

5. A reference to Table A shows that the health of the prisoners has been good throughout the year, the daily average of sick being—males 5·92, and females 1·03, an increase of 0·02 in the males, and a decrease of 0·18 in the females, as compared with the year 1896.

6. Four deaths occurred in gaols during the past year—viz., one at New Plymouth, one at Dunedin, one at Invercargill, and one at Mongonui. In each case a coroner's inquest was held in conformity with the Prisons Act. No epidemics occurred in any of the prisons.

7. There were two executions during the year—one at Lyttelton, and the other at Wellington. In each case the death sentences were properly and successfully carried out, and the usual inquests were held.

8. From Table A it will be seen that at the commencement of the year 503 males and 47 females were undergoing detention in the various gaols of the colony; while at its close there were 603 males and 71 females, giving an increase of 100 males and 71 females. During the year 1897 3,518 males and 648 females passed through the different prisons, as against 3,280 males and 670 females during the previous year; an increase of 238 males and a decrease of 22 females, a total increase of 216 prisoners. This large increase is mainly accounted for by upwards of 100 Maori prisoners being sent to gaol for unlawfully ploughing and destroying fences on settlers' lands.

9. During the past year the daily average number of prisoners in the gaols has been 518·25 males and 49·22 females, an increase on the previous year in the daily average of 3·87 males, with a decrease of 7·9 females.

10. According to the figures supplied by the Registrar-General, the population of the colony at the end of 1897 was 406,376 males and 362,534 females, a total of 768,910 persons; while the number of prisoners at the same date was 603 males and 71 females: total, 674 persons. The average percentage of prisoners according to population was therefore 0·0876, as against 0·0729 in the previous year.

11. During the past year 46 male misdemeanants, in default of bail, and 53 males and 19 females, supposed lunatics, were detained in the various prisons of the colony, a decrease of thirteen in the former, and in the latter a decrease of two males and an increase of two females. The system of detaining these supposed lunatics (as well as criminal lunatics, of which there are one male and one female) in the prisons during the Colonial Secretary's pleasure is, I believe, a most improper one, and an injustice is done both to the suffering persons and to the prison officials, as such maladies can only be aggravated by detention in gaols. No blame in this matter can be attached to the Magistrates. Men and women are brought before them in a state of mental imbecility, or suffering from the effects of excessive drinking, and, in the absence of suitable institutions for the reception and treatment of such unfortunates, they are relegated to a gaol. Now, by a reference to "The Lunatics Act, 1882," sections 67 and 68, it is imperative that hospitals shall provide wards for the temporary reception of lunatics; but owing to the non-compliance with this law by hospital Boards, the pernicious practice of sending supposed lunatics to prisons continues. As regards persons suffering from *delirium tremens*, if such cannot be legally considered lunatics, then the sooner homes are established the better, where those unfortunates can be treated for diseases instead of for crimes.

12. At the close of the year there were 102 males and two females undergoing sentences of penal servitude, a decrease of five on the previous year.

13. During the past year 392 males and 42 females were acquitted, or discharged after remand, as against 340 males and 45 females in the previous year—an increase of fifty-two males and a decrease of three females.

14. By a reference to Table B, it will be seen that the prisoners were maintained last year at a gross cost per head of £49 4s. 8d., as against £47 3s. 3d., and at a net cost of £33 9s. 8d. per head, as against £31 3s. 6d. in 1896. The gross costs are made up as follows, viz.: Staff supervision, £32 8s. 10d., as against £31 1s. 1d.; maintenance, £13 4s. 11d., as against £12 16s. 5d.; and incidentals, £3 10s. 11d., as against £3 5s. 9d. It has been already stated in this report that the management has been economical; and to qualify that statement it is pointed out that adaptability to the circumstances, owing to the peculiar configuration of the colony, necessitates keeping open prisons at which there can only be a few prisoners; owing to isolation and the Supreme Court sessions being held in the locality, a prison becomes a necessity. The prison at Nelson was again reduced to a police gaol, on the score of economy, on the 1st March last, the work which the Government agreed to give the Borough Council in making a road from the Port to Stoke having been completed in February last, and for the present no necessity exists for anything more than a police gaol at Nelson. It must also be borne in mind that as large a sum as £317 3s. 3d. of the expenditure under the heading of "Incidentals" is recouped to the Government, and is therefore merely in reality a transfer, viz.: £245 0s. 3d. to the Railway Department, and £72 3s. to the Post and Telegraph Department.

15. As regards the education of prisoners, a reference to Table C shows that, out of a total of 3,015 males and 601 females received into the gaols during the past year, 2,697 males and 540 females were able to read and write well, 71 males and 24 females could read only, while 247 males and 37 females could neither read nor write.

16. The receipts and credits for prison labour, road-metal, bricks, &c., amounted last year to £8,783 14s. 8d., as against £8,977 2s. 9d. in the previous year, a decrease of £193 8s. 1d.

17. It is interesting to notice from Table F that a comparison of the previously convicted prisoners sentenced during the past year, with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1892, shows a decrease in the once convicted of ninety-eight males and four females, a decrease in the twice convicted of eighty-six males and ten females, and in the thrice or oftener convicted a decrease of eighty-nine males and forty-six females. These decreases are considered satisfactory from every point of view.