

1884.
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 June, 1884.

In presenting this my fourth annual report on the prisons of the colony, I have the honour to inform you that in the year ended the 31st December last I visited the various prisons on the dates stated in the attached table marked L. I have on all occasions found them kept clean and in good condition, due attention paid to the sanitary arrangements, and a high state of discipline maintained. My method of visitation satisfies me that the condition in which I have found these institutions on the occasions of my inspections is that which I believe always exists. I have also inspected as many of the smaller police gaols during the past year as the time at my disposal would permit.

2. The daily supplies of rations, and the periodical supplies of fuel, clothing, and necessaries, for use in the prisons, have invariably been of good quality and according to sample. The rations are inspected daily on delivery by the Gaoler or Chief Warder, and the right of having their food weighed in their presence is accorded to the prisoners should they desire it.

3. The clothing and necessaries both for the officers and prisoners are obtained from local tradesmen by public tender, and there have been no complaints as regards these articles. A board of survey, consisting of officers detailed by roster in each prison, carefully examines and reports upon them before they are issued for use or admitted into store.

4. One escape took place during the year, viz., at Dunedin. This prisoner, who was working in the vicinity of the prison, managed to elude the vigilance of the warder in charge of him, and effect his escape, but, after being absent thirty hours, was recaptured by the police at Mullock's Gully, nineteen miles from Dunedin, and brought back to the prison the following day.

5. Table A shows that the prisoners have generally enjoyed good health. Two deaths have occurred (exclusive of one suicide), one at Auckland and one at Lyttelton. Inquests were held in each case in accordance with the provisions of the Prisons Act, and satisfactory verdicts returned.

6. The only case of suicide I have to report as occurring in prisons during the year was at Nelson, to which allusion will be found further on.

7. Three death-sentences have been passed during the year—at Christchurch, Auckland, and Wanganui respectively; but in each case His Excellency the Governor was pleased to commute the sentence to penal servitude for life, and there have been no executions.

8. It is with much satisfaction that I am able to report that all the prisons are now worked under the same regulations, and the hours of duty for the officers are similar, as far as circumstances will admit. A copy of the daily routine now in force is attached, marked N.

9. All complaints and requests, which have been very few, made to me by prisoners, have been patiently listened to, and action taken where I deemed necessary, and all their petitions have been presented to His Excellency the Governor for his decision.

10. A reference to Table A shows that at the commencement of the past year there were 527 male and 103 female prisoners confined in the thirteen larger prisons of the colony, and at the close of the same year 505 males and 101 females, showing a decrease of 22 males and 2 females. In my last year's report it is shown that in the year 1882 there passed through these prisons 3,732 males and 937 females, while the table now under reference gives the numbers for 1883 as 3,822 males and 1,059 females respectively, being an actual increase of cases dealt with of 90 males and 122 females; but this increase is entirely due to offences committed by short-sentenced prisoners, who were tried for trivial offences. It will be noticed that the number of sentences of three months' hard labour and under has risen from 2,089 males and 696 females in 1882 to 2,235 males and 813 females in 1883, an increase of 144 males and 117 females. Explanatory of this increase, it is worthy of notice that at the criminal sessions in Auckland in April, last year, a batch of twenty-four Maoris were convicted of assaulting a Government official; and, further, that trivial offenders are increased by the constant arrival of the direct steamers from England, with crew and firemen refractory and refusing to work, who are usually sentenced to be kept in prison till the ship is ready again to proceed to sea.

11. During the past year the daily average number of prisoners in gaols has fallen, from 571·5 males and 96·4 females in 1882, to 537·2 males and 99·6 females, being a decrease of 34·3 males, with an increase of 3·2 females, making an average decrease of 31·1 prisoners in 1883.