

all first convictions, with one-half the remission on second sentences, and no remission on third or more sentences, it would prove both deterrent and reformatory, but before finally making these recommendations more reliable data is required, and is being obtained.

26. As the Howard Association has been somewhat largely quoted from in this report, it may be interesting to notice how the prisons of the colony are administered in reference thereto. First, then, the leading feature in their theory is that cellular accommodation, as against association—that is, that every prisoner should have a cell to him or herself, instead of being confined in cells with others—is the main plank in their platform, and a reference to the former reports on the prisons of the colony clearly shows that this contention has been steadily adopted as far as accommodation will admit, and is year by year coming into general use. The next item is visitors to prisons. Now, as far back as 1883, Official Visitors were, on my recommendation, appointed to the prisons, and for the last two years lady Visitors to the female prisoners have formed part of our system, and the thanks, not only of the department, but of all persons interested in the matter, are due to these lady Visitors, who, from the interest they have taken in some of the younger prisoners more especially, not only while they were under detention, but also after discharge from prison, have undoubtedly saved them from a career of crime and debauchery, these lady Visitors are a great blessing to the department. All prisons are open to the members of both Houses of the Legislature, and all respectable persons who apply for permission are welcomed and shown over the establishments. I have always been a very strong advocate for the admission of the public to prisons; it is a protection to the officers; shows the prisoners that the outside world is not unmindful of them, and desires to know how they are treated; and it also proves to the public that prisons are not secret places of torture, and they are after a visit the better able to appreciate the humanity and earnest endeavours of the existing authorities to render prisons places of merciful as well as penal treatment.

The other main feature in the Howard Association programme is the abolition of infant imprisonment, but, as this has been already dealt with in this report, no further comment is necessary. Now, when it is taken into account that the great aim and object of this association is to assist penal reform generally, it may be justly claimed for this department that it is being administered in the direction pointed to by the most reliable authorities.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

1. A reference to Table L shows that 75 persons were placed upon probation last year, as against 59 in 1893. Of these, 39 satisfactorily carried out the conditions of their licenses and were discharged, 2 were rearrested and committed to prison, 1 absconded, and 33 still remain under the supervision of the Probation Officers, completing their respective terms of probation.

2. The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £248 17s. 2d., of which £173 0s. 2d. had been actually paid at the end of the year, and the greater portion of the remainder will be paid by instalments as it becomes due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders, had they been sent to prisons, would have been £1,860, which, added to the amount of cost, &c., actually paid, gives a saving of £2,033 0s. 2d. to the colony.

3. Of the 633 persons placed on probation since the Act came into force in October, 1886, 540 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out all the conditions of their licenses, 37 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 2 have died, 16 have eluded the vigilance of the Probation Officers, and 38 still remain under probation.

4. The above return speaks for itself, and requires no comments to show what a real good Act it is, and how well it is working; but the following report from a Probation Officer, in the case of a Maori, is published as interesting, and also to prove the error persons make in supposing that the Act is not applicable to Natives: "This offender is a Native, and was admitted to nine months' probation in September, 1893, and ordered to pay the sum of £10 costs, and £6 to the prosecutor, and to find a surety in £25 for future good behaviour. The offender, who was convicted on a charge of larceny as a bailee, though belonging to the Urewera country, and to a tribe generally credited as being defiant and opposed to European laws, has reported himself regularly, and, though continually on the move from place to place, shearing, &c., has in every case first advised me of where he was moving to. He has paid the sum of £16, and has been continually in work the whole time, being lazily disposed prior to getting into trouble. In his case probation has proved an unqualified success."

Before closing this report, I will quote an extract from an article on "Disappearance of Crime," in the *Law Times*, 11th May last, by G. Pitt-Lewis, Queen's Counsel: "The imposing severe and savage punishment upon first offenders appears to have practically no effect in preventing crime; much more can be done in this direction by an efficient system of organized police. Crime can, however, be still more effectually defeated by giving children a good education and good training, which will prevent them becoming, from either choice or necessity, members of the criminal classes. The powers which Magistrates possess of sending juvenile offenders to industrial or reformatory schools ought therefore to be freely exercised, and if the age of the offender or the circumstances of his offence render a recourse to them impossible, the powers of dealing with a case in a summary way should be exercised, rather than any danger run of making the person an habitual 'gaol bird' by sending him to prison. In all cases the provisions of the First Offenders Act should, with the same object, ever be kept in view. In the case of persons of mature age its provisions often serve to prevent the training of a fresh 'gaol bird.' With children, money employed in educating a child is always far better bestowed and brings society a far better return than any amount of it which may be spent in punishing an older person."

I have, &c.,

A. HUME, Inspector of Prisons.