

6. There were two executions last year—viz., at Auckland simultaneously, the culprits having been convicted in the same case. At Gisborne three death sentences were passed, which His Excellency the Governor was pleased to commute to penal servitude for life.

7. Table A further shows that at the commencement of the past year there were 557 males and 68 female prisoners confined in the gaols of the colony, and at the close of the year 592 males and 99 female prisoners, giving an increase of 35 males and 31 females. In the year 1886 there passed through the prisons 4,536 males and 1,056 females, while during the past year the numbers were 4,478 males and 945 females, being a decrease of 58 males and 111 females, giving a total decrease in cases dealt with of 169. These statistics are extremely satisfactory.

8. During the past year the daily average number of prisoners in gaols has been 566·1 males and 71·5 females, being an increase of 33·6 males, with a decrease of 3·05 females, giving a net average increase of 30·55 for the year as compared with 1886. The prison population, after continuously decreasing for six years, has during the year 1887 increased, but not to any great extent. This fact may be attributed in a great measure to the long sentences being now awarded to vagrants under the Police Offences Act by Resident Magistrates generally, and also to the better detection and tracing of offenders by the police.

9. According to figures obtained from the Registrar-General, the population of the colony was at the end of the past year 347,393 males and 297,927 females, total 645,320 persons; while the number of prisoners at that date was 592 males and 99 females—691 persons; the average percentage of prisoners according to population was therefore 0·1, being a slight increase of ·002 on the previous year, which showed a percentage of ·098.

10. During the past year 114 male and 2 female misdemeanants in default were detained in the gaols of the colony, and during the same period 85 male and 21 female supposed lunatics were detained in the various prisons, giving a decrease of 38 male misdemeanants in default, as in the previous year, with the same number of females, and an increase of 2 males and 2 females supposed lunatics.

11. With reference to prisoners under sentence of penal servitude, there were at the close of last year in the several prisons 189 males and 5 females, being an increase of 5 males and 2 females on the previous year.

12. During the year 1887 461 males and 60 females were acquitted or discharged after remand, being an increase of 45 males and 7 females on the previous year.

13. As regards the financial table given under heading 'B,' it will be found that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £49 4s. 4d., as against £53 18s. 9d. for the previous year; and at a net cost per head of £28 3s. 5d., as against £33 5s. 11d. for the year 1886. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £31 12s. 7d.; maintenance, £14 5s. 6d.; incidental, £3 6s. 3d. It will be noticed that there are substantial reductions under each of these heads on the previous year's expenses. It may also be mentioned that, of the item £755 5s. 6d. for conveyance of officers and prisoners, the sum of £410 7s. 3d. was paid to the Railway Department, and, of the £819 13s. 2d. charged against gratuities to prisoners and sundries, £123 19s. 4d. was paid to the Postal and Telegraph Department for rent of telephones, &c.

14. The substantial decrease in both the gross and net cost per head per prisoner for the past year cannot be looked upon but as satisfactory as far as it goes, but it must be apparent to any one studying the subject that keeping open small prisons at such places as Timaru, Nelson, and Lawrence is disastrous alike to the taxpayer and the criminal. The net average cost per prisoner in the English county prisons last year amounted to £22 7s. 1d., or £5 16s. 6d. less than the New Zealand prisoners, so that, all things considered, our prisons cannot be looked upon as other than economically managed. Were it not for the Supreme Court criminal sittings being held at Timaru and Nelson, those prisons might be converted into police gaols, but, where provision has to be made for detaining prisoners awaiting trial at the Supreme Court, it becomes necessary to keep up a sufficient staff to meet such requirements. It may be contended that these prisoners awaiting trial might be kept elsewhere; but then comes the consideration that by removing them considerable obstacles are placed in the way of preparing their defence, &c. On a close examination of the financial Table B it will be clearly seen that the smaller the prison the greater the expense, and, it may be added, the worse the discipline. For example, Nelson is the most expensive, at £116 6s. 8d., with as low a daily average of 3·9 prisoners, while Mount Cook, Wellington, is the cheapest, at £2 4s. 9d. per prisoner, with a daily average of 63·3 prisoners, all of whom are what may be termed remunerative. Awaiting-trial, contempt-of-Court, or misdemeanant prisoners, who do not perform hard labour, are not incarcerated at Mount Cook; this materially assists in keeping down expenses.

15. The receipts for value of prison-labour, sale of road-metal, bricks, drain-pipes, needlework, maintenance of prisoners, &c., for the past year amounted to £13,037 4s. 9d., as against £12,270 6s. 2d in 1886.

16. As regards the education of prisoners a reference to Table C shows that, out of a total of 3,921 males and 877 females, 3,330 males and 671 females were able to read and write, 133 males and 75 females are able to read only, whilst 458 males and 131 females were neither able to read nor write.

17. I regret to have to report a considerable increase again during the past year in the number of juvenile offenders. Table D shows that during the year 1887 30 children under the age of ten years passed through the prisons of the colony, as against 39 in 1886, while in those from ten to fifteen years of age the numbers are 83, as against 101; but in those aged from fifteen to twenty years the numbers are 336, as against 295; giving a total increase during the past year of 14 prisoners under the age of twenty years. Though this increase is only about one-fourth of the previous year's increase, still it is a matter of deep regret that so large a number as 113 children under the age of fifteen years should have been detained in prisons where it is at present almost a matter of impossibility to keep them isolated from the older and hardened criminals. I am, however, glad to be able to report that much has been done in this direction, and in some cases these children have been kept entirely separate from all other prisoners.