

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 9TH AUGUST, 1878.

Mr. READ, Governor of Wellington Gaol, examined.

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1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Read, I suppose you keep a copy of the regulations posted up in the gaol?—An abstract of the regulations should be posted in the gaol, but it has not been printed. I read them to the prisoners occasionally.

2. Are the regulations strictly observed?—As far as practicable.

3. In what particular is it not practicable to observe them? Of course we know there are some regulations which, when made, it was known they could not be followed in all gaols at present. But we want to know which are not carried out, and why they are not carried out?—Well, I cannot carry all the regulations in my mind, so I can scarcely answer that question.

4. Are there any striking points in which it has been impossible to carry out the regulations?—No; I think not. There are some merely minor points of discipline on which it is impossible to carry them out just now.

5. They are carried out so far as is practicable in the gaol?—Yes.

6. And you say there is no material divergence from them?—No.

7. Very well; some printed questions will be forwarded to you, and then you can answer as to details. Is the mark system in force in the gaol?—It is.

8. Carefully?—Carefully.

9. How has it worked since it has been introduced?—Very well, so far; but it cannot be worked properly on account of the manner in which the prisoners are sent to labour. They work associated together in gangs, making roads or such other work. When men work separately at particular jobs it is possible to estimate what they do. To a man who does a fair day's work you can give six marks; for a better day's work, seven; and for a still better, eight. You are able to distinguish between them easily. But when they are associated together in work it is perfectly impossible to carry the mark system thoroughly into effect. If a man is shoemaking or picking oakum, then you can arrange the number of marks to be given easily. As a rule, most men, under the mark system, work well. What I wish to convey is that the marks cannot be so fairly and properly awarded when men are associated in gangs as they can if set fixed tasks; and it is impossible to give men fixed tasks when they are working on the roads. It is quite possible that some men so working may get eight marks when they deserved only seven, and *vice versa*.

10. Is there any particular rule among the regulations for prisons now in force against which you have any objection to urge?—No.

11. Or do you hear of any such among the officers under you?—None at all.

12. *Hon. Mr. Fox.*] Any complaints from the prisoners?—I do not think even the prisoners themselves consider the rules oppressive in any shape or way. No complaints have reached me respecting the rules.

13. *The Chairman.*] How many Visiting Justices are there in Wellington?—There are five, but practically only four, as one of the five is so ill that he cannot visit, and has not visited for years.

14. How often do they visit the gaol?—At uncertain times. They do not tell me when they are coming. Sometimes they come two or three times a month, sometimes once a month.

15. Do they visit in turns?—No; merely at convenience.

16. What record is kept of their visits?—They always make entries in the Visiting Justices' book.

17. *Hon. Mr. Fox.*] Do they look below the surface of things, or merely make a cursory excursion through the gaol?—They go through the gaol, and look through every part of it. They visit every cell, and occasionally ask the prisoners if they have any complaint to make.

18. Do you consider the inspection is of such a character that if any irregularities were occurring in the gaol they would be likely to secure attention?—Sometimes. Sometimes it is merely a walk through the gaol.

19. I suppose that, in case of any serious infraction of prison discipline or any frauds being perpetrated, the Justices are in a position to detect such a thing?—Oh, yes. I do not know much about other gaols, but I do not think it is possible that there should be any fraud in the Wellington Gaol, we are under such stringent regulations of the Stores Department.

20. But as far as the Visiting Justices are concerned. You think fraud is impossible in consequence of the strict regulations of the Stores Department, not on account of the inspection of the Visiting Justices. We want to ascertain what is the value of the inspection of the Visiting Justices?—So far as the detection of fraud is concerned, it amounts to very little.

21. They have no power to ascertain anything in the ordinary way, except that which is on the surface. They merely see that the gaol is clean, ask the prisoners if they have any complaints, and ask you if all is right?—Yes.

22. Then it is not a very strict scrutiny?—I do not know how they could make a much stricter scrutiny.

23. They must take things, in fact, as they find them?—Yes, as far as stores are concerned; but the accounts are very carefully overlooked by the Stores Department. I do not think the Justices