

1898.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1897;

ALSO

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1897.

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,—

Department of Justice, Prisons Branch, 1st July, 1898.

I have the honour to present this my seventeenth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the twelfth annual report on the working of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886."

1. I have periodically inspected the various prisons on the dates stated in the attached table marked "J," and I am glad to be again in a position to report that, though my visits have in many instances been surprise ones, I have found on every occasion the establishments clean and well kept, every attention being paid to the sanitary arrangements, while the management had been both effective and economical, and a state of discipline maintained that reflects credit on all concerned, and, as some of my visits were made at times when I was least expected, it is reasonable to suppose that a similar satisfactory state of things prevails at all times. At these visits I have made a point of seeing all the prisoners, and giving interviews to all that asked them, carefully listening to such complaints as were brought to my notice.

2. It affords me great pleasure to be again in a position to inform you that the First Offenders' Probation Act continues to work most satisfactorily, and it will be seen from the remarks under that heading that the use of that Act—which is very desirable whenever it can be suitably resorted to—has often sufficed to check any further transgression by those brought under its influence, and its application has been most valuable.

3. As usual the supplies for the various prisons have been publicly tendered for locally, and no complaints of any moment have been made either by the prison authorities or by the different contractors. The long-established custom of all tenders being addressed to and opened by the local Visiting Justices has been strictly adhered to, and their recommendations have invariably been adopted. This system, while relieving the department from a great amount of responsibility, throws the onus of detection on gentlemen who, from their local knowledge and surroundings, must be competent judges on such important matters; and the absence of complaints as to the quality of the provisions, &c., tendered for use, proves that a wise discretion is exercised by the Visiting Justices in this matter of selecting tenders. During the past year, owing to a rise in prices, some of the contractors have thrown up their contracts, but no difficulty has been found in getting fresh contracts provided for.

4. Two escapes took place during the past year, viz., one at Auckland, and one at Lyttelton, both from the works; and no case of breaking-out of prison or attempting to do so occurred during the year. As regards the escape from Auckland (Fort Cantley), the prisoner was undergoing a two years' sentence, and, after an absence of about two months, was recaptured by the police in the Waikato. An inquiry into the circumstances of the escape was held by the Visiting Justices, with the result that an assistant warder was found guilty of neglect of duty and fined £2. As regards the escape from the works at Sticking Point, Lyttelton, the prisoner, who was undergoing a sentence of ten years' hard labour, was recaptured by the police and Permanent Artillery after an absence of two days. In this case the Visiting Justices held an inquiry, but could not discover that blame rested with any of the prison officers.