

fewer than 88 occurred in Dunedin, against 37 in 1883; and in Lyttelton 78 in 1882, as against 43 in 1883. Of the 81 serious offences in 1882, 24 occurred in Dunedin, equal to the whole number in all the prisons for the year now reported on, as against 8 in 1883. In Lyttelton the serious offences were 29 in 1882, and in 1883 they were only 14. I think it must be admitted that these statistics justify—if justification is needed—the special action which I deemed it my duty to take with respect to these prisons, and prove the advantages which have arisen from the new Act and regulations. The increase in offences in Auckland is due to the fact that formerly the Gaoler, subject to the approval of the Visiting Justices, was in the habit of giving trivial punishments, which were not included in the return furnished by him, and therefore omitted in the tables of my last report; but this practice having been put a stop to naturally caused more cases to come under the hands of the Visiting Justices, and all offences are now dealt with by them.

18. There have been 48 reports against prison officers in 1883, as against 36 in the previous year; but many were merely for trivial neglects of duty, and none were for offences of a very serious nature. It is, I think, deserving of notice that not a single case of drunkenness is recorded against prison officers in the past year, and their conduct has generally been commendable. The system of transferring officers from prison to prison has been attended with beneficial results to the service. There is a long list of names registered for appointments, from which the most suitable and meritorious candidates are selected as vacancies occur. Many of the older officers have passed the limit of age at which is to be found that real fitness for the arduous and incessantly vigilant duties they are required to perform. Naturally those officers are loth to retire from positions which they have so long and not unworthily filled, but the necessity of a strict service should always be paramount, and override personal and sentimental considerations. I have, therefore, to repeat the opinion I expressed in my report presented three years ago, that, in cases of officers whose age and infirmity can be shown to interfere with efficiency, these officials should be directed to retire.

19. It was stated in my last report that numbers of the officers did not sufficiently study the characters of the prisoners under their charge. A melancholy example of this occurred in the Nelson Prison in the murder of a warder by a prisoner, and the suicide of the murderer. This convict was under a life sentence for manslaughter at the Lyell, on the west coast of the Middle Island, the case presenting features of peculiar ferocity. Clearly such a man should not have been placed in a position to have access to dangerous weapons. Yet both before and after the trial he occupied the position of cook. The fatal sequel showed the impropriety of such a selection; but, though painful in itself, this occurrence has not been without a good effect in the direction required, and officers now devote more careful study to the peculiarities and temperaments of prisoners. A pleasing circumstance connected with this fatality, and one which affords me gratification to record, is that the officers of the department all over the colony raised by subscription among themselves a sum of upward of £290 for the benefit of the widow and family of the murdered man.

20. Table K contains a record of the visits of the Visiting Justices to the prisons during the year 1883, from which it will be seen that these visits have been regular and frequent. Agreeably to the Act passed last session of Parliament, Visitors have now been appointed in addition to the Visiting Justices. The duty of these Visitors is to hear any complaints which prisoners may have to make, and thus afford to prisoners another channel of communication, in addition to that of the Visiting Justices, or of the Inspector. The right to visit all prisons at all reasonable hours is also given to members of both Houses of Parliament, as well as to all Justices of the Peace. It would be well, in my opinion, if the public generally would exhibit a greater interest in prisons, and their inmates and management, than is at present displayed. Beyond the visits of relatives or friends of prisoners, very few of the outside public ever cross the threshold of our gaols, although at all convenient seasons the Gaolers, by instructions, are ready and willing to admit any respectable citizen who may desire to examine personally the interior economy of prison life and discipline. The visiting-books of other public institutions, such as hospitals, lunatic asylums, and industrial schools, show that in these and their inmates greater interest is taken than in the inmates and working of prisons. If more attention were paid to prison-visiting by the public, I believe that not only would this general interest prove an encouragement to the officers, but would also have a beneficial effect on the prisoners who are working out their weary sentences, and who would feel that, though secluded by their own faults from the community against which they have sinned, yet nevertheless they are not forgotten. At the same time, such a system of visiting would remove the opinion which is current amongst many that there is something dark and mysterious in prison management, while on the contrary nothing occurs that may not be fully published abroad.

21. Table F shows a decrease in the past year of 10 in the number of juvenile criminals received into the prisons, those under ten years of age being 25 in 1883, as against 35 in 1882; but in those from ten to fifteen years of age there is an increase of 10 on the previous year, the numbers being 95 in 1882, against 105 in 1883; while in those aged from fifteen to twenty years there is also an increase, the numbers being 250 in 1882, as against 261 in 1883, giving a total increase during the year 1883 of 11 prisoners under the age of twenty. These statistics again convince me of the absolute and urgent necessity of establishing reformatories, to which I drew attention last year. All authorities on prison matters are unanimous in their opinion that gaols are unsuitable and improper places for the detention of boys and girls of tender years.

22. As regards the financial table given under heading B, it will be found that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost of £55 11s. 6d. each, as against £51 7s. 10d. for the previous year, and at a net cost of £45 9s. 7d. as against £44 14s. 1d. in 1882. These totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £35 10s.; maintenance, £16 5s. 6d.; incidental, £3 16s. The proportional increase in last year's expenditure is due to several causes: First, a reduction in the number of prisoners, without its being possible to make any immediate reduction in the staff, or fuel and lighting expenses; second, the item for conveyance of officers is largely increased in consequence of the requirements of the service demanding the transfer of many officers and their families; third, the system introduced last year of giving gratuities to prisoners on discharge, and sending them back