

1889.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1888.

ALSO

REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF "THE FIRST OFFENDERS PROBATION
ACT, 1886,"

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1888.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of JUSTICE.

SIR,—

Justice Department (Prisons Branch), Wellington, 15th April, 1889.

I have the honour to present my ninth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the third annual report of the operations of "The First Offenders Probation Act, 1886." I have made periodically—as shown in Table J—inspections of the larger prisons of the colony at uncertain dates, and have visited as many of the smaller or police gaols as the time at my disposal permitted of; and, on the whole, my official experience continues yearly to confirm the opinion formed some time since, that the theory and practice of the prison system now fairly well established in New Zealand is better and milder in many respects than the prisoners deserve, better than that meted out to like offenders in many other countries, and, if in need of change at all, requiring to be made more rather than less severe. The harshness and barbarity of the prison system in New Zealand, which has been so graphically described from time to time, does not, I am pleased to report, exist, as the public can very easily ascertain for themselves, either by visiting the various prisons or by questioning those discharged after serving their sentences. The system of inspection now carried out in the New Zealand prisons by the Visiting Justices, Visitors, and Inspector, entirely explodes all the fabricated tales of cruelties and wrongs inflicted on prisoners, and prevents the possibility of harshness, injustice, partiality, or secret wrongs not coming to light, whilst the system has undoubtedly proved itself both deterrent and reformatory.

As regards the First Offenders Probation Act, from the details given in this report it will be seen that the Act is working more satisfactorily than its most ardent supporters could possibly have anticipated.

2. It is a matter of congratulation to be again able to report that the cost of maintenance of prisoners during the year is again considerably less than in the previous twelve months, and that very suitable work for the prisoners at the larger centres has been found in their employment on the fortifications, equally beneficial both to the taxpayer and the department.

3. As heretofore, the supplies for the various larger prisons have been publicly tendered for, and no complaints have been made by either the prison authorities or the various contractors. The usual custom of these tenders being addressed to and opened by the Visiting Justices has been adhered to, and their recommendations as to acceptance or rejection have been invariably adopted.

4. Six prisoners escaped during the year, but with one exception they were all recaptured. This is an increase of four escapes on the year 1887, and I regret to say that the majority might have been prevented had the officers concerned taken proper precautions. In each case a most searching inquiry was held, and the offending officers properly punished. The escapes occurred from the following prisons: Addington, the same prisoner twice; Dunedin, 1; Lyttelton, 1; Timaru, 1; and Wanganui, 2. As long as there are prisoners so long will there be escapes, but I regret to say that in the cases at Timaru, Invercargill, Addington, and Lyttelton the gaol officials were grossly to blame, and severe punishments had to be meted out in consequence. At Timaru both doors were left unlocked at the same time, in contravention of the Gaoler's orders. At Addington, in the first escape, the prisoner was not properly locked up. The same negligence occurred at Invercargill; whilst at Lyttelton the prisoner, after having escaped at Timaru, was, immediately