

9. According to figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the colony was, at the end of 1890, 355,477 males and 311,708 females—in all, 667,185 persons; whilst the number of prisoners at that date was 495 males and 67 females—in all, 562. The average percentage of prisoners to the population was therefore .085, a decrease of .011 on the previous year.

10. During the year 1890 63 male misdemeanants in default, and 65 male and 15 female supposed lunatics, were detained in the gaols of the colony, a decrease on the previous year of 2 male misdemeanants in default and 22 male and 10 female supposed lunatics. It is again pointed out that there are no proper appliances in the prisons for proper treatment of the supposed lunatics, and their detention interferes very much with the maintenance of discipline.

11. With reference to prisoners under sentence of penal servitude, there were in the various prisons at the end of last year 164 males and 7 females, a decrease of 25 males and an increase of 1 female.

12. During 1890 387 male and 33 female prisoners were acquitted or discharged after remand, an increase of 94 males and a decrease of 13 females as compared with 1889.

13. From Table B it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £46 9s. 5d., as against £45 15s. 8d. for the previous year, and at a net cost of £39 10s., as against £38 6s. 5d. in 1889. The gross totals are made up as follows: Staff supervision, £30 14s. 9d.; maintenance, £12 13s. 5d.; and incidentals, £3 1s. 3d. This increase in the gross cost per head is easily accounted for—firstly, by the substantial daily average decrease of 43·63 prisoners; and, secondly, by the increase of the price of provisions and fuel during the labour troubles. The first reason being so satisfactory, and the second so unforeseen, it is believed that the most dubious will be compelled to admit that the department has been economically administered during the past year. It has been asked why the inmates of lunatic asylums cost so much less than prisoners; but this query is very easily answered by the fact that a very large income in the asylums is derived from the paying patients, whereas there is no such revenue in the Prison Department.

14. The receipts and credits for prison-labour, road-metal, needlework, maintenance of prisoners, &c., for the past year amounted to £3,949 19s. 8d., exclusive of the work done at the fortifications, as against £4,551 3s. 8d. for the previous year.

15. On reference to Table C it will be seen that, out of 3,510 male and 820 female prisoners, 3,038 males and 669 females were able to read and write, whilst 367 males and 86 females were neither able to read nor write.

16. It will be seen from Table F that a comparison of the previously-convicted prisoners sentenced during the past year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1886—shows a decrease of the once convicted of 41 males and 44 females, a decrease of the twice convicted of 11 males and 18 females, whilst in those convicted thrice or oftener there is an increase of 31 males and 3 females. It is believed that these last mentioned include a class of persons who were probably gaol-birds before they came to the colony, and who have spent the greater portion of their lives in prisons, and are so hardened and well versed in crime that no reformatory system, however good it may be, will ever alter their mode of life or induce them to forsake their criminal ways.

17. It is my painful duty to again draw attention to the practice still prevailing in the colony of sending children under ten years of age to gaols. A reference to Table D shows that during the past year the number of juvenile offenders who have passed through the gaols of the colony are as follows: Those under the age of ten years (mere infants) being 20, as against 14 in 1889; those from ten to fifteen years, 54, as against 61 in 1889; and those from fifteen to twenty years, 223, as against 219 in 1889: giving a total increase last year of 3 in young persons under the age of twenty years. Now, this appears to me a very decided blot in our administration. What can those 20 infants under the age of ten years—a tender era, when these unfortunates should be inmates of some home or school—develop into but criminals, no matter how they may be kept isolated when in gaols? The fear of the police-cells, the dread of the prison-walls, are all blunted in their child-minds; and so they commence their downward career, and are successfully made into hardened criminals long before they reach man- or womanhood. I must again reiterate my annual protest that prisons are altogether unsuitable places for the detention of children of tender years, and the commitment to or detention in gaols of children under ten years of age is nothing short of a public scandal.

18. Table K again shows a considerable decrease in the number of prison punishments awarded during the past year—viz., 172, as against 213 in 1889. Of these, 165 were for minor offences, punished by the Visiting Justices, while 7 serious or aggravated prison offences, after first being investigated by a Visiting Justice, were reheard in open Court, as against 10 in the previous year. Any interested person looking back to the prison records for, say, twenty years, must, I think, at once admit that, considering the high state of discipline now maintained, together with the amount of work done by the prisoners, there is a maximum amount of efficiency obtained with a minimum amount of punishment. When it is remembered that twenty years ago punishment by means of the lash and bread-and-water diet was constantly inflicted, that additional imprisonment amounting to months, and in some cases to years, was imposed for offences committed in prison, the department may well be congratulated on the result achieved by the humane modern system of punishment introduced into our gaols. The figures for the year show only seven aggravated offences, while a much higher state of discipline and fair-play exists than at the period above referred to, and the amount of labour performed by the prisoners speaks for itself.

19. The number of offences committed by prison officers last year was 13, against 18 in 1889. There were no cases of inebriety, and the general conduct of the officers has been satisfactory. I am pleased to find that the officers, as a rule, to a considerable extent, study the temperaments and dispositions of those under their charge, and so, while maintaining strict discipline, establish a mutual confidence, which results in a cheerful obedience and good feeling between all parties. The subordinate officers are still selected almost exclusively from men