

into practice. The steady decrease in the number of prisoners for the last ten years in the colony may be looked upon as clearly indicating that the ideal object of punishment of criminals has to a considerable extent been grasped, and that the sentence is not only the legal payment of a debt which has been incurred, both to the law and to society, but that it is also a deterrent from crime. It is thought that none can truthfully say that the inmates of our gaols are harshly treated, improperly cared for, and scantily fed, while they certainly do not obtain luxuries or amusements during the period of their confinement. The blots on our system may be summed up thus: Sending children of tender years, drunkards in delirium tremens, and lunatics to our gaols.

19. It is my painful duty to again draw attention to the practice still prevailing in the colony of sending children under ten years of age to prison, but it is a matter of considerable congratulation to find that last year there were only 10, as against 20 in 1890. These children—mere infants—are of course kept entirely separate while in prison, but they should, at that age, never be allowed to darken a prison door. A reference to Table D shows the number of juvenile offenders who have passed through the prisons of the colony during 1891 to be as follows: Those under ten years of age, 10, as against 20 in the previous year; those from ten to fifteen years, 55, as against 54 in 1890; and those from fifteen to twenty years, 214, as against 223 in the previous year; giving a total decrease of 18 in young persons under the age of twenty years. This is not satisfactory, and, with the First Offenders' Probation Act in force, the number of juvenile offenders seems very large, while, it is repeated, infants under ten years of age ought under no circumstances to be consigned to prisons.

20. The total number of punishments awarded for prison offences last year was 148, as against 172 in 1890. Of these offences, 145 were for minor offences punished by the Visiting Justices, and only 3 serious or aggravated prison offences, after first being investigated by a Visiting Justice, were reheard in open Court—a decrease of 4 as compared with the previous year. This again is encouraging, and clearly shows that the introduction of the system of bringing serious or aggravated offenders before the open Court has not been attended with the disastrous results to discipline which was predicted for it. One hundred and forty-eight minor offences is as low an average as can be reasonably expected, while a good state of discipline is fully maintained.

The number of offences committed by prison officers was 9, as against 5 in the previous year. These offences were more or less of a minor nature, and there were no cases of intoxication; while the officers, though subject to trying work and long hours, have evinced interest and humanity in the performance of their duties and gained respect from those over whom they are placed.

22. The prisoners at the four centres have been principally employed at fortification-work during the year, and the Defence Engineer appears satisfied with the quantity and quality of the work carried out by them, as will be seen from his report. At Auckland considerable progress has been made with the erection of the new prison, and the overcrowding and occupation of vermin-infested antiquated buildings complained of in former reports has now virtually ceased. The grounds at Government House, Auckland, have been kept up with prison labour, while useful work has been done at the Mount Eden Rifle-range. At Wellington, in addition to the fortification-works, a new police-station at Mount Cook has been built by the prisoners, and is now almost completed. It is a commodious brick building, and was much required in that locality. At Lyttelton the prisoners have been hard at work at the fortifications at Ripa Island and Sumner Road, which are now fast approaching completion; they have also been employed making repairs and improvements to the immigration buildings on Quail Island. At Dunedin, where there are considerably fewer prisoners, they have been exclusively employed on defence-works at Taiaroa Heads. The supply of clothing, boots, officers' uniforms, &c., still continues to be made in Lyttelton prison, where also a considerable amount of printing is done for the Government Printer.

23. As regards Milford Sound, the work allotted to the prisoners was found much more stupendous and the climate more unfavourable than could be gathered from mere descriptions, and owing to the terribly heavy rainfall the prisoners were only able to work about half the year. To give some idea of the climate it may be mentioned that on the last day of last year 11½ in. of rain was the registered fall for twenty-four hours. The work set to the prisoners was to make a coach-road 16ft. wide with half a chain cleared on either side, and there was to be an officer of the Public Works Department to supervise and lay off the work; but soon after the work commenced that officer was withdrawn and the officers and prisoners were left to their own devices. The tools and appliances issued were also of a very inferior kind and quite unfitted for the work. Notwithstanding all these drawbacks a fair amount of work was done. Later on His Excellency, Lord Onslow, visited Milford, and I understand expressed an opinion that a coach-road was a mistake, and that a pack-track was all that was necessary; and a short time after the Hon. the Minister for Public Works visited Milford, and determined that the coach-road should be discontinued and a pack-track substituted, which naturally altered the entire aspect of the case. I at once reported that the construction of a pack-track was not suitable work for prisoners, as the constant shifting of camp which is necessitated by such work would be costly and unprofitable, while the result of camp not being constantly shifted must entail a great loss of time to the prisoners daily in going to and returning from work; while in a climate like Milford it is undesirable to employ prisoners at any distance from their camp. Again, to make prison labour on public works of this kind remunerative, at least 100 prisoners should have been sent instead of half that number, as it takes very little additional staff to supervise 100 than it does to look after 50. I claim, however, to have clearly demonstrated by the Milford Sound experiment that, with trustworthy officers, prisoners can with safety be located and worked in any part of the colony. In justice to the officers who have been stationed at Milford it is pointed out that, during the time the camp has been there—namely, since December, 1890—there have been only four escapes, while a fair amount of discipline has been maintained; and had it not been for the unfavourable weather a