

1888.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1887.

ALSO

REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF "THE FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1886,"

UP TO 31st DECEMBER, 1887.

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,—

Justice Department, Prisons Branch, Wellington, 20th March, 1888.

I have the honour to present my eighth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with second annual report of the operations of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886." I have made periodically, as shown in Table J, inspections of the thirteen larger prisons of the colony at uncertain dates, and have visited as many of the smaller or police gaols as the time at my disposal permitted of, and, on the whole, have every reason to believe that these institutions are now established and conducted on an efficient and economical basis; and while, on the one hand, there is no approach to tyranny or cruelty, on the other the system adopted is sufficiently severe to make penal servitude and imprisonment deterrent and to some extent reformatory. As regards the First Offenders' Probation Act, from the details given in this report it appears that its success is now established beyond a doubt.

2. It is a matter of congratulation this year to be again able to report that the cost of maintenance of prisoners is much less than in the previous twelve months, and there has been a considerable falling-off both in the number and seriousness of prison offences, as well as of complaints against prison officers.

3. As heretofore the supplies for the various prisons have been publicly tendered for, and no complaints have been made by either the prison authorities or by the various contractors. The usual custom of these tenders being addressed to and opened by the Visiting Justices has been adhered to, and their recommendations as to accepting or rejecting them have invariably been adopted.

4. There were three escapes during the year—viz., one at Hokitika, one at Oamaru, and one at Mount Cook, Wellington; but in each case the prisoners were recaptured. At Hokitika the prisoner ran away from the works, but was never lost sight of by the officer who followed, overtook, and recaptured him when he had gone about five hundred yards. At Oamaru the prisoner managed to get out of his cell during the daytime through a defective lock; and, after being absent about an hour and a half, was taken by the police in the town. The escape at Mount Cook was from the temporary wooden prison, and was entirely due to the want of vigilance on the part of the night-watch officer, whose services were dispensed with in consequence. After being at large three days, the prisoner was recaptured by Detective Campbell, assisted by the gaol officials. It appears that he had secreted a gouge in his cell, and with it had cut his way out, a work that should have been quite impossible had the night-watch officer properly performed his duty. Considering the old and dilapidated buildings that are utilised as a prison at Mount Cook, it has been a matter of surprise that there have not been more escapes, which is mainly, I think, due to the satisfactory manner in which the officers carry out the instructions; but, as in this case, the authorities are sometimes deceived and irregularities follow.

5. A reference to Table A shows that the health of the prisoners throughout the year has been good at all the prisons; the daily average of sick has been 10·23 males and 2·59 females, showing a daily average decrease of 3·9 in the males and an increase of 0·64 in the females as compared with last year. A great deal of the sickness is accounted for by the large number of persons who, I regret to say, are still sent to prisons through suffering from the effects of drink; but to this I shall draw attention later on. Four deaths occurred in prisons as against three in 1886—viz., one female at Dunedin, and three males at Napier, Wellington Terrace, and Tauranga respectively. The usual inquests were held, and two of these deaths were attributed to alcohol.