

1887.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1886.

ALSO,

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

UP TO 31st DECEMBER, 1886.

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,—

Justice Department, Prisons Branch, Wellington, 17th March, 1887.

In presenting this my seventh annual report on the prisons of the colony, I have the honour to inform you that in the year ended the 31st December last I visited the thirteen larger prisons on the dates stated in the attached table, marked J. I have also visited several of the smaller or police gaols whenever time and circumstances permitted my doing so, and have devoted the entire time at my disposal to the various duties appertaining to my office as Inspector of Prisons. I have every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which these institutions are conducted, as well as with the care and treatment of the inmates; and, as in several instances no preparations could have been made, my visits having been at times when I was least expected, I am satisfied that the condition in which I have found the prisons and their inmates on the occasions of my periodical visits is what always exists.

2. It is a matter for congratulation this year to be able to report that, while there has been a considerable decrease in the daily average number of male prisoners, with only a very slight increase in the females, the cost of their maintenance is much less than last year, and there has been a large falling-off in the number of prison offences.

3. In no instance have there been any complaints regarding the quality of the rations supplied; and these, together with the clothing, bedding, and other necessities, which, as usual, are obtained by contract, have been carefully inspected before delivery, and, if not found of good quality and according to sample, have been at once condemned and replaced.

4. There were four escapes during the year—viz., one at Nelson, Gisborne, Lyttelton, and Dunedin respectively; but in every case the prisoners were speedily recaptured. In the Nelson escape a female managed to run away from the matron, but had only gone a short distance when she was retaken. At Gisborne, a Maori succeeded one afternoon in getting over the gaol-fence; but was recaptured by the police the following evening. At Lyttelton, a prisoner awaiting trial, who had volunteered for work, was taken outside the prison-walls to labour, when he attempted to escape by running away, but was immediately followed and retaken in a few minutes. In the Dunedin case, a prisoner, when at labour at the Otago Heads, escaped during the afternoon, and was not missed till cease-labour hour, but was recaptured the same night by the police. After investigating the whole of the circumstances of this escape I was fully convinced that it was entirely due to gross negligence of two officers—viz., the principal warder in charge of the works, who was accordingly reduced in rank, and the warder immediately in charge of the escaped prisoner's party, whose services were dispensed with, this being the second time of his allowing a prisoner to escape from his charge.

5. Table A shows that the health of the prisoners throughout the year has been good at all the prisons. The daily average of sick has been 14·13 males and 1·95 females, showing a daily average increase over last year of ·38 in the males and ·35 in the females. Three deaths occurred, as against seven in 1885—viz., at Addington, Lyttelton, and Woodville—and in each case they were male prisoners.

6. There were no executions last year. At Gisborne one death-sentence was passed, which His Excellency the Governor was pleased to commute to penal servitude for life.