

Mr. Read.
9th Aug., 1878.

consider the overlooking of stores to be part of their duty. They merely see that the gaol is kept in proper order, and that the ordinary work is carried on. Sometimes they visit the works. One gentleman went out the other day to the new lunatic asylum to see how things were going on. They also receive complaints from or against the prisoners. That appears to be their duty.

24. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.* They have the power to punish prisoners, have they not?—Yes; certainly. If there was anything wrong going on in the gaol they would soon hear of it. There could be no secret kept from them long. With the prisoners watching on one side and the officers and the public and the Visiting Justices and the Government on the other side, wrong must inevitably soon be discovered.

25. You must remember I am not asking these questions with reference specially to the Wellington gaol, but you are the only officer present of whom we can ask these questions. I wish to know how far the system of Visiting Justices is likely to be efficient throughout the colony, supposing it to be the same in other parts of the colony as it is in Wellington?—Yes. Of course I cannot give any information as to other parts of the colony. I have not been in any of the other gaols, except that at Nelson and that at Wanganui.

26. *Mr. Rolleston.* Would not a periodical inspection of the gaols of the colony by an Inspector specially appointed for that purpose, himself having a full knowledge of the management of gaols gained by experience, tend to promote the efficient management of gaols throughout the colony?—Most certainly; there can be no doubt about that.

27. *The Chairman.* Practically, I take it, Mr. Read, the principal duty of the Visiting Justices is to look into all grievances that may arise from time to time in gaols, and to punish any breach of discipline?—Yes.

28. Then it is not the function of Visiting Justices to inquire into questions as to stores?—No.

29. The internal management of gaols and the maintenance of discipline is practically in the hands of the gaoler himself?—It is.

30. And without any check beyond that of public opinion?—Yes.

31. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.* You think the appointment of a general Inspector would be beneficial?—If he was a man of experience—Yes. But it is of no use appointing a man to that position who knows nothing about gaol discipline. I think it is very desirable that an officer of that sort should be appointed.

32. *Major Atkinson.* Is anything like systematic cruelty in a gaol possible, under the present rules, on the part of a warder towards a particular prisoner, without its being known, or on the part of a combination of two or three warders who might take a dislike to a man and wish to treat him harshly?—I should say not.

33. Do you mean that no officer would do such a thing, or do you mean that the gaol system is such that it could not be done?—A little of both, perhaps. I think it is a little of one and a little of the other. Any system of persecution on the part of the officers, however, must come under my personal surveillance, and would be detected at once.

34. Could the Governor of the gaol, under the present system, adopt such a course without its being detected?—No; the officers would doubtless complain, and the matter would at once be set right by the Visiting Justices. I do not think it could be done.

35. Except by a combination of the whole of the officers?—That is a thing very unlikely.

36. *Mr. Rolleston.* The officers would not be likely to report it unless they fell out with the Governor?—Perhaps not; but, if the Governor should find it desirable to report an officer, that officer would at once turn round and report the Governor to the Visiting Justice. The prisoner would also report the matter to the Visiting Justices if he saw that the officers or the Governor had a "down" upon him.

37. Practically, do the prisoners make any complaints?—They have not done so in Wellington Gaol for very many years past.

38. *Major Atkinson.* Would it not, in case a prisoner made a complaint, be very difficult for him to prove its correctness?—I think not. For about eighteen months after I first took charge of the gaol there were general complaints to the Visiting Justices, and they took evidence in the fairest possible manner. Nothing could have been fairer. The prisoners complained about me as being a tyrant. The fact was that I had a very difficult task. Things were in a bad state, and I had difficulty in restoring discipline. The complaints were dealt with by the Visiting Justices, and I do not think there have been any complaints since then.

39. I do not wish to be understood to be speaking of the matter particularly—that is, with reference to a particular man, but as to the general effect of the system. Supposing there was an arbitrary Governor at a gaol, is the system itself a check upon him?—I do not think a tyrannical Governor could carry on long without being brought before the Visiting Justices.

40. Or a warder?—Or a warder, the prisoners have so many friends outside the gaol.

41. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.* Could favouritism be practised—lighter work given to one man than to another—without its being known?—I do not well see how that could be done. It might possibly be done at the works.

42. But not in the gaol itself?—No, it would soon be known and spoken of. If one man gets half an ounce more rations than another there is immediately an outcry about it. Prisoners have a great check upon the officers afforded them by the visits of the Justices, and there would soon be complaints if there was any favouritism.

43. *The Chairman.* Now, about recommitments. Are recommitments of old offenders frequent here?—No, except for drunkenness and vagrancy.

44. Are they not frequent in cases of larceny?—Not very frequent. There are some few men who are frequently committed for that offence; who are no sooner out than they are in again. But such cases are exceptions. There are very few indeed.

45. *Hon. Mr. Fox.* Are you able to form an opinion as to whether prisoners, on the expiration of their sentences, generally clear out of the place or not?—Most remain in the town. All of them can get work. The fact of their having been in gaol does not seem to affect their chances of employment.