

becoming injurious isolation or solitude. Both by public advocacy and by personal representation at the Home Office the Howard Association has recently, as well as previously, pleaded this very important point. But the committee have observed with some anxiety that several of the writers in the recent discussions on prison questions have recommended such undue relaxations of the separate treatment of offenders as would prove cruelly injurious to them, especially from a moral point of view. These persons have based such recommendations upon misapprehensions of the actual facts and conditions of prison discipline, as well as upon certain very inaccurate or misapplied statistics. Some of them also appear to have given very inadequate consideration to the necessity of distinguishing clearly between the two classes of casual offenders and the professional criminal. But this distinction is most important to be borne in mind; and, further, it should never be forgotten that a measure of leniency which may be justly accorded to certain pitiable and unfortunate delinquents may be most mischievous, and actually cruel, especially to the women and children of the community, if extended to the perpetrators of brutal outrage and violence."

20. The number of offences committed by prison officers last year was but one, and that of only a trivial character, as against 9 in 1893. I am glad to be again able to bear testimony to the satisfactory manner in which the prison officers carry out their duties. The enforcement of discipline among prisoners is necessarily a somewhat unpleasant task, requiring a union of firmness and kindness. The fact, however, that there was only one offence committed by prison officers during the past year speaks volumes for the quality of our prison service.

21. The number of punishments awarded last year for prison offences was 161, as against 154 in 1893; of these, 154 were for minor offences which were adjudicated upon by the Visiting Justices, while the remaining 7, being serious or aggravated prison offences, after being first investigated by the Visiting Justices, were reheard and decided upon in open Court. A reference to the table giving the detail of these prison offences shows that a great many are for idleness or refusing to work; and, when it is taken into account the class of persons that are dealt with in prisons, the small number of punishments tends to prove that, while prisoners are made to work, no undue harshness is exercised by the officers placed over them. In this colony the prison population is to a large extent furnished from the vagrant class, who on being first convicted boast that they have never done a day's work and never mean to, and in dealing with such the prison officers have often a difficult part to play. But I am pleased to be able to report that by a careful study of the habits of the prisoners by those set over them the officers in the majority of cases get a fair day's work out of their prisoners, and, while not being unnecessarily severe, they make the prisoners feel that if imprisonment is to be deterrent there must be no idleness on the works.

22. The prisoners at the four centres have been principally employed as heretofore at fortification work during the past year, but this work is now nearly completed. In Auckland the building of the new prison is progressing satisfactorily, and new quarters have been completed for the Gaoler and two subordinate officers. The grounds round Government and Admiralty Houses and Supreme Court have also been kept in order, and a considerable amount of work done for the Domain Board. At Wellington, besides the fortification work proper, a road from Kilbirnie to the torpedo-sheds has been completed, and the manufacture of bricks, drain-pipes, &c., has been continued. At Lyttelton the fortification works at Ripa Island have been completed, extensive improvements on the quarantine station at Quail Island have been carried out, and the prisoners are now engaged in reclaiming at Striking Point, which work was left incomplete some years ago in order to make the fortifications at Ripa Island. In Dunedin the prisoners have been employed on the Maori Kaik Road, and on fortifications. At Nelson they are still employed on the Rocks Road, and their work gives general satisfaction to the Corporation, by whom they are employed. At New Plymouth they are still on the breakwater works, and have done really good serviceable work, and, being isolated from the public gaze, the work and locality is well suited to prison labour. At Napier they are quarrying and preparing stone for a boundary-fence for the prison, which is much needed; while at Invercargill they are employed reclaiming for the Borough Council.

23. As regards new prisons, the prison at Mount Cook is not yet connected with the main drains, and no system of lighting has yet been fixed upon, but it is believed that these defects will soon be made good; and it is hoped at no distant date the prisoners at the Terrace will be removed to Mount Cook. With the exception of the Dunedin Prison, the Terrace is the worst in the colony, and, in my opinion, the greater part of it is fast becoming unfit for habitation. It is neither safe, wholesome, or spacious enough for present requirements, and imprisonment cannot be made either deterrent or reformatory in the buildings that at present exist. The sooner this establishment is closed and the prisoners transferred to Mount Cook the better for all concerned. It is with much satisfaction that I can report that the new prison at Dunedin is at last commenced, and it is hoped it will now be pushed on to completion as fast as practicable. When completed it will accommodate (each with a separate cell) 50 males and 20 females, with the usual offices, and this, it is thought, will meet the local requirements for some time to come; while, with the site on which the old prison now stands, there will be ample space for enlarging it from time to time to meet the necessity for increased accommodation, as may be requisite.

24. With a view to making imprisonment more rigorous for vagrants who make prisons their homes, a new dietary scale has been introduced for men undergoing sentences of three months or under, and has been on trial for the last six months, but owing to an alteration made, contrary to my recommendations, the scale is still too liberal, and suggestions for curtailing some of the items are about to be made, and special labour, such as picking oakum for this class of prisoners within the prisons, instead of being put in association on the works with the longer-sentenced ones, is what is required, as the association of the shorter-sentenced prisoners with those serving long terms is detrimental to discipline, and tends to make short sentences neither deterrent or reformatory.

25. As regards long-sentence prisoners, it would appear that the classification system and remission scale require alterations, and it is believed that if, instead of as at present, when remissions of one-fourth of the sentences, less the first three months, are granted to all sentences of over three months, for industry and good conduct, a regulation was issued granting the present remission on