

which must be of incalculable value to them when discharged from prison. In these days, when prisons are no longer secret establishments, closed, as it were, to outside visitors, as perhaps they may have been in former times, it behoves all concerned to use every conceivable weapon that may tend to reform the inmates of gaols, subject, of course, to reasonable restrictions; but the public are too ready to rest satisfied with knowing that prisoners are properly cared for and not maltreated, without thinking whether proper measures are taken for their reformation, or that no stone is left unturned that may in some degree have a deterring tendency. It has not been found that taking prisoners to open Court has had any bad effects, because as a rule the Resident Magistrate or Justices sitting decline to allow the accused to air his supposed prison grievances; but it is in many respects inconvenient and troublesome, without any proportionately good results, and might well be discontinued.

21. The number of offences committed by prison officers last year was 18, as against 17 in 1888. The more serious of these offences were three cases of intoxication, and one neglect to report the intended escape of a prisoner. In each case punishments proportionate to the seriousness of the offences were meted out. The new appointments to the prison service are still made from men serving in the Permanent Artillery; and, though the prison service may be looked upon as a field for promotion, still men who have served for some time in the permanent forces do not always make good prison officers, and the fact of having so small a field for selection often prevents the services of a good tradesman being obtained, who would be valuable for teaching the younger prisoners a trade, whereby they would be enabled to gain an honest livelihood on their discharge from gaol.

22. The new prison-buildings in course of erection at Wellington and Auckland have made good progress during the year. At Wellington the roof has been completed, and the internal fittings are being pushed on with all speed. The exercising-yards have been brought down to the proper level, and as soon as the kitchen and scullery are built the wing should be ready for occupation. The fact of the prisoners working at the fortifications at both Wellington and Auckland has, of course, prolonged considerably the erection of both of these buildings; but as at each place it led to some fifty prisoners being withdrawn from the old buildings, which were overcrowded and ill-calculated to hold them, and located at the fortification works at Fort Cautley and Point Halswell, the delay has not been without its advantages; and, as there is no reason to expect an immediate or substantial increase of prisoners, it is clear that we have been saved from a most serious dilemma by the reduction in the number of prisoners, and the labour at the defence works turning up at a period when our prison-accommodation was inadequate and inferior. At Auckland the two wings in course of construction have advanced considerably during the year, and a tender has been accepted for the roofing, which should be completed in a few months; the internal fittings are well advanced, and part of these buildings is already occupied: but it is a matter of the greatest importance that the whole be completed with all practicable speed, and the rotten and vermin-infested portions of the old wooden prisons vacated and pulled down. It is a matter of great regret to me that no absolute decision has been arrived at in regard to the erection of a new prison at Dunedin. The gaol, as it now stands, though a stone one, is in many respects a relic of the dark ages, unfit for occupation and not capable of being improved, where any carrying-out of classification is next to impossible, and where the evils of contamination and corruption from evil associations cannot be prevented. Here, again, the defence works have come to the rescue, and removed to Taiaroa Heads some forty prisoners, and to some extent mitigated the evils referred to; but the time has certainly arrived for a new prison for Otago to be commenced without delay. Beyond the annual painting at the various other prisons there is no expenditure required for any special work during the present year.

23. During the past year the prisoners have been employed at the four centres on the fortification works, and have been located in temporary prisons at Fort Cautley, Point Halswell, Fort Jervis, and Taiaroa Heads, and have done excellent work, an account of which will be found in the report of the Defence Engineer. They have also been employed in building new prisons at Auckland and Wellington, at work on the breakwater at New Plymouth, brickmaking and levelling at Wellington, and tailoring and shoemaking at Lyttelton; while the females have done shirtmaking, stocking-knitting, mending, and washing at the various prisons.

24. Before concluding this report I desire to place on record that to make long sentences reformatory and deterrent two alterations in our present system are necessary—(1) a less liberal ration-scale, and (2) that at the commencement of all long sentences the offenders should be made to pass a certain time in separation. This, of course, has been impossible up to the present, with the limited accommodation at the larger gaols, but as our new prisons become available I strongly recommend that all long-sentenced prisoners be made to pass the first eight months of their sentences in separation. A sentence of imprisonment with hard labour is essentially the same as a sentence of penal servitude, and it is of practically little importance whether the sentence is called by one name or the other so long as the treatment of the prisoners subjected to them is adapted to the duration of the sentence. It would therefore be desirable to assimilate the practice as to the treatment of prisoners under sentence of penal servitude and of those under sentence of imprisonment, and make each undergo a term of eight months from date of conviction in separation. That the scale of rations is far too liberal I gather from the fact that as a general rule prisoners increase in weight considerably during their sentences, and, further, from the amount of food which is not eaten, but thrown to waste daily by the prisoners. This time last year I introduced a special scale of rations for boys under sixteen years of age, curtailing considerably the daily supply of bread and meat; and the result has been most satisfactory, and has without doubt prevented some from committing offences which were likely to cause their return to gaol. In addition to our very liberal scale of rations, there is a large expenditure every year in extras ordered for prisoners by the gaol surgeons, such as eggs, cocoa, milk, beef, &c., which doubtless in many cases are absolutely necessary; but it is the duty of all interested in the reformation of criminals to set their faces against anything like luxuries or too good feeding in such places as prisons. The question of prisoners' rations is, I am willing to admit, a most important and wide one; but I am anxious to see the matter fully considered by the gaol surgeons of the colony, and to hear their verdict.