

23. The prisoners at the three centres and Lyttelton have, as usual, during the past year been principally employed under the Public Works Department on works in connection with the fortifications, and satisfactory work has resulted, and if it were not for prison labour being available these works would have been a great drain on the revenue. As the fortifications are not accessible to the public, the localities are well suited for prisoners to work in, and both the Public Works and Defence Departments are satisfied with the progress made. Owing to constant changes in guns and war munitions it is presumed there will always be more or less labour for prisoners at these fortifications. In Auckland most satisfactory progress has been made with the new building, which reflects great credit on the Gaoler and his staff. The grounds at Government House and around the Supreme and Stipendiary Magistrate's Courts have been kept in order by the prisoners, and a large amount of road-metal has been turned out. At New Plymouth the boundary-wall is completed, with the exception of two or three subdividing small walls. At Napier good progress has been made in getting stone ready for the boundary-wall, and a concrete retaining-wall has been built at the bottom of the reserve. In Wellington there has been the usual output of bricks and drain-pipes, and a large stock are now on hand for the various Government buildings that may require them. At Lyttelton good progress has been made with the Sticking Point reclamation-work, which is nearly completed. At Hokitika the Hospital grounds have been kept in repair, part of the cemetery grounds has been reclaimed, and about 2 acres of the prison reserve has been made into a vegetable-garden, which should for the future supply the prison with vegetables all the year round. At Wanganui good work has been done in Cook Gardens. In Dunedin those prisoners not working at the fortifications have been employed on the rifle-range at Pelichet Bay, where they have made considerable enlargements and improvements. In Invercargill we have, as usual, worked for the Corporation, who pay a fair rate of wages, and employ the men on improvements that would not be undertaken unless prison labour was available.

24. As regards new prisons, a wing giving accommodation for sixty cells at the Wellington Terrace Prison has been planned and approved, and a road giving an easy gradient has been made up to the site; and, as bricks, drain-pipes, &c., are ready at Mount Cook for such a building, it is hoped tenders will be accepted and the work commenced at an early date. If such a wing was completed there would be sufficient accommodation to provide every prisoner with a separate cell, which is most desirable. At Invercargill a new prison-site has been purchased, and, no doubt, in due course a new building will be started; but there is not the same urgency in that locality, as the present building accommodates the prisoners of the district. New Gaoler's houses are much required in Dunedin and Auckland.

25. The report of the Gaoler at Waitapu gives some interesting details of the scheme of employing prisoners in the work of tree-planting. The success that has hitherto attended this experiment naturally leads to inquiry as to why the scheme is not extended to other localities. In the first place, it must be borne in mind that only prisoners of a fairly robust type, well conducted and of quiet habits, can be utilised. The ordinary criminal is, under present conditions, not available, for the reason that his first impulse would be to escape. Some men are safe only under lock and key and behind a fourteen-foot boundary-wall. The class of prisoner required for tree-planting or similar work in the country is the man who is determined to shorten his term of imprisonment by good conduct and industry, whose last thought is to escape, and who therefore needs little supervision. This class is, however, limited in number, and for that reason the scheme referred to cannot be extended as far as one could wish.

26. It is satisfactory to find from the report of the Gaoler at Wanganui that there were no cases of indecent crimes in his district during the last half of the year, which, no doubt, to a great extent is due to the more frequent resort to corporal punishment for such offences. But in some cases, at least, it would be safer and preferable to use the birch in lieu of the cat-o'-nine-tails, if such were legal; but subclause (6) of clause 14 of "The Criminal Code Act, 1893," directs that whipping—i.e., the birch—shall not be inflicted on a person whose age exceeds sixteen years.

27. The same Gaoler refers to the length of time some prisoners are kept awaiting trial, and no doubt hardship does occasionally occur, as prisoners, after awaiting trial for over four months, have been found not guilty.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table K shows that 97 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 112 in the year 1900. Of these 21 have satisfactorily carried out the conditions of their licenses and been discharged, 5 were rearrested, and 71 still remain under the supervision of Probation Officers completing their respective terms of probation.

The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £454, of which £216 6s. 6d. has been actually paid, and there is every reason to suppose the balance will be paid by instalments as it becomes due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders had they been sent to prison would have amounted to £3,908, which sum, added to the amount of costs, &c., actually paid in, gives a saving of £4,124 6s. 6d.

Of the 1,329 persons placed on probation since the inception of the Act in October, 1886, 1,094 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 80 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 1 committed suicide, 1 died, 1 was sent to a lunatic asylum, 32 absconded, and 119 still remain fulfilling the terms of their licenses.

No doubt there is a good deal in the argument put forth by the Auckland Gaoler as to the difficulty in dealing with a probationer who goes from one district to another and then fails to carry out the conditions of his license, but a slight amendment of the Act will get over this difficulty. Clause 12 says such a defaulter may be rearrested and again brought before the Court