

11. The prisoners undergoing sentences of penal servitude in the colony numbered last year 163 males and 4 females, a decrease of 1 male and 3 females on 1890.

12. In 1891, 327 male and 43 female prisoners were acquitted or discharged after remand, as against 387 males and 33 females during the preceding year.

13. From the figures given under Table B it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £52 2s. 8d. as against £46 9s. 5d., and at a net cost of £36 9s. 3d. against £39 10s., in 1890. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision £36 10s. 5d., maintenance £12 11s. 2d., and incidentals £3 1s. 1d. This increase in the gross cost per head is mainly due to the very large decrease in the daily average number of prisoners. The cause is supplemented by an increase in the price of provisions with a corresponding increase in the price of necessaries; while the staff supervision is considerably increased in consequence of instructing warders, who were formerly paid by the Harbour Defences and Public Works Department, being now paid by the Prisons Department, under a new system.

14. The receipts and credits for prison-labour, road-metal, maintenance of prisoners, needle-work, &c., amounted to £7,216 2s. 3d., as against £3,919 19s. 8d. in the previous year. This of course accounts for the net cost of prisoners during the past year being decreased considerably.

15. From Table C it will be seen that out of the prisoners who passed through the various gaols 2,482 males and 618 females were able to read and write, 90 males and 58 females could read only, and 341 males and 101 females were unable to read or write.

16. It is interesting to note, from Table F, that a comparison of the previously-convicted prisoners sentenced during the past year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1887—shows a decrease of 144 males and 16 females in the once convicted, a decrease in the twice convicted of 56 males, with the same number of females, whilst in those convicted three times, or oftener, there is a decrease of 32 males and an increase of 1 female. This, it is considered, goes far to prove that the sentences passed upon prisoners and the manner in which they are carried out are deterrent, and tend to prevent and repress crime. It has always been a vexed question with those whose duty it is to administer punishment to criminals as to whether the deterrent or reform theory is the better, some holding that the best guarantee for the prevention of crime is to make it certain that punishment means something to be feared and dreaded, and so unpleasant as to entirely obliterate the motives which may tend to make it attractive, whilst others value punishment chiefly for the beneficial results it may have on those subjected to it. But all agree that society must be protected against offending criminals. Mr. William Tallack, secretary to the Howard Association, who has a life-long experience of criminals and their management, says: "The experience of the United States in this matter may be referred to as useful in a negative sense. It teaches us by what acts a regular and ample supply of criminals may be most unfailingly kept up. The authors of the new system, he says, have had the success which their efforts have merited: they have made prison-life so pleasant that we learn without surprise that they have vastly increased the number of candidates for its exceptional privileges."

17. The well-meaning persons who have formed what is known as the Massachusetts Prison Reform Association have gained the public ear, not only in Massachusetts, but in several other States of the Union; and we read their view is that a man is not sent to gaol to be punished for what he has done—his only punishment is to be that of instruction and elevation. The criminal in a modern prison is to be taught moral and intellectual beauties and refinements that he never dreamed of before. Now, what is the result of this treatment? In the report of the Boston Police Commissioners last year, we find that 1 in 10 of the entire population of the city was arrested in the course of the year, and 1 in 26 throughout the States. The reason is obvious: Boston provides better bed and board than most of the prisoners ever had before, and if they come once they are sure to come again. Again, prison-life in the Concord Reformatory is described as attractive, as it can well be made, and the same remark applies to many more of the States prisons. A similar system prevails in Italy with like results.

18. The above quotations, and information gathered from various papers on the subject of the treatment of criminals, is published with a view of showing that the English system, the main feature of which is to assiduously prevent prisoners while under detention from mutual contamination, is the right one, and is, as far as practicable, being carried out in the New Zealand prisons. To do this in its entirety, however, it is imperative that each prisoner must have a cell to himself, which naturally must add considerably to the expense; nevertheless, it would appear that we are recouped by finding a material decrease of prisoners each year, with an increasing population. In the prisons every effort is made to assist—by books, advice, &c.—those who are anxious to reform, and this object is receiving more and more attention each year. It affords me much pleasure to report that, in many of the towns, philanthropic persons have assisted the prison officials by gifts of books to prison libraries and by visits to the prisoners for the purpose of reading and giving kindly advice to them while in the prison, as well as providing employment for them on discharge. The gaolers, too, I am pleased to say, have been very active in this matter, and when they have been assured from his or her conduct, while under their charge, that the prisoner is anxious to lead an honest life when released, they have, in several instances, taken considerable trouble in finding employment for expirées, and in very few cases has their confidence been misplaced, while many expirées freely admit they owe their conversion from crime to the exertions and interest taken in them by those under whom they served their sentences. In my opinion, the only efficient system devised for the repression of crime is entire separation and prevention of social intercourse by the cellular system. As before stated, this is costly; but, so far, results justify the expenditure. The free intercourse of prisoners with one another gives grand opportunities to the whole body for perfecting themselves in the criminal art. What one does not know of it another teaches him, and they exchange views accordingly, and form plans which they carry out in due course when their period of detention is at an end, and when they are once more at liberty to put their prison lessons