

The conduct of the officers of the Prison, with one exception, due more to ill-health than anything else, has been excellent, and much of the successful working of the Prison is due to their strict attention to their duties and the cheerful and intelligent manner in which they have carried out all instructions. The officer above alluded to was retired on medical grounds.

The progress made with the central wing of the new prison during the year has been very rapid, and some of the cell-accommodation is nearly ready for occupation. The work is of a most substantial character, and the workmanship reflects the greatest credit upon the officers who have supervised it, and also on the prisoners who have carried out their instructions. When the prison is finished it will enable a complete system of classification to be maintained. The female prisoners are for all practical purposes already classified, first offenders exercising, bathing, &c., apart from the previously convicted women, the result being most satisfactory. The same system is, as far as it is practicable, carried out with male prisoners, and is entirely and most strictly observed with those under the age of sixteen years.

Most of the long-sentenced men have been employed at stone-dressing, of which they have done 10,336 cubic feet, valued at £1,092 7s. 10d. Others have worked as builders, and, although few, if any, of them had ever laid a stone before, they have become very expert. Many of both these classes are Maoris, who are most willing and intelligent workers. A gang of twenty-four men, under four officers, is located at Fort Cautley Prison, North Shore, and is employed on fortification-work. In addition to this 754 days' work have been performed at Government House, Supreme Court, Police-station, and Magistrate's Court. The short-sentence prisoners as a body have been employed in the quarries, and I am quite satisfied with the quantity as well as the quality of the work performed.

Connected with the subject of prison labour one sometimes hears the question raised that it may unduly compete with free labour, but I cannot imagine that the people that express these views can have given the matter much thought. In the first place, every man has an inalienable right to earn his living, and that right is not taken away but rather made more imperative by his being sent to prison for hard labour, often because he would not work when free. Prisoners are sentenced to do so much hard labour for the public under laws made by the public, and yet according to some people they (prisoners) are not allowed to do work which would benefit the public by reducing the cost to the State of their maintenance. This seems illogical. Every pound earned by prison labour is so much relief to the taxpayer. Then, again, suppose every prisoner in New Zealand were released at once, would they not then have to compete with other people and be entitled to earn their bread? The chief argument against standing armies is that they withdraw so many able-bodied men from the ranks of the producers; if this is true, would it not apply to keeping our prisoners from profitable employment? If the argument is not good, then the more men who are locked up the better for the country. In any case, the competition with free labour so far as our prisons are concerned would be so trivial as to be practically nil.

It will be seen from the attached tables that the past year has been a remarkable one as regards the average cost per prisoner, which was only £11 4s. 3d. net; this is chiefly due to the high daily average number of prisoners—viz., 192'22. I have also endeavoured to keep down the expenditure as much as possible compatible with efficiency. The large number of prisoners employed accounts for the great amount of work done.

#### *First Offenders' Probation Act.*

On the 1st January there remained on probation 13 men and 4 women, and during the year there were placed on probation 15 men and 2 women. There were also 3 men received on transfer from other districts, which makes a total of 31 men and 6 women dealt with. 11 men and 5 women were discharged after completing their terms, and 7 men were transferred to other districts; 2 men were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, one for not complying with the terms of his release on probation and one for theft while still on probation. On the 31st December there remained on probation 11 men and 1 woman. Costs and restitution ordered during the year amounted to £62 9s. 2d., of which sum £35 5s. has been paid.

There is one difficulty with regard to the working of this Act, among a number of others, which I have not hitherto seen any allusion to, viz.: A probationer is transferred from one district to another—say, from Christchurch to Auckland; his conduct is unsatisfactory, and he does not comply with the terms of his release: what is the Probation Officer to do? The Act says he must arrest the probationer, who shall then be "brought before the Court where he was originally convicted," &c., which in this case means that he must be taken from Auckland to Christchurch; and, as the Probation Officer for the former place is the only person who can give evidence in the case, he must go too, which is practically impossible. In many districts police officers are Probation Officers, and from my experience ever since the Act came into force they have acted in a strictly impartial and humane manner towards accused persons; and I take this opportunity to thank the members of the Police Force of all ranks for the most valuable assistance which they have rendered me by collecting money from probationers in out-of-the-way places, and for obtaining information which it would otherwise have been impossible for me to get.

As regards the general working of the Act, I have already alluded to it elsewhere. In some cases persons have been placed on probation whom I should have been very sorry to see sent to prison; but in others I am convinced the Courts have been misled by coloured evidence and statements in favour of the accused. In some cases the order to pay costs bears very heavily on the probationer, and in most cases there is great difficulty in obtaining payments when due, much money being unpaid long after the term of probation has expired.

I have, &c.,

FRANCIS EGERTON SEVERNE,

The Inspector of Prisons, Wellington.

Gaoler and Probation Officer.