

1885.  
NEW ZEALAND.

# PRISONS DEPARTMENT

(REPORT ON, FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1884).

*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 the Inspector of Prisons, Wellington, 1st June, 1885.

In presenting this my fifth annual report on the prisons of the colony, I have the honour to inform you that in the year ended 31st December last I visited the thirteen larger prisons on the dates stated in the attached table, marked L. I have also visited several of the smaller or police gaols whenever time and circumstances permitted my doing so, and have devoted the entire time at my disposal to the various duties appertaining to my office as Inspector of Prisons. On the whole I have every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which these institutions are conducted, as well as with the care and treatment of the inmates.

2. The daily supplies of rations, and the periodical supplies of fuel, clothing, and necessaries for use in the prisons, have been carefully inspected before delivery, and have been found to be of good quality and according to sample, not a single complaint having come under my notice during the year.

3. Two escapes from custody took place—namely, at Auckland and Greymouth. In the former case a party of prisoners was employed in cleaning the Supreme Court grounds, and during a severe thunderstorm a lad eighteen years old ran away. He immediately went home, and, after being absent about two hours, was given back into custody by his mother. In the Greymouth case the prisoner, when at exercise in the yard, jumped over the fence, but, being at once pursued by the Gaoler, was captured in a few minutes.

4. Table A shows that the health of the prisoners (though not so good as in the previous year) has been fair, the daily average sick being 12·1 males and 3·6 females, as against 9·4 males and 2·4 females in 1883; showing a daily average increase of 2·7 males and 1·2 females last year.

5. Nine deaths have occurred during the year—namely, 6 males and 1 female in Auckland, and 2 males in Lyttelton—as against two deaths in the previous year; but it should be remembered that the mortality among prisoners in 1883 showed an unprecedentedly low rate as compared with either the year now reported on or any year since I took charge, the natural deaths in 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1883 being respectively 12, 9, 14, and 2. In every case an inquest was held as directed by the Prisons Act, and a satisfactory verdict returned. There have been no cases of suicide in prisons during the year.

6. Three death sentences were passed in 1883, all on male prisoners—namely, at Napier, Hokitika, and Dunedin. In the latter case His Excellency the Governor was pleased to commute the sentence to penal servitude for life. At Napier and Hokitika the sentences were duly carried out, and instantaneous death resulted in each case, the same executioner being employed, as well as the same scaffold. I would here mention that the system adopted of having a movable scaffold, capable of transport to wherever required, is the best possible arrangement that can be made, and tends to prevent the possibility of any undue delay or unseemly accident at executions, while as regards economy it is no more expensive than having scaffolds made for each prison. The Gaolers have expressed their satisfaction at having an instrument on which they can depend and an experienced executioner sent to them on these melancholy occasions.

7. All reports, complaints, and requests made to me by both officers and prisoners have been duly listened to and fully investigated, and, if they had any foundation, have been brought to your notice, and all petitions from prisoners have been forwarded to his Excellency the Governor for his decision.

8. A reference to Table A shows that at the commencement of the past year there were 503 male and 102 female prisoners confined in the thirteen larger prisons of the colony, and at the close of the year there were 525 male and 97 female prisoners; giving an increase of 22 males, with a decrease of 5 females. In the year 1883 there passed through these prisons 3,822 males and 1,059 females, while during the past year the numbers were 3,855 males and 992 females; being an increase in 1884 of 33 males, with a decrease of 67 females, giving a total decrease in cases dealt with of 34. It will be observed that the sentences of three months' hard labour and under have decreased from 2,235 males and 813 females in 1883, to 1,909 males and 635 females in the year now reported upon—a decrease of 326 males and 178 females.