

1890.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1889.

ALSO

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1889.

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, 15th April, 1890.

I have the honour to present my tenth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the fourth annual report of the operations of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," and am pleased to be able to state that during the past year there has been a very considerable reduction in the number of persons who have been confined in the different prisons, with only a small increase in the cost per head; that discipline has been maintained with fewer punishments; that there has been less sickness amongst the prisoners, with a very large diminution in the number of escapes; and, though last, by no means least, there has been a very satisfactory decrease in the number of juvenile offenders who have passed through the prisons of the colony.

As regards the First Offenders' Probation Act, I cannot speak too highly of its usefulness, and I have no hesitation in stating that many a young and thoughtless offender has been rescued from a career of crime through its intervention. The Act continues to work smoothly and satisfactorily, and is proving year by year one of the most useful measures ever passed by any Legislature. The details of the working of the Act for the past year, as shown further on, speak for themselves, and need no comments from me.

2. During the past year I visited the twelve larger prisons on the dates stated in the attached table marked J. I 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 appointment as Inspector of Prisons. I have every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which these institutions are conducted generally, as well as with the care and treatment of the inmates; but, owing to the want of sufficient and proper accommodation at some of the central prisons, a complete system of separation and classification cannot yet be thoroughly carried out. As my visits are generally surprise ones, sometimes perhaps when I am least expected, I have no reason to suppose the care and treatment of prisoners is any different during my absence from what I actually find at the periodical inspections.

3. As heretofore, the supplies for the various prisons have been publicly tendered for, and no complaints have reached this office of the supplies not being up to the required standard. The usual custom of these tenders being addressed to and opened by the Visiting Justices has been strictly adhered to, and their recommendations as to accepting or rejecting them have invariably been adopted without any protests from the unsuccessful tenderers.

4. There has been no breaking out of prisons during the year, and only one prisoner, a male, escaped from the labour party, at Wanganui, and was recaptured within four hours. As during the year 1888 there were no less than six escapes, one prisoner having never yet been recaptured, the fact of only one escaping during the past year clearly shows, as I pointed out last year, that one successful escape leads to a regular epidemic, and does incalculable harm; and it behoves all prison officers at all times to be on the alert, always to keep a careful watch on those under their charge. Whenever an escape takes place it is invariably suggested by those who consider themselves authorities in such matters that blame must attach to the head of the department, whereas nothing can be more absurd. The Gaolers on the spot, and those acting under their orders, are, and must be, alone held responsible for the safe keeping of all committed to their charge; and the fact of only one prisoner escaping during the past year reflects considerable credit on the Gaolers and their subordinates.

5. A reference to Table A shows that the health of the prisoners throughout the year has been very good at all the prisons, and I can testify from observation that all prisoners are carefully watched by the gaol surgeons, and that no prisoners are allowed to remain at labour for which they are unfit. In this respect, at least, the inmates of prisons possess an advantage, on the whole, over the rest of the community. It is, no doubt, right and proper that increasing care