

1899.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1898;

ALSO

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1898.

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,—

Department of Justice, Prisons Branch, 1st July, 1899.

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

1. A reference to Table J shows the dates upon which I have inspected the various prisons of the colony, and I am again glad to be in a position to report that I have invariably found on these visits that, while the establishments are, in accordance with the regulations, kept scrupulously clean, a vast amount of attention has been paid to efficiency and economy, together with, as far as practicable, a classification of prisoners, to prevent those not well versed in crime being led away by their more adept comrades. At these periodical visits a point is made of giving interviews to all prisoners that ask it, as well as of thoroughly investigating all complaints and requests that are brought to my notice, whereby an opportunity is given to all prisoners to personally interview me at any of these inspections, and freely state, either privately or in the presence of the prison officials, any grievances they may suppose they are suffering under, and any statements or requests so made are fully inquired into and decided on their merits.

2. 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 tenders, called for in the last month of each year, are addressed to and considered by the Visiting Justices, whose recommendations are invariably adopted. This system has now been in operation for some years, and the absence of complaints shows that a wise discretion is used by the Visiting Justices in these important matters.

3. Five escapes took place during the past year—viz., two at Auckland (Fort Cautley), one at Dunedin (Taiaroa Heads), one at Lyttelton, and one at Wellington. All the escapees were male prisoners, and were recaptured within a few hours, except the one from Wellington prison, who has so far not been rearrested. The Wellington escapee—a lad of eighteen years of age—was the only case of prison-breaking, and it was no doubt entirely due to the fact of the Warder, through carelessness, having left the prisoner's cell unlocked. For this the officer was fined a week's pay, and duly cautioned that a repetition of similar carelessness would lead to his dismissal. The other four escapes were from the parties when at work outside the prison walls. In every case the Visiting Justices held an inquiry.

4. A reference to Table A shows that the health of the prisoners has been good throughout the year, the daily average of sick being—males 4·65, females 0·83, a decrease of 1·27 in the males and 0·20 in the females as compared with the previous year.

5. Two deaths occurred in the gaols during the past year, both at Lyttelton, and male prisoners. In each case an inquest was held, and verdicts of death from natural causes were returned.

6. There were three death-sentences carried out during the year 1898—one at New Plymouth, one at Dunedin, and one at Wellington. In each case death was instantaneous, and the usual inquests followed.

7. From Table A it will be seen that at the commencement of the year 603 males and 71 females were undergoing detention in the various prisons of the colony, while at its close there were 530 males and 65 females, giving a decrease of 73 males and 6 females. During the year