

11. From figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the colony at the end of the year 1900 was 427,229 males and 383,307 females, a total of 810,536 persons, whilst on the same date the number of prisoners (males and females) was 568. The average percentage of prisoners according to population was therefore 0·0707, as against 0·0735 in the previous year. This is absolute proof that criminals are not on the increase in the colony.

12. During the year 1900, 54 male misdemeanants in default of bail, and 46 males and 11 females, supposed lunatics, were detained in the prisons, a decrease of 6 males and 2 females in the former, and an increase of 7 males, with decrease of 1 female, in the latter.

13. Last year 478 males and 55 females were acquitted or discharged after remands, as against 463 males and 47 females in the previous year, an increase of 15 males and 8 females.

14. From the figures given under Table B it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £48 9s. as against £47 18s. 3d., and at a net cost of £29 4s. 6d. as against £30 15s. 4d., in the year 1899. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £31 7s. 11d. as against £31 5s. 8d.; maintenance, £13 1s. 2d. as against £13 5s. 5d.; and incidentals, £3 19s. 11d. as against £3 7s. 2d. Of incidentals, £384 6s. 5d. is recouped to the Government—viz., Railway Department, £305 18s. 11d., and Post and Telegraph, £78 7s. 6d.

15. As regards the educational attainments of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that out of a total of 3,253 males and 658 females received during the year 23 males were of superior education, 2,918 males and 574 females were able to read and write, 103 males and 46 females could read only, whilst 209 males and 65 females could neither read or write.

16. 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 1896—shows in those once convicted a decrease of 5 males and 2 females, in those twice convicted an increase of 26 males and 2 females, and in those thrice or oftener convicted an increase of 289 males and 34 females. In making out this table the same individuals appear more than once.

17. A reference to table D shows that 2 children under ten years of age were confined in the prisons, against 4 in 1899. In those aged from ten to fifteen years there were 23, as against 36 in 1899, while in those aged from fifteen to twenty years there were 252, as against 273 in the previous year—a total decrease of 36 in those under twenty years of age.

18. A reference to Table J shows that there was a decrease of 48 in prison punishments—viz., 152, as against 200 in 1899. Of these 141 were minor punishments inflicted by Visiting Justices, while 11 were more serious or aggravated prison offences, and after first being investigated by the Visiting Justices were adjudicated upon in open Court. This system of taking aggravated prison offences to open Court works well, and is looked upon as a safeguard by the Gaolers. In deciding these cases the Stipendiary Magistrates or Justices give every opportunity to the accused to call such witnesses as he or she may think fit in their defence, which is in full accord with the wishes of the departmental officials.

19. The number of offences recorded against subordinate prison officers last year was 7, as against the same number in the previous year—viz., drunkenness, 1; late for duty, 3; absent from night duty, 1; neglect of duty, 1; and selling prison property, 1.

20. As regards new buildings and alterations for the accommodation of prisoners, the Terrace Gaol, Wellington, is the one that requires most attention, as the sanitary arrangements are the only part of it that can be called up to date. Up to last year it was intended that the new prison at Mount Cook should take the place of the Terrace, but as that idea has now been abandoned it becomes an absolute necessity that either the extensive alterations required at the Terrace to make it a thoroughly serviceable up-to-date prison should be taken in hand, or some other locality be selected for the local prison. With the exception of introducing the electric light, a drainage system, and a proper fire-extinguishing apparatus, very little money has been expended on the buildings since the Mount Cook Prison was commenced. It is thought there is sufficient ground in the Terrace site to admit of the necessary alterations being carried out. New Gaoler's houses are badly wanted at Wellington and Dunedin, and at Napier a boundary-wall is much required; the stone for this wall is now being got from the prison quarry, and is being got ready with prison labour, so it is hoped it will not be long before the building commences.

21. A reference to the extracts from the reports of the Gaolers attached hereto show the work that has been done by the prisoners in the various gaols. It has been found that for the last year or two there has been a great dearth of tradesmen prisoners, presumably because wages at present are so high, and the want of such artisans has, to some extent, delayed work. I suggest that, in making selections in future for officers for this department, only skilled tradesmen should be appointed. There are a few really good tradesmen among the officers, and their services are found both remunerative and useful.

22. The Auckland Gaoler is quite right in what he says about pushing on the building of the wing now in hand, and every endeavour is being made to enable him to expedite that work. The department is fully alive to the fact that every prisoner should be confined in a separate cell, except a few very special medical cases, which is the only system that keeps first offenders and men who are likely to reform apart from habitual and hardened criminals.

23. As the Gaolers have nearly all referred to the objectionable practice of sending persons suffering from delirium tremens or drink to prisons for medical treatment, and supposed lunatics for temporary remands, I feel it is hardly necessary for me to again lodge my annual protest. It is said that all things come to those that wait; but an alteration in this matter has not come yet, but is anxiously waited for.

24. The report of the Gaoler of Dunedin is a long one, full of suggestions both as regards discipline amongst prisoners and alterations as to the working of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," and while agreeing with some of them there are others which are more imaginary than