

STATISTICS.

The statistics published with this report show that the year 1914 constitutes a record for the number of prisoners confined in our gaols. The year commenced with a total of 919, as against 866 in 1913, and ended with a total of 1,045, as compared with 919 for the corresponding period of the previous year; while the daily average for the Dominion in 1914 was 979·81, or 86·57 per day more than in 1913. For the reasons stated in last year's report, an appreciable increase was anticipated. Recent returns show a considerable reduction in the figures for 1914, and it is probable that the daily average for 1915 will be less than that for the year under review. Rather a remarkable feature of the sudden increase in 1914 was that it was entirely confined to male prisoners; the daily average of females being slightly lower than it has been for several years past.

The position regarding the fluctuation in the prison population is clearly shown in the table below :—

Prison Population.

Year.	Daily Average of Prisoners in Dominion Prisons.		
	Males.	Females.	Total.
1881	631·66	94·37	726·03
1891	459·22	58·39	517·61
1911	799·08	64·18	863·26
1912	855·28	64·07	919·35
1913	826·69	66·55	893·24
1914	916·09	63·72	979·81

EXPENDITURE AND RECEIPTS.

A reference to the details of expenditure (Table B) shows that the gross cost of the prison system for 1914 was £55,479, as compared with £51,578 for 1913, an increase of £3,901. This excess of expenditure over the previous year is accounted for, primarily, by the fact that the number of prisoners in the gaols averaged 86·57 per day more than in 1913. Thus, while the total is greater, the cost per head is slightly less. The rise in prices caused by the war also assisted in building up the accounts for rations and other items; while the costs incidental to the development of the properties acquired during the past two years make a very material addition to the general expenditure. This will, no doubt, be recouped later when the farms have reached the productive stage, but in the meantime the departmental vote must stand the special charges that are cast upon it. We have already had some cash returns from Waikeria from the sale of fat stock, while the supplying of the Auckland Prison with vegetables grown at that place, which has recently been commenced, results in a direct saving to the Department.

With regard to receipts, it is gratifying to observe that the cash credits are increasing substantially each year. For the year ended 31st December, 1912, they were £5,451; for 1913 they were £7,382; while in 1914 the total amounted to £9,162. This steady growth is satisfactory in every way, and reflects considerable credit on the officers in charge of the different institutions where works or industries are carried on.

While this is the total cash credit, it must not be forgotten that in building, roadmaking, farming, gardening, &c., the prisoners confined in the gaols have carried out work during the year that if valued on a free-labour basis would amount to many thousand pounds. The practice of other prisons administrations is to estimate the value of all prison labour, even including domestic work, and to show a credit for the total so assessed in their published accounts. No credit whatever is shown except for actual cash and departmental transfers. These only represent payment for much the smaller proportion of the work done.

PROGRESS DURING THE YEAR AND FUTURE PROSPECTS.

The progress made during the year in regard to buildings and works is dealt with in detail under another heading. It may here be said, however, that progress made in the construction of buildings means a further advance towards carrying out the policy of the Department, which, broadly speaking, is to remove the better class of prisoners from the cities and find more healthy, congenial, and remunerative employment for them in the country.

Within the last twelve months a considerable amount of improvement has been effected at Waikeria, and if its development can be continued at the same rate it will not be many years before the property becomes a very valuable State asset. When the buildings are completed and the labour of all the prisoners confined there can be employed on the land, it is anticipated that "the farm," as it is known in the prisons, will support its population, and that they will cease to be a burden on the State.

The number of prisoners employed at Waikeria increased from thirty-nine in the beginning to fifty-four at the end of the year.