

and unbiassed inquiry into any matters prisoners may have to bring before them, then the sooner they are deposed and succeeded by more competent gentlemen the better for the Department. As far as my experience goes, a more painstaking, competent, and fearless class of persons could not be found for the duty than most of the present Visiting Justices. It must be borne in mind that the duties, though honorary, are at times extremely irksome and unpleasant.

7. In December, 1901, there were confined in the various prisons of the colony 713 persons, while in December, 1902, the numbers had dropped to 653, a decrease of 60 persons.

8. From Table A it will be seen that the health of prisoners has been excellent—the daily average of sick, 4·35 males and 2·47 females; a decrease in the males of 2·27, and a slight increase in the females of 0·97; as compared with the previous year.

9. Eight deaths occurred amongst prisoners during the past year—viz., 2 in Auckland, 1 in Invercargill, 1 in Lyttelton, 3 in Wellington, and 1 in Thames (Police Gaol). In each case a Coroner's inquest was held, in accordance with clause 46 of "The Prisons Act, 1882."

10. There were no executions during the past year.

11. From Table A it will be seen that at the commencement of the year there were 637 males and 76 females in custody, and at the close of the year there were 605 males and 48 females, a decrease of 32 males and 28 females. During the year 4,149 males and 614 females passed through the various prisons, as against 4,141 males and 729 females in the previous year; an increase of 8 males and a decrease of 115 females, or a total decrease of 107 prisoners.

12. During the past year the daily average number of prisoners in the different prisons has been 609·37 males and 58·92 females, an increase of 15·54 males and a decrease of 3·84 females.

13. From figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the colony at the end of the year 1902 was 449,020 males and 402,052 females, a total of 851,072 persons, whilst on the same date the number of prisoners (males and females) was 653. The average percentage of prisoners according to population was 0·0767 as against 0·0859 in the previous year, a decrease of 0·0092.

14. During the year 1902 10 male misdemeanants in default of bail, and 39 males and 4 females supposed lunatics, were detained in the prisons; a decrease of 20 males and 1 female in the former, and 7 males and 3 females in the latter.

15. During the year 1902 524 males and 56 females were acquitted after remands, as against 511 males and 59 females in the previous year, an increase of 13 males and a decrease of 3 females.

16. From the figures given in Table B it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost of £46 1s. 10d., as against £45 16s. 10d. in 1901. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £28 16s. 10d., as against £29 7s. 5d.; maintenance, £19 16s. 7d., against £13 10s. 3d.; incidentals, £3 8s. 5d., as against £2 19s. 2d. Of the incidentals, £318 18s. 1d. is recouped to the Government—viz., Railway Department, £249 8s. 1d., and Post and Telegraph, £69 10s.

17. The slight increase in the gross expenditure is accounted for by the rise in prices both in provisions and wearing-apparel, and it is only due to the fact that there was a slight increase in the daily average of prisoners that the gross total expenditure per head was not more. As provisions are still higher this year than they were last, a still further increase per head per prisoner may be looked for this year.

18. As regards the educational attainments of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that out of a total of 3,512 males and 538 females treated during the year 32 males were of superior education, 3,111 males and 477 females were able to read and write, 224 males and 37 females could read only, whilst 224 males and 37 females could neither read nor write.

19. 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 1898—shows in those once convicted an increase of 35 males, in those twice convicted an increase of 40 males and 10 females, and in those thrice or oftener convicted an increase of 121 males with a decrease of 19 females.

20. Three children under the age of ten years were confined in the prisons of the colony last year, as against 1 in 1901. In those aged from ten to fifteen years there were 35, as against 19 in 1901; while in those aged from fifteen to twenty years there were 236, as against 252 in 1901; making a total increase of 2 in those under twenty years of age. I can only again reiterate what I have so often before written, that prisons are not fit places for children under ten years of age, even when in transit to an industrial school or under any other circumstances. However, when sent to prisons they are kept entirely separate from the adults, and every effort is made to reform them.

21. A reference to Table J shows that there were 161 punishments for offences in prison awarded last year, as against 117 in 1901, an increase of 44. Of these, 149 were minor prison offences, and were adjudicated upon by Visiting Justices; while 12 were more serious or aggravated offences, and after being first inquired into by Visiting Justices were sent to the Stipendiary Magistrates' Courts. There can be no doubt that, owing to what prisoners were told by their friends and what appeared in the newspapers from time to time, considerable remissions were expected at coronation time, but—in my opinion, very rightly—none were granted, and the prisoners, probably feeling disappointed, committed acts of insubordination, which entailed punishments.

22. It is very satisfactory to be able to report that during last year there were only two subordinate officers reported as against seven in the previous year; the two cases referred to occurred in the Auckland Prison, and, being trivial (late for duty), were in each case met by reprimands.

23. Vacancies amongst the subordinate officers have been filled, mostly by men who have done good service for the colony in South Africa, and as they have been thoroughly grounded in dis-