

17. *Conclusion.*—In conclusion, I may state that it has been a source of pleasure to me to have been associated with the Volunteers for the past two years. The advice I have given and the suggestions I have been able to offer have always been cordially received and acted upon, and my relations with the Forces have been of a most harmonious character. The recent visit of Major-General Edwards has, however, brought prominently forward the views which I believe to be held by all competent military critics—viz., that the time has now arrived when the New Zealand Volunteers should be placed under the command of an officer still serving in the army, who will be able to devote his whole time to their training and organization. The result of my experience has fully confirmed my convictions that what is wanted is a modern scientific soldier, who after a limited period of service in the colony—say, five years—would rejoin his regiment, and be replaced by another Imperial officer of similar standing, by which means New Zealand would secure a succession of commanders always abreast of the latest military developments. Under such an arrangement an Inspector of Volunteers would no longer be required, and, though I should regret to sever my connection with the Volunteers, I feel very strongly that some such step as I have mentioned above must be taken if we wish to place our military organization on a proper basis.

I have, &c.

A. HUME,

Lieut.-Col. and A.A. Gen. N.Z.M., Inspector of Volunteers.

The ENGINEER for DEFENCES to the UNDER-SECRETARY for DEFENCE.

SIR,—

New Zealand Defences Office, Wellington, 30th May, 1890.

I have the honour to forward the usual report upon the harbour-defences of the colony for the year ending 31st March, 1890.

*Temporary Prisons.*

There has not been any material new departure in regard to defence-works during the past year. The occupation by the prisoners of the converted submarine-mining buildings on Ripa Island completed the establishment of four temporary prisons—the converted barracks at Fort Cautley, Auckland; Point Halswell, Wellington; and Taiaroa Head, Port Chalmers, having been already proclaimed and occupied. The much better work which has been done on Ripa Island since the permanent-location system was brought into operation, as compared with that executed when the prisoners had to be taken to and fro every day in the steam-launch, both justifies and confirms its earlier adoption at the other ports. The temporary prisons have proved equal to the needs of the department; there has been no serious attempt to break out, those confined in them recognising that, although the buildings are denominated temporary prisons, they have been sufficiently carefully strengthened and barred to render any such attempt very unlikely to result in success. The prisoners also appear healthy, and, if the context will admit the expression, contented.

*Convict Labour.*

With regard to the average value of convict-labour, it was pointed out in last year's report that, although it is well known by experience such labour will not stand comparison with ordinary or contract-labour as regards the amount of work executed in a given time, yet the economy of its employment compensates for the lesser results where rapidity is not essential. It may be added that, although rapidity is the essence of field-fortification, in permanent fortification it is rarely feasible, and more rarely advisable, owing to the peculiar exigencies of the work. This favourably discounts the apparent principal drawback of convict-labour. As compared with ordinary picked labour, there is a further disadvantage that the *personnel* of the gangs is most varied, ranging through all grades from the gentleman to the boy-thief, and from the herculean navy to the slim clerk, so that an even gauge of work can hardly be expected from such diverse capabilities. Here, again, however, the many varieties of work which the execution of a fortification demands enable all, under judicious arrangement and supervision, to be usefully employed. It may be—and, indeed, often is—urged that a prisoner has no interest to work hard, and consequently never does an honest hour's labour. This is no doubt largely the case where the work is that of the roads—or the chain-gang. An improved spirit, however, appears to reign on the defence-works, and perhaps no better explanation can be advanced than stated in last year's report, as follows: "The better class of prisoners is selected for transfer to the temporary prisons and employment on the works; they are housed in buildings which, while secure, are not suggestive of a gaol, and they have an always-bracing atmosphere around them. Moreover, they have not to march through the streets to and from a city gaol every day, nor are they when at work exposed to curious eyes; while the nature of the work upon which they are engaged has a definite interest and object to them, and is not merely a monotonous medium for the enforcement of hard-labour. All these considerations combine to induce them to work with greater willingness than is customary with convicts, and in many cases to display an unusual and intelligent interest in the execution of the tasks set to them." The experience of another year confirms these views. To the casual visitor to the scene of these prisoners' labour the usual gaol stroke may suggest itself as not conspicuous by its absence; but the amount and quality of the work accomplished in a given time is a better test. Of this, visits of inspection to all works throughout the colony, undertaken as often as the exigencies of a central control extending from Auckland to Dunedin, and of other duties, will admit, enable a good judgment to be formed. And it should be added that these conditions are in a very large measure due to the characters and qualities of the Inspectors of Works at the different ports, who have carried the energy and ability which they have always applied to the management of the works proper into the more difficult field of managing the convicts—so as to get ready and willing work out of them—with intelligence and judgment, and correspondingly good results. In this they receive every assistance from the warders; but it is hardly remarkable that the convicts will work, other things being equal, more readily for the plain-clothes Inspector than for their uniformed official overseers.