

1901.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1900;

ALSO

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

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1900;

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 May, 1901.

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

1. This year a new departure from the usual routine has been made by publishing extracts from the annual reports of the various Gaolers, in accordance with the expressed wishes of many members of the House of Representatives during last session.

2. It is satisfactory to find during the past year there has been a diminution in crime, a considerable reduction in punishments for prison offences, and a decided advancement in classification.

3. My time has, as usual, been fully occupied in periodically visiting the different prisons of the colony, and the different dates of my visits of inspection are shown in Table I. I have, without exception, found them clean and in good condition, few complaints by prisoners, the sanitary arrangements excellent, discipline maintained with recourse to very little punishment, and economy carried out as far as compatible with absolute requirements. "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," also continues to work smoothly and well.

4. The contractors for food, clothing, and necessaries have carried out well the conditions of their contracts, there being few, if any, complaints. The practice of submitting the public tenders to the local Visiting Justices and adopting their recommendations has, as usual, been observed.

5. Six prisoners escaped during the year, as against eight during the previous twelve months—viz., four from Wellington and two from Invercargill. In all six cases the escapes were from the works, and the escapees were speedily recaptured. There was no case of prison-breaking.

6. From Table A it will be seen that the health of the prisoners has been good, the daily average of sick being—males 6·43 and females 2·83, a decrease in the males of 3·24 and an increase in the females of 1·53 as compared with the previous year. A reference to the extracts from some of the Gaolers' reports give good reasons for even this small percentage of sickness.

7. Six deaths occurred amongst prisoners during the year, all males—two in Auckland, two in Lyttelton, and two in Wellington. It will be seen by a reference to the reports from the respective Gaolers that none of these prisoners who died were fit subjects for a prison, but should have been committed to either a hospital or some such institution.

8. There were no executions during the past year.

9. From Table A it will be seen that at the commencement of the year 518 males and 48 females were undergoing detention in the different prisons of the colony, while at its close there were 511 males and 57 females, a decrease of 7 males and an increase of 9 females. During the year 1900, 3,771 males and 706 females passed through the various prisons, as against 3,693 males and 676 females during the previous year, an increase of 78 males and 30 females, making a total increase of 108 prisoners for the year. This must not be taken as an indication that crime is on the increase, but rather goes to show that there have been more short sentences, probably for drunkenness, obscene language, and suchlike offences.

10. During the past year, as shown by Table A, the daily average number of prisoners in the different prisons has been 529·29 males and 54·17 females, a decrease on the previous year of 7·74 males and an increase of 0·19 females. This clearly shows that criminals are not increasing, and though the decrease pointed out may look small, yet it must be recollected that during the year there was an increasing population, as shown in the next paragraph.