

10. There were no executions during the past year.

11. From Table A it will be seen at the commencement of the year there were 605 males and 48 females in custody, and at the close of the year there were 677 males and 62 females, an increase of 72 males and 4 females. During the year 4,813 males and 626 females passed through the various prisons, as against 4,149 males and 614 females in the previous year, an increase of 664 males and 12 females, or a total increase of 676 persons.

12. During last year the daily average number of prisoners in the different prisons has been 673 males and 68·20 females, an increase of 64·48 males and 9·10 females.

13. From figures supplied by the Registrar-General the population of the colony at the end of the year 1903 was 462,706 males and 412,862 females, a total of 875,618 persons; whilst on the same date the number of prisoners (males and females) was 739. The average percentage of prisoners according to population was 0·0844, as against 0·0767 in the previous year, an increase of 0·0077.

14. During the year 1903, 4 male misdemeanants in default of bail, and 42 males and 7 females, supposed lunatics, were detained in the prisons—a decrease of 6 males in the former, and an increase of 3 males and 3 females in the latter.

15. During the past year 506 males and 30 females were acquitted after remand, as against 524 males and 56 females in the previous year, a decrease of 18 males and 26 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 £47 14s. 4d. per capita, as against £46 1s. 10d. in 1902. The gross total was made up as follows: Staff supervision, £28 5s., as against £28 16s. 10d.; maintenance, £15 17s. 6d., as against £13 16s. 7d.; incidental, £3 11s. 10d., as against £3 8s. 5d. Of the incidentals, £323 10s. 2d. is recouped to the Government—viz., Railway Department £258 0s. 2d., and Post and Telegraph, £65 10s.

17. This increase in the gross cost was foretold in last year's report, and is due to the fact of the rise in prices—for all sorts of provisions and wearing-apparel, it being generally admitted that during the last year or two living in New Zealand has gone up 30 per cent. In support of this contention, it will be noticed that the large increase in expenditure is in maintenance, the increase in incidentals being very slight, while there is a decrease in the staff supervision. Economy is never lost sight of when compatible with efficiency.

18. As regards the educational attainments of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that out of a total of 4,208 males and 578 females received during the year, 24 males were of superior education, 3,884 males and 511 females were able to read and write, 70 males and 21 females could read only, whilst 230 males and 46 females could neither read nor write.

19. In Table F will be found a comparison of the previously convicted prisoners sentenced during the past year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1899—showing in those once convicted an increase of 132 males and 17 females; in those twice convicted an increase of 83 males and 5 females; and in those thrice or oftener convicted an increase of 265 males and a decrease of 32 females.

20. Table J shows that there was a decrease in prison punishments of 55—viz., 106, as against 161 in 1902. Of these 99 were minor prison offences and were dealt with by the Visiting Justices, while 7 being aggravated prison offences were dealt with in the Stipendiary Magistrates' Courts. It is stated without fear of contradiction that we are at present getting the maximum amount of discipline and efficiency with the minimum amount of punishment.

21. There were only two reports against subordinate officers again last year, as against the same number in the previous year—viz., 1 at Dunedin and 1 at Wellington—the former for being asleep on duty, and the latter for want of vigilance when on sentry duty, by which a prisoner escaped. During the past year the working-hours for the subordinate officers have been considerably reduced without much loss of prison labour, and the shorter hours are much appreciated. The Department has every reason to be satisfied with the way in which all the officers have carried out their duties during the past year.

22. As regards new prisons, the wing giving accommodation for sixty male prisoners in Wellington is now completed and occupied, and as it was urgently required it is appreciated, and has relieved the overcrowding that has from time to time been experienced in that prison. The new wing is built of bricks made at Mount Cook Prison works, and is up to date in every respect. The building of the new prison at Mount Eden is progressing very well, and the wing now under construction should be fit for occupation shortly. A new Gaoler's residence has been built at Mount Eden, in brick, during the past year, and is now completed and occupied. The foundations for the new prison at Invercargill are being prepared, and a considerable amount of building-material is now ready on the ground. A small new prison is much required at Gisborne owing to the one in use there being so small. The districts around are so large and prosperous that it is more than probable a larger and up-to-date gaol will be required there in the near future.

23. As regards the expenses of prisoners at tree-planting prisons, which are not included in Table B, at Waiotapu, where there are 4 officers and 41 prisoners, the gross annual cost per prisoner was £44 2s. 1d., made up as follows: Staff supervision, £17 0s. 8d.; maintenance, £19 7s. 9d.; incidentals, £7 10s. 3d.—in these charges no credit is taken for any work done. At Hanmer Springs there are 4 officers and 25 men, but as the prison there was only opened in September last no financial statistics can yet be given.

24. At both Waiotapu and Hanmer Prisons good work is being done, as may be gathered from the extracts from the Gaolers' reports printed herewith, and by the end of the present month there will probably be some 19 officers and 176 prisoners employed at tree-planting prisons as follows: Dumgree, 4 officers and 37 prisoners; Hanmer Springs, 4 officers and 25 prisoners; Waipa Valley, 4 officers and 33 prisoners; and Waiotapu, 7 officers and 81 prisoners. The work at these tree-planting prisons, though hard, is healthy and suitable, and under the circumstances discipline is fairly well maintained without punishments, as there are no Visiting