

four of whom got three days bread-and-water, two got two days, and four got one day, so that as far as punishments are concerned there appears to be no necessity for the appointment of female Visiting Justices.

25. For some time past it has been observed that the present classification of prison officers in regard to rank and pay is not working satisfactorily, and in some instances entails considerable hardships. It is found that the responsibility and supervision required from officers in what are known as second-class prisons, is just as great and as arduous as in first-class gaols, though the pay is smaller; and to enable an officer to take his proper status under existing circumstances, expensive, and for other reasons unnecessary, transfers have to be carried out. This can be obviated by putting all the subordinate prison officers on a scale of pay regulated by length of service, instead of by the class of prison they may by chance be located in. Such a scheme is now ready for submission to you with a view to its adoption, which, while giving satisfaction, would, I feel sure, add much to the efficiency of the service. It will be found that with little or no additional expenditure, every subordinate, provided he shows ability and conducts himself well, will get periodical advancement in pay, regardless of the class of prison he may be serving in. An important feature in this classification is that in future men, on entering the prison service, will be placed on probation for a period of six months, and that the probation shall be served in one of the larger prisons, under an experienced officer, who will teach them their duty, prior to their being permanently posted to the service.

26. Owing to the abolition of penal servitude, and various other causes, I think the time has arrived for a revision and amendment of the prison regulations, and I shall be prepared to submit such alterations as are considered necessary for your favourable consideration shortly.

#### FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

1. A reference to Table L shows that ninety-one persons were placed on probation last year, as against seventy-two in 1896. Of these, twenty-seven have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, six were rearrested, and fifty-eight still remain under the supervision of Probation Officers.

2. The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £583 9s. 11d., of which £224 2s. had been actually paid at the end of the year, and the greater part of the balance will probably be paid in as it becomes due.

The approximate cost of keeping these offenders in prison amounts to £4,627, which, added to the amount of costs actually paid already, gives a saving of £4,857 2s. to the colony.

3. Of the 914 persons who have been placed on probation since the introduction of the Act in October, 1886, 763 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, fifty-eight have been re-arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, one committed suicide, two have died, twenty-one have absconded, and sixty-nine still remain fulfilling the conditions of their terms of probation.

4. The information supplied in the foregoing paragraph must be admitted by the most sceptical opponents of the Act as highly satisfactory, and reflects credit on Probation Officers for the judicious selections made in their recommendations, and should be an encouragement for a far more extensive resort to the use of the Act than hitherto. It may be argued that because twenty-one probationers have absconded, out of a total of 914, there is a considerable danger to the community; but this melts away, and is infinitesimal, when the numbers who have been saved from the infliction of the cruel "tar brush" of the gaol stigma, and probably a career of crime, is taken into account.

A. HUME,  
Inspector of Prisons.