

18. As regards the education of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that, of a total of 4,244 male and 961 female prisoners, 3,458 males and 698 females were able to read and write well, and 526 males and 172 females were unable to read or write.

19. A reference to Table D shows, I regret to say, a very large increase in the number of juvenile criminals received, those under ten years of age being 40, as against 17 in 1884; but in those from ten to fifteen years of age there is a very considerable decrease on the previous year, the numbers being 68, as against 118 in 1884; while in those aged from fifteen to twenty there is a slight increase, the numbers being 269 last year, as against 258 in 1884; giving a total decrease during the past twelve months of 16 prisoners under the age of twenty. It is, however, a serious blot on our administration to find as many as 40 children under ten years of age have passed through the prisons during the year; and, as far as can be calculated at present, I have every reason to believe there will be a considerable increase in juvenile criminals this year. This seems the more to be regretted from the fact of many of the industrial schools having spare accommodation since the introduction of the boarding-out system.

20. The total number of prison punishments awarded during the year was 339, as against 311 in 1884: these were minor punishments by Visiting Justices; while 47 serious or aggravated prison offences were reheard in open Court after first being investigated by a Visiting Justice. This system of taking the more serious prison offences for hearing in open Court has worked well, especially where Resident Magistrates have adjudicated; and the punishments have proved deterrent in many cases. It will be seen from the table under review that, with the exception of an attempt at mutiny in the hulk at Otago Heads, there have been no prison offences that need any special remarks. Of the 47 cases reheard in open Court, 17 were in connection with that *emeute*; and it appears to me that, if a little more discretion had been exercised by the officers on that occasion, it would have been unnecessary to bring more than the ringleaders up for punishment. It is at all times a matter of great difficulty to maintain rigid discipline on a hulk, and the difficulty is intensified in the one now in use at Otago Heads owing to its wretched accommodation, which has been reported upon several times. These periodical outbreaks are what must be expected in prisons and on hulks where strict discipline is enforced. The small amount of punishments—at Lyttelton, 27, for minor offences; at Mount Cook, 12 minor offences and 2 Court cases; and the Terrace, Wellington, 33 minor offences and 1 Court case—reflect credit on the officers of these establishments, where a complete and strict system of discipline prevails.

21. Under Table H it will be noticed that, of the more serious offences of which prisoners have been convicted during the past year, there were—forgery and uttering, 10; larceny, 55; indecent conduct and rape, 5; housebreaking and burglary, 15: being a decrease on the previous year of 25 and 8 on the first and third offences respectively, and an increase of 14 on larceny and 4 on house-breaking.

22. The number of offences recorded against officers in 1885 was 23, as against 32 in the previous year; but, with the exception of one for intoxication and another for unbecoming conduct, they were ordinary cases of absence and neglect of duty. By effluxion of time some of the oldest officers have retired from the service, and Government have been able to fill their places by younger men of more active habits. These changes have proved of considerable benefit in the management of the prisons, and have enabled me to carry out reforms which I was not before in a position to effect, and have also conclusively shown that for our larger gaols we must secure men who, still in the prime of life, are ready to carry out with zeal and ability the instructions conveyed to them. Several promotions and appointments have been made during the year, and I am glad to report that the officers have proved themselves fitted for the difficult and arduous work they have been called upon to perform.

23. Classification of prisoners is, I regret to report, almost at a standstill for want of proper accommodation in the different prisons, and little more can be done in this most important matter until the buildings in course of erection at Mount Cook and Auckland are completed. These works are being pushed on as fast as possible, and both buildings should be in a sufficiently-forward condition to accommodate a considerable number of persons within the next twelve months, provided nothing unforeseen occurs to delay the works.

24. The second storey of the main wing of Mount Cook prison is now nearly erected, and the brick-making and laying have been pronounced by experts as superior to anything of the kind before attempted in the colony. It was thought by many that this building would never be completed with prison labour, but it has now sufficiently advanced to disprove that assumption; and it will, I think, be found, when finished, to have cost little over one-half the estimate. Whatever the expenditure may be, I believe it will not only repay the outlay in the construction, but that it will ultimately leave a large credit-balance, derived from the reclaimed land. During the year about two millions of superior bricks have been manufactured.

25. The new gaol at Auckland, a large undertaking, is being built of scoria-stone from the prison quarry, entirely by prison labour; and, considering the number and physique of the men available for the work, is making good progress, and should be partly ready for occupation within the next twelve months.

26. At New Plymouth three halls and the centre-dome are nearly completed; but a good deal of levelling for sanitary reasons is required before they can be fully occupied.

27. New prisons are about to be built at Wanganui and Greymouth, where they are urgently required. The very limited accommodation for prisoners in the existing gaols at Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin necessitating in some cases as many as seven and eight persons being placed in one cell is, in my opinion, not creditable to the colony. As I have before stated, it entirely prevents any proper system of classification being carried out; and I feel I cannot too strongly urge the necessity of completing the prisons at Mount Cook, Wellington, and Auckland without delay. The question of a new prison for Otago will have to be carefully considered and a conclusion arrived at before long. As I have previously pointed out, a new hulk at Otago Heads is urgently needed, the one in use being not only unserviceable, but absolutely dangerous. The