

SESSION II.
1906.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1905;

ALSO

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

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1905.

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 May, 1906.

I have the honour to present this my twenty-fifth annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the twentieth annual report on the working of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," both of which I again venture to think will be considered satisfactory when all the surrounding circumstances are taken into account.

1. Extracts from the annual reports of the several Gaolers are, according to custom, attached to this document, and some of the suggestions are commented upon. It is pointed out that all the prisons are in a thoroughly efficient state, and, as far as practicable, the classification of prisoners has been well carried out, though, owing to the want of accommodation at some of the gaols, the cellular system cannot be enforced in its entirety. With the exception of a few medical and mental cases, to thoroughly carry out a proper classification system every prisoner should be confined in a separate cell.

2. During the past year, as shown in Table I, I have visited the various prisons on the dates stated, and have given interviews to those prisoners that have sought them; and all complaints and requests have been fully inquired into, and the decisions arrived at have, as a rule, satisfied the persons concerned. The majority of complaints are that of innocence and too severe sentences; but representations of improper treatment, bad food or clothing, and suchlike are, I am pleased to state, very few. The Visiting Justices as a rule attend frequently, as shown by Table H, and interview those prisoners who desire to see them, and report any irregularities that come under their notice.

3. The supplies required for use in the town prisons have, as heretofore, been obtained by public tenders, on the recommendation of the Visiting Justices, and have given satisfaction; the only difficulty has been with potatoes, which were scarce, expensive, and inferior; and in some cases it was found necessary to substitute bread, rice, split peas, &c.; but the contractors have invariably tried to maintain the supply of potatoes in accordance with their contracts, although often at a considerable pecuniary loss to themselves. As the isolation of the tree-planting prisons prevents supplies being contracted for, they are purchased in the neighbourhood at the lowest market rates consistent with good quality, while the vegetables are grown by the Department.

4. There were 13 escapes during the year, as against 9 in 1904—viz., 2 from Wellington, 1 from Dunedin, 1 from Lyttelton, 1 from Napier, 3 from Waiotapu, 3 from Dumgree, and 2 from Hanmer. In every case the escapees were speedily recaptured and punished.

5. A reference to Table A shows that at the commencement of last year there were 678 males and 72 females in custody, and at the close of the year there were 744 males and 66 females, an increase of 66 males and a decrease of 6 females. During the year 1905 5,150 males and 639 females passed through the various prisons, as against 5,244 males and 665 females in the previous year, a decrease of 94 males and 26 females; but of the 6,439 persons who passed through the prisons it has been found that a fifth were in more than once during the year and should therefore be deducted from the gross total.

6. On the 31st December, 1904, there were confined in the various prisons of the colony 750 persons, while twelve months later there were 810, an increase of 60 persons; but in considering this increase it must be remembered that, as shown elsewhere, there is an increase of 26 misdemeanants in default