

5. There was a slight decrease in the daily average of prisoners on the sick-list during the year—viz., 8.92 males and 0.53 females, a decrease of 0.934 males and 0.79 females. Influenza was the prevailing disease.

6. Six deaths occurred in prisons during the year, the same number as in the previous year—viz., 2 at Auckland, 1 at Invercargill, and 3 at Lyttelton. The usual inquests were held, and verdicts of death from natural causes returned in each case.

7. There were no executions during the year, and no prisoner was sentenced to death.

8. From Table A it will be found that at the commencement of last year there were 764 males and 82 females undergoing detention in the various gaols of the Dominion, while at the close there were 823 males and 56 females, an increase of 60 males, with a decrease of 26 females. During last year 5,837 males and 554 females passed through the different prisons, as against 5,815 males and 663 females in the previous year, an increase of 22 males and a decrease of 107 females. Of these numbers, 925 males and 187 females were received more than once. The actual number of persons, therefore, that passed through the prisons during the year was 4,912 males and 368 females, a total of 5,280 persons.

9. During the year 1908 the daily average number of prisoners in the different gaols of the Dominion was 783.04 males and 69.89 females, a decrease on the previous year of 8.31 males and 11.01 females.

10. According to figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the Dominion at the end of last year was 542,091 males and 478,622 females, a total of 1,020,713, while the number of prisoners at the same date was 879; the percentage of prisoners to population was therefore 0.0862, as against 0.0855 for the previous year.

11. During the past year 34 male misdemeanants in default of bail, and 40 male and 4 female supposed lunatics, were detained in the prisons, an increase of 7 males and a decrease of 1 female in the former, and a decrease of 6 males and an increase of 4 females in the latter. If these 44 supposed lunatics, who should never have been sent to prison, and are in no way criminals, are deducted from the number of prisoners who passed through the prisons, and from the daily average, there is a considerable reduction in both cases.

12. Last year 770 males and 76 females were acquitted after remand, as against 714 males and 59 females in 1907, an increase of 56 males and a decrease of 17 females. As it is only right to suppose, as these persons were acquitted, they were innocent, they should in all fairness be deducted in considering the number of prisoners in the Dominion last year.

13. A reference to financial Table B shows that prisoners in the town prisons were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £52 0s. 2d., as against £50 0s. 6d. in the previous year, and the increase is accounted for by the general rise in prices of food and all necessaries. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £31 7s. 4d., as against £30 14s. 5d.; maintenance, £16 16s. 2d., as against £15 14s. 11d.; and incidentals, £3 16s. 8d., as against £3 11s. 2d.

14. As an exemplification of different prices in the various localities, it will be noticed from Table B that in Wellington it cost £2,160 8s. 8d. to provision a daily average of 167.62, while in Auckland it cost only £2,052 13s. 9d. for a daily average of 241.71. At New Plymouth, with a daily average of 34.51, it cost £510 14s. 1d.; while in Wanganui only £269 18s. 1d. was expended on a daily average of 29 prisoners. The supplies are of the same quantity and quality, and are tendered for in the same way all over the Dominion.

15. As regards the expenses of prisoners at tree-planting prisons, which are not included in Table B, at Waiotapu, where there were 7 officers and 50 prisoners, the annual gross cost per prisoner was £59 14s. 5d., made up as follows: Staff supervision, £22 5s. 1d.; maintenance, £24 12s. 10d.; and incidentals, £12 16s. 6d. At Hanmer, where there were 4 officers and 30 prisoners, the gross cost per prisoner was £77 2s. 11d., made up as follows: Staff supervision, £22 16s. 3d.; maintenance, £45 10s. 1d.; and incidentals, £8 16s. 5d. At Waipa, where there were 4 officers and 24 prisoners, the gross cost per prisoner was £57 12s. 3d., made up as follows: Staff supervision, £23 0s. 11d.; maintenance, £26 15s. 4d.; and incidentals, £7 15s. 11d. The increase for last year is accounted for chiefly by an addition to the staff at each place, and the increased cost of food and all necessaries. At present there are 16 officers and only 72 prisoners employed at tree-planting, and more are urgently required at all the camps.

16. As these tree-planting camps have now got beyond the experimental stage, I strongly recommend single huts be in future provided, to permit of a better system of classification being carried out. It is satisfactory to find that many of those discharged to liberty from tree-planting camps at the expiration of their sentences have not again been occupants of any prisons in the Dominion, and many have benefited by the employment given them by the Forestry Department, which also gains by getting experienced workmen.

17. A reference to educational Table C shows that out of a total of 5,073 males and 472 females received during the past year 31 males were of superior education, 4,782 males and 448 females were able to read and write, 52 males and 5 females could read only, while 208 males and 19 females could neither read nor write.

18. In comparing the number of previously convicted prisoners received last year with those received five years ago, it will be seen from Table E that in those once convicted there is an increase of 96 males and a decrease of 15 females; in those twice convicted an increase of 81 males; while in those convicted thrice or oftener there is an increase of 49 males and a decrease of 104 females.

19. From Table J it will be seen there were exactly the same number of punishments last year as in the previous year—viz., 188. Of these, 180 were minor prison offences, and were dealt with by Visiting Justices, while 8 were aggravated offences, and after being investigated by Visiting Justices