

expenditure in connection with the various prisons is debited to each respectively, and the simple but accurate system of keeping the accounts now adopted prevents the possibility of any incorrect charges being made or fictitious credits being taken.

15. In the gross cost per prisoner Timaru is the highest, at £115 10s. 9d., which is mainly due to the expenses attending the trial before alluded to, and in a small respect to the falling-off in the daily average number of prisoners. As a large reduction has now been made in the staff of this prison, it is confidently expected that a corresponding reduction in the cost of prisoners per head for the present year will result. The next highest gross cost per head is at Wanganui, with £88 15s. 8d.; while the lowest is Auckland, at £41 9s. 9d., followed by Mount Cook at £45 4s. 8d.

16. The receipts and credits for prison-labour, road-metal, bricks, needlework, maintenance of prisoners, &c., for the past year, amounted to £12,270 6s. 2d., as against £7,481 15s. in 1885.

17. As regards the education of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that, out of a total of 4,025 males and 978 females, 3,324 males and 749 females were able to read and write well, while 462 males and 135 females were unable to read or write.

18. It is with deep regret I have to report, as I anticipated last year, a very large increase in the number of juvenile offenders who passed through the prisons during 1886; those under ten years of age being 39, as against 40 in 1885; while in those from ten to fifteen years of age the numbers are 101, as against 68; and in those aged from fifteen to twenty the numbers are 295, as against 269: giving a total increase during the past year of 58 prisoners under the age of twenty years.

19. In many instances the crimes of which these young offenders have been convicted were of such a serious nature as to necessitate the prisoners being sent for trial to the Supreme Court—viz., forgery, uttering, breaking into and entering, placing obstacles on the railway, &c.; and in one instance a child seven years old was committed to take his trial at the Supreme Court sessions for breaking into a store. The Grand Jury, however, ignored the bill, and the child is now in an industrial school. Although there is a decrease on the previous year of 1 in those under ten years of age, it is nevertheless a matter for the gravest consideration that so many as 39 children under ten years of age have been detained in the prisons during the past year, while as many as 140 under fifteen years of age have passed through the prisons. It is beyond argument that to place young people of such tender years in ordinary prisons with adult criminals, on the same scale of rations, especially with the great facilities for contamination by association which the prisons still afford, owing to the new buildings not yet being ready for occupation, not only is not calculated to check their criminal tendencies, but rather to develop them, and to deprive prisons of the dread they ought to inspire. I feel sure it will be necessary to establish a reformatory for juvenile criminals unless the successful working of the First Offenders Probation Act obviates it, and so to have an establishment for the reception of convicted juvenile offenders, as distinct from the industrial schools, which should be purely preventive and training institutions for unconvicted orphans or neglected and homeless children.

20. The total number of prison-punishments awarded during the past year was 227, as against 339 in 1885. These were minor punishments by Visiting Justices; while 19 serious or aggravated prison-offences, after first being investigated by a Visiting Justice, were reheard in open Court, as against 47 similar cases in 1885. It is extremely satisfactory to find that at Mount Cook Prison, with a daily average of 52.5 prisoners, it has been found necessary to punish only one prisoner during the year. The small number of prison-punishments at Lyttelton—viz., 21 minor and 2 Court cases, with a daily average of 111.6 prisoners; and at the Terrace Prison, Wellington, of 29 minor and 1 Court case, with a daily average of 73 prisoners—must, I think, induce the most sceptical to admit that no error on the side of excessive leniency towards prisoners was made by the Legislature in passing "The Prisons Act, 1883," which abolished flogging and additional imprisonment being awarded by Visiting Justices. It would be erroneous to suppose for one moment that where there are so few punishments discipline is in any way relaxed; but, on the contrary, the highest state of discipline prevails at the three prisons above-mentioned, while the amount of work performed by the prisoners at these establishments, both in quantity and quality, reflects the utmost credit on the gaolers and their officers. The prison-offences at Auckland and Dunedin I hope to see considerably reduced, which can only be accomplished by the officers more carefully studying the diverse temperaments and natures of those under their charge, encouraging them to self-restraint and good behaviour, and endeavouring to secure discipline and subordination by other means than severity and force, and at the same time to refine, and so to raise the characters of their prisoners, which is the foundation of prison reformation.

21. Under Table H it will be noticed that of the more serious offences of which prisoners have been convicted during the past year there were—forgery and uttering, 19; larceny, 37; indecent conduct and rape, 4; housebreaking and burglary, 8: being an increase on the previous year of 9 cases of forgery and uttering, with decreases in larceny, rape, and housebreaking of 18, 1, and 4 respectively. The increase in forgery and uttering I believe to be mainly, if not entirely, due to the facilities offered by unscrupulous persons issuing blank cheques to entire strangers, without taking ordinary precautions, in the hope of making some pecuniary gain.

22. The number of offences committed by prison-officers last year was 25, as against 23 in 1885. Except in the case of one officer for repeated acts of intoxication, and another for allowing a prisoner to escape (before referred to), the majority of offences were ordinary cases of absence and neglect of duty. It was my painful duty to investigate charges of gross neglect of duty and making a false representation to a Visiting Justice, against a Gaoler of long standing, which were fully proved; but, as he tendered his resignation before you had fully considered his case, and as the same was duly accepted, I considered it unnecessary to recommend any punishment, on account of previous good services rendered. On the whole, I have reason to be satisfied with the conduct of the officers during the past year, and I feel the annual decrease of prison offences, without the discipline being in any way impaired, conclusively proves that the prison staff are gradually learning