

1898, 3,505 males and 631 females passed through the different prisons, as against 3,518 males and 648 females during the previous year, a decrease of 13 males and 17 females—a total decrease of 30 prisoners. This decrease, though small, is satisfactory when it is remembered that there is a steadily increasing population.

8. During the past year the daily average number of prisoners in the gaols has been 563·55 males and 54·41 females, an increase on the previous year in the daily average of 45·30 males and 5·19 females. This increase is accounted for by the detention of a considerable number of Maori prisoners in the gaols for a considerable part of the year.

9. According to the figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the colony at the end of the year was 413,797 males and 369,520 females, a total of 783,317 persons; while the total number of prisoners at the same date was 530 males and 65 females: total, 595 persons. The average percentage of prisoners according to population was therefore 0·0759, as against 0·0876 in the previous year.

10. During the past year 45 male misdemeanants, in default of bail, and 40 males and 17 females, supposed lunatics, were detained in the various prisons of the colony, a decrease of 1 in the former, and in the latter a decrease of 13 males and 2 females. This decrease is of considerable importance, but the system of sending mentally afflicted persons to such places as prisons is much to be deprecated, even though their detention may be of only a few days' duration. A reference to "The Lunatics Act, 1882," sections 67 and 68, clearly shows that the intention of the Legislature when passing that Act was that it should be imperative on hospitals to have wards for the temporary reception of lunatics, and so prevent the present pernicious practice of sending supposed lunatics and persons suffering from *delirium tremens* to gaols for medical treatment. If the Hospital Boards continue to be indifferent in these matters, and such cases are to be treated as crimes and not diseases, and in prisons instead of establishments specially set apart for the treatment of their malady, not only may we look in vain for cures, but before long some grave scandal will probably occur.

11. At the end of the past year there were 91 males and 3 females undergoing sentences of penal servitude, a decrease of 10 on the previous year.

12. During the past year 389 males and 51 females were acquitted or discharged after remand, as against 392 males and 42 females in the previous year, a decrease of 3 males and an increase of 9 females.

13. By a reference to Table B it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £45 1s. 7d., as against £49 4s. 8d., and at a net cost of £27 18s. 10d. per head, as against £33 9s. 8d., in 1897. The gross costs are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £28 14s. 5d., as against £32 8s.; maintenance, £12 15s. 11d., as against £13 4s. 11d.; and incidentals, £3 11s. 3d., as against £3 10s. 11d. Of these incidentals a sum of £333 6s. 9d. is recouped to the Government, viz.: Railway Department, £250 4s. 6d., and Post and Telegraph Department, £83 2s. 3d.

14. It has been pointed out in previous reports that, with the utmost economy, the net cost of keeping prisoners must depend mostly upon the daily average number of prisoners detained in each separate establishment, and the reduction in cost during the past year amply proves the reliability of this argument. As before shown, last year there was an increase in the daily average of prisoners of 50·49, and consequently there is a decrease in the cost of maintaining them. When it is considered that at all times there are detained in the prisons many who contribute nothing towards their keep, being exempt from labour, such as awaiting trial, sick, misdemeanants, remands, supposed lunatics, and those sent to gaols for medical treatment, who required extra medical comforts, it is thought that it will be generally admitted that a net cost of £45 1s. 7d. per head is not excessive when the ruling prices of food and clothing in the colony are taken into consideration.

15. As regards the education of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that, out of a total of 2,902 males and 560 females received during the year, 2,626 males and 474 females were able to read and write, 67 males and 27 females could read only, whilst 209 males and 59 females could neither read nor write.

16. The receipts and credits for prison labour, road-metal, bricks, drainpipes, &c., amounted last year to £10,405 9s. 9d.

17. It is interesting to notice from Table F that a comparison of the previously convicted prisoners sentenced during the past year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1893—shows in those once convicted a decrease of 31 males, and an increase of 2 females; in those twice convicted, decreases of 6 males and 13 females; and in those thrice or oftener convicted, decreases of 9 males and 19 females. These decreases are considered satisfactory from every point of view, as indicating that the prison system at present in operation in the colony is at least deterrent, which should be the primary object sought for. In order, however, to carry out properly a deterrent system, it is absolutely necessary that every prisoner (except, perhaps, in special medical cases) should be provided with a separate cell, but this is not yet practicable in some of the prisons. What is required in dealing with criminals is work for his hands and occupation for his mind, and entire separation when not at work, and so prevent his concocting mischief and crime. The only system which has the least chance of effecting reformation must include separate treatment throughout the various classes and grades. To the vagrant, who lives on settlers or pilfers from house to house, and never does any honest work, the gaol, as long as he has companionship, is his home—he is better fed and housed than when free—or the larrikin, who has no character to lose, is idle, and strong enough to laugh at the prison hard labour; but separate either, and keep them by themselves, and very soon the vagrant's indifference and the larrikin's cheek will disappear, and neither of them are likely to be found inside a prison again if they can possibly help it.