

small prisons such as Nelson, Timaru, and Hokitika, necessitated by the peculiar configuration of the country, all tends to additional expenditure, which the most careful administration is powerless to curtail.

15. The receipts for value of prison-labour, sales of road-metal, bricks, drainpipes, needlework, maintenance of prisoners, &c., for the past year, amounted to £4,551 3s. 8d., exclusive of any credit taken for work done at the fortifications, as against £7,042 8s. 3d. in 1888. This reduction is accounted for by the large diminution of the number of prisoners who passed through the gaols last year, and by the fact of so large a number being employed on labour for the Government, non-remunerative to the department.

16. As regards the education of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that, out of a total of 3,317 males and 736 females, 2,866 males and 579 females were able to read and write well, whilst 340 males and 97 females were unable to read or write.

17. It is with feelings of profound gratification that attention is invited to the ages of prisoners under Table D, from which it will be gathered that during the past year there has been a very considerable reduction in the number of juvenile offenders who have passed through the gaols of the colony, those under the age of ten years being 14, as against 22 in 1888; whilst in those from ten to fifteen years the numbers are 61, as against 88; and in those from fifteen to twenty years the numbers are 219, as against 241: giving a total substantial decrease of 57 in young persons under the age of twenty years. This is very satisfactory as far as it goes, and is in a great measure due to "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886;" but it does not go far enough, and the colonists should not rest content to find that, with the Act just referred to in full force, and with the industrial schools and similar institutions open in the colony, there have been actually imprisoned 14 children of such tender ages as under ten; but, as this matter has so often been drawn attention to in previous reports without leading to any decided action, it must be hoped that this is only the first of an annual substantial decrease, which may end ere long in the total disappearance from the gaol-records of the names of persons whose ages befit them more for the nursery than a public prison, and whose detention in, or even commitment to, the latter-named institution is nothing more or less than a public scandal.

18. It is interesting to note, from Table F, that a comparison of the previously-committed prisoners sentenced during the past year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1885—shows a decrease in once-convicted of 74 males and 3 females; a decrease of the twice-convicted of 27 males, with an increase of 21 females; and in those thrice or oftener convicted, an increase of 12 males, with the large decrease of 167 females. This substantial diminution in the female prison-population permitted the Addington Prison to be closed last April, and the prisoners transferred to the Lyttelton Prison. This has not only the advantage of being an economical arrangement, but permits of a far better system of strict discipline being carried out; while the cells in present use are more healthy and better suited for a female prison than those at Addington. I here take the opportunity of placing on record my appreciation of the valuable services rendered to the female prisoners at Addington and Lyttelton by the lady visitors, who by their kindly advice and interest have given valuable assistance in solving the somewhat difficult question of finding employment on discharge from prison for, and so preventing the possible lapse into crime of, a class of the younger female prisoners whom it is most desirable to bring under influences of this character, and who, if left to their own devices, would, without doubt, fall into the clutches of some of their older and profligate prison companions.

19. There is a decrease in the number of prison punishments awarded during the past year—viz., 213, against 227 in 1888. These were minor punishments inflicted by Visiting Justices, while 10 serious or aggravated prison offences, after first being investigated by a Visiting Justice, were reheard in open Court, as against 15 similar cases in 1888. I would here draw attention to the remarks of one of the Visiting Justices at Lyttelton Prison, in his annual report furnished this year, in which I fully concur. They are as follows: "Before concluding my report, I am anxious to bring before your notice two matters which I think require consideration—first, the necessity of reintroducing corporal punishment; second, having aggravated offences heard within the prisons. With respect to flogging, I am perfectly satisfied that in some cases it is absolutely necessary: I refer to incorrigibles. With men of this class my experience is that, punish them how you may, it has no effect; but, if prisoners knew that if they persistently continued to offend they would be likely to receive corporal punishment, I think it would deter men, and be the means of making them behave. I am quite aware that if this question was mooted it would be cried down by many, but I venture to think that, if they had a few years' experience of prisoners, they would come to the same conclusion as I have. I may mention that my late colleague, Mr. —, who had very many years' experience, was strongly of this opinion. I will quote from our report of 15th April, 1887: 'This gaol contains some remarkable examples of incorrigibles, to whom the suspension of corporal punishment is a great boon.' With respect to having aggravated prison offences heard in the prison, I think it would be very desirable to have all cases heard within the four walls of the gaol. These cases could without any inconvenience be heard by a Resident Magistrate or two Justices. As a rule, prisoners whose cases are ordered to be reheard in open Court repeat minor prison offences for the purpose of airing their fancied grievances and talking to the public. If these cases were heard inside the prison, I think it would perhaps tend to prevent men repeating offences."

20. With reference to these remarks, I have already stated I fully concur in what this Visiting Justice says; and it must be recollected that, as he is a prison Magistrate of long standing, and no doubt has given the matter very serious consideration, his opinions are of considerable value. Those versed in prison matters are well aware that with some prisoners of the class referred to by this gentleman nothing but the dread of the lash has the slightest effect, and the very fact of their knowing that they may be subjected to it at any time for certain serious offences, prevents their committing those of an aggravated nature, and tends to teach them how to curb their tempers;