

1904.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1903;

ALSO

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

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1903.

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 June, 1904.

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

1. The system recently adopted of publishing extracts from the annual reports of the several Gaolers is continued this year, and their remarks and suggestions will be read with interest by those concerned in the well-being and reformation of prisoners generally.

2. During the past year I have adopted my usual custom of making surprise visits (as far as possible) to the different prisons, as shown in table marked J, and have invariably found them clean and in good sanitary condition, and the management is both effective and economical.

3. The supplies furnished by the various contractors for use in the prisons, with the exception of the tree-planting establishments, have been obtained by public tender. The tenders are submitted to the Visiting Justices, whose recommendations have been invariably adopted, with the result that there have been no complaints of any moment, and it is believed that no better system can be substituted for obtaining supplies. At the tree-planting prisons, owing to their isolated positions, it is found impossible to obtain tenders, but every care is taken that the supplies are purchased at the lowest market rates.

4. There were only 3 escapes during the year, as against 13 in 1902—viz., 1 from Taiaroa Heads, 1 from Point Halswell, and 1 from Wellington. With the exception of the Taiaroa Heads prisoner, they were very speedily recaptured and dealt with by the Courts.

5. Of the three escapes during the past year, two certainly should have failed to get away had proper vigilance been exercised. The Taiaroa Heads escape was entirely due to divided authority, as a Royal New Zealand Artillery sentry was on duty at the spot where the escape took place, and should certainly have prevented the prisoners going; and in the Wellington Prison escape the sentry on the tower at the time should most certainly have stopped the prisoner from going over the fence, and he was in consequence substantially fined for neglect of duty.

6. As has been before pointed out, some of these escapes and attempts to escape, which from time to time take place in all prisons, are not due to any hope of success, but simply to the desire to obtain notoriety.

7. In December, 1902, there were confined in the various prisons of the colony 653 persons, while in December, 1903, the numbers had risen to 739, an increase of 86 persons. In reviewing these numbers it must be recollected that during the year 1902 there was a decrease of 60 prisoners, so that the prison population (for they cannot properly be termed "the criminal class") is a fluctuating quantity, moving up and down like a barometer. Another reason for the increase of prisoners is, I think, due to the flourishing state of the colony, and the consequent influx of undesirable characters from other colonies which are not so prosperous. It has been found, as a rule, that where things are booming and money is plentiful, prisoners will also be plentiful.

8. From Table A it will be seen that the health of the prisoners has been good; the daily average of the sick was 7.13 males and 0.51 females, an increase of 2.78 males and 0.04 females as compared with the previous year. It is satisfactory to know there were no cases of small-pox or plague in any prison. There were two cases of measles in Wanganui Prison, but in consequence of the steps taken to prevent infection there were no other cases.

9. Nine deaths occurred amongst prisoners during the year—4 in Auckland, 1 in Dunedin, 2 in New Plymouth, 1 in Wellington, and 1 in Naseby (minor gaol). In each case a Coroner's inquest was held in accordance with the Prison Act, and verdicts of "Death from natural causes" were returned.