of habits of industry in connection with labour of a reproductive nature, which may act as a set-off against the cost of the different prisons.

11. During the past year considerable expense has been saved by the transfer of tradesman prisoners from one prison to another, where they were required for some special work, which, had they not been available, would have caused additional expenditure. I am satisfied that by such transfers alone, carried out by careful inspection and a knowledge of where to find certain prisoners capable of performing certain labour, a large outlay, otherwise unavoidable, can annually be saved. Under the old system it was not unnatural that a gaoler, on being formally applied to for such skilled labourers, would feel reluctant to part with those whom he believed useful to him, and whose work would be a credit to his establishment. The advantages, however, which are derivable from these transfers are sufficiently apparent, and, from constantly visiting the different prisons, I am in a position to know when particular prison-labour redundant in one place can be most profitably employed in another, and to recommend removal accordingly.

12. Against this arrangement it may be argued that, under it, criminals are brought from other districts, and, on the termination of their sentences, liberated in a town whose inhabitants do not desire any such addition to their population. The invariable practice, however, is that a prisoner who has been transferred as above described is, on his release, sent back to the district in which he was convicted. This is the system adopted in England, and it is one which I hope will be continued at every prison in the colony.

13. The majority of male criminals in New Zealand prisons is, I am glad to find, not of the habitual and hardened class, but is composed rather of incidental offenders, who have been driven to crime under the stimulus of drink, and many of them may therefore be deemed not wholly dishonest or irreclaimable. To give to such prisoners opportunity of redeeming their characters is what prison discipline ought to aim at. Every possible effort should be made to prevent the cultivation of such a criminal class as springs from gregarious associations, some of the horrors of which, that have come