

SESS. II.—1897.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 1896.

ALSO

REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE "FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1886."

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 1896.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of JUSTICE.

SIR,—

Justice Department, Prisons Branch, Wellington, 1st June, 1897.

I have the honour to present this my sixteenth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the eleventh annual report on the working of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886."

1. I have periodically inspected the various prisons on the dates stated in the attached table marked "J," and am glad to be again in a position to report that, though my visits were in most cases surprise ones, I have found in every instance the establishments clean and well kept, every attention being paid to the sanitary arrangements, while the management has been both effective and economical, and a state of discipline maintained that reflects credit on the gaolers and their officers; and, as some of my visits were made perhaps when I was least expected, it is reasonable to suppose that this satisfactory state of things prevails at all times. With a fluctuating community such as the inmates of prisons are, I am of opinion that the larger prisons should be inspected (if possible) three times in each year, and the smaller ones, where shorter-sentenced prisoners are detained, oftener.

2. It affords me great pleasure to be again in a position to inform you that the First Offenders' Probation Act continues to work most satisfactorily, as will be seen from the remarks under that heading. That this Act has saved many a young man and woman from a criminal career is now a fact beyond contradiction.

3. As usual, the supplies for the various prisons have been publicly tendered for, and no complaints have been made either by the prison authorities or the various contractors. The long-established custom of all tenders being addressed to and opened by the local Visiting Justices has been again strictly adhered to, and their recommendations have invariably been adopted. This system, while relieving the department from a great amount of responsibility, throws the onus of selection on gentlemen who, from their local knowledge and surroundings, must be competent judges on such important matters, and the absence of complaints as to the quality of the provisions, &c., tendered for use proves that a wise discretion is exercised by the Visiting Justices in this matter of selecting tenders.

4. Eight escapes took place during the year, all male prisoners—one at Auckland, one at Dunedin, one at Napier, two at Nelson, and three at New Plymouth. With the exception of one case, where the prisoner when at exercise in the gaol yard escaped by getting over the boundary-wall, all were cases of prisoners running away from their party when out on the works. In every case the escapees were quickly recaptured, and a searching inquiry made by the Visiting Justices to ascertain whether any blame was attachable to the prison officials, while the escapees, after being brought back, were arraigned in open Court and punished accordingly.

5. A reference to Table A shows that the health of the prisoners has been good throughout the year. The daily average of sick has been 5·90 males and 1·31 females, a decrease of 0·21 in each gender as compared with the previous year.

6. Fifteen deaths occurred during the year—twelve in Auckland and one each at New Plymouth, Timaru, and Mcgonui. Though one or two cases of typhoid fever were treated in prisons there was no epidemic, such cases being at once isolated. In each case of death in prisons an inquest was held in conformity with the Act.