

says, where any person is arrested in a state of helpless drunkenness the Justice before whom he shall be brought may, if he thinks fit, remand such person to some hospital, infirmary, or other fitting place for curative treatment. Now, it is asked, in all fairness, is there one Justice to be found in New Zealand who would conscientiously say he considers a prison a fitting place for treating such cases? We find Coroners' juries adding riders that such cases should not be sent to prisons, but still the objectionable practice is allowed to continue. I was pleased to see recently a jury adding a rider to the following effect: "That the Government be asked to withhold their support from public hospitals which have not made provision to receive persons suffering from the effects of drink." A careful reading of section 67 of "The Lunatics Act, 1882," and section 21 of "The Police Offences Act, 1884," it is submitted, clearly tends to show that the Legislature when passing those Acts never intended that persons suffering from the effects of drink, or supposed lunatics, were to be treated as criminals in gaols, instead of as invalids in a hospital or infirmary.

26. The new regulations referred to in my last report, giving greater facilities for well-conducted prisoners to communicate with their friends by letters and visits, and modifying the scale of gratuities on discharge, came into force on the 1st April last, and are giving satisfaction as far as they have gone.

27. It is believed that a good deal might be done for the better class of prisoners if a State farm was established, where those who may be considered worthy of it might be employed in cultivating both agricultural and garden grounds, looking after cattle, milking, butter-making, or tree-planting. Some years ago, when I was at Dartmoor Prison, a large farm was attached to that prison, and worked entirely by the better class of convicts, with good results. Plantations of the different class of trees required by the Government might form part of such a farm; and if pedigree stock were kept the breed of horses and cattle might be considerably improved by allowing stallions and bulls from the farm to serve the settlers' mares and cows. A horse-breeding establishment for remounts might also form part of such an establishment. The scheme appears to me worthy of consideration.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table L shows that 117 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 91 in the year 1898. Of these, 38 were discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their license, 4 were rearrested, and 75 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 £461 3s. 7d., of which £230 12s. 11d. has been actually paid, and it is believed the remainder 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 £3,715, which sum, added to the amount of costs, &c., actually paid, gives a saving of £3,945 12s. 11d.

Of the 1,120 persons put on probation since the inception of the Act in October, 1886, 926 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 67 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 1 committed suicide, 2 died, 1 was sent to a lunatic asylum, 27 absconded, and 96 still remain fulfilling the terms of their licenses.

From the foregoing it will be seen that a percentage of 83 have done well, while only a percentage of 2.41 have eluded the vigilance of the Probation Officers and absconded. These statistics speak for themselves, and show that the Probation Officers, who do the work gratuitously, have carefully inquired into and made judicious recommendations in the majority of cases, and are deserving of commendation.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME,

Inspector of Prisons