

With a greater number of prisoners, and a larger staff of officers, I could push on work in the quarries more energetically than at present, and so hasten the completion of the new prison. There is also a very great demand for road-metal for country districts where no stone can be obtained locally. In fact, the Government has a most valuable asset in this Prison Reserve—it contains a practically inexhaustible supply of fine stone, eminently suitable for building or road-making, and for which the demand is sure to increase as years go by. On this account I look upon Mount Eden Prison as a perfect place for the employment of prisoners in almost any number; for, although not far from the city, it is to all intents and purposes isolated, and hundreds of men could work on the reserve without in any way coming in contact with the public. The work can be done at a minimum cost with a maximum gain, and without in the slightest degree competing with free labour. For these reasons it would, in my opinion, be a great misfortune if by any means this reserve were curtailed or alienated, as I consider that so long as the Government hold this land the problem of suitable employment for prisoners is solved.

The stone-crushing machine now in use is old, and should before long be replaced by a more powerful and modern one.

In conclusion, I express the earnest hope that the completion of the prison will not be delayed by the reduction of the number of prisoners by drafting many of them away to other works. For my part, I shall devote my utmost energy to the pressing forward of this most urgent work.

First Offenders' Probation Act.

The first case in which probation was ordered occurred on the 10th January, 1887; and from that date until the 31st December, 1900, 252 persons have been placed on probation. Of this number 182 have more or less satisfactorily completed their terms, and have been discharged; 14 were rearrested during the period of probation (on other charges), and were sentenced to various periods of hard labour; 36 absconded or were transferred to other districts; 3 died during their probation; and 17 still remain on probation: total, 252.

At the commencement of the year 1900 there were 15 males and 3 females on probation, and on the 31st December the number was 13 males and 4 females. There were 13 males and 4 females admitted to probation during the year, and 15 males and 3 females completed their terms or were transferred to another district. The total amount of costs and restitution-money ordered to be paid by those placed on probation during 1900 was £159 10s. 10d., of which £19 3s. 1d. has been paid.

During the year four men who had been previously placed on probation and completed their terms thereof were again tried at the Supreme Court for various offences, two being acquitted and two sentenced to hard labour. Of the men admitted to probation prior to the year 1900, some have completed the period for which they were put on probation, but have not paid the costs and restitution-money ordered, £173 12s. 3d. being still unpaid. In the great majority of cases there is a considerable difficulty in collecting the costs, &c., ordered to be paid by probationers, while those who have not to pay anything, but to report only, usually carry out the terms of their release. This is an Act which requires the utmost discretion in its administration, for an indiscriminate granting of probation is sure to be followed by an increase of crime, and what was intended to be a merciful and beneficent Act becomes a direct encouragement to commit crime to those who have the slightest inclination in that direction. Only those on whom the responsibility rests of making recommendations under this Act know the amount of anxiety and trouble caused in the endeavour to do justice between the public interest and the criminal. The latter often has the benefit of eloquent counsel, and friendly witnesses ready to prove that the offender is only one degree removed from a saint; while the Probation Officer, who has no interest in the case, except to see that justice is done, is powerless to confute them. The consequence is that in spite of adverse reports offenders are often released on probation who subsequently by their conduct bring discredit on the Act. In my opinion, Gaolers in the large centres of population have not the time to spare from their regular duties to enable them to work this Act as it should be done; one or other duty must be neglected, and it will probably be the working of the First Offenders' Probation Act which will suffer.

F. E. SEVERNE,
Gaoler and Probation Officer.

DUNEDIN PRISON.

No doubt lunatics and D.T. cases, of which there have been several under supervision (and many more on the verge of D.T.), should not be admitted to prison, but whilst they are subject to committal I would respectfully suggest arrangements should be made whereby they can be effectively supervised. There is no padded cell.

There are no effective means of classification of prisoners as regards nature of offences, &c., at this Prison. There are simply two exercise-yards, one of which is used for criminal male prisoners convicted and sentenced to hard labour; the other yard is used to exercise all other male prisoners—viz., debtors, lunatics, invalids, prisoners awaiting trial, on remand, &c. Should youths or children be committed they are exercised on one of the balconies around the interior of the Prison, and, as far as possible, kept apart from adult criminal prisoners. The female prisoners are in a division entirely separate from the male prisoners. The female prison accommodation is sufficient. Though there are cells for twenty prisoners, the average daily number for 1900 was six. The male prison accommodation at Dunedin, though small (52), is not as a rule overtaxed, by reason of the bulk of the long-sentenced prisoners (daily average, 32) being located at Taiaroa Heads Prison. A portion of the Permanent Artillery Barracks was set apart as a prison in 1888, and since that time (May, 1888) prisoners have been located there, except at Christmas season, when they are brought