

The female was committed for trial on a charge of perjury, and as she was unable to procure bail the Justices gave her probation on the usual conditions. All the probationers but two are paying costs.

MICHAEL FLANNERY,
Gaoler and Probation Officer.

NEW PLYMOUTH PRISON.

During the year ending the 31st December last seventy-three prisoners were received, of whom sixty-seven were males and six females. Of the males, forty-two were sentenced to hard labour and one to simple imprisonment, whilst one was admitted to probation. Nine were received on remand, and were handed over to the police, and were subsequently discharged at the several Stipendiary Magistrate's Courts. One, a youth of sixteen, was sent to Burnham Industrial School. Three male lunatics were received: of these, two were certified to by the doctors as being of unsound mind, and committed to the Lunatic Asylum; one was discharged at the local Stipendiary Magistrate's Court, the Prison Surgeon, after a few days' medical treatment, under close observation, certifying that the prisoner was suffering from an overindulgence in alcohol and not from any permanent form of insanity.

The general health of prisoners through the year has been good, with but two exceptions—that of an old man sixty-six years of age, who was for a considerable time on the sick-list, and was allowed extra diet by direction of the Prison Surgeon; his sickness was due more to the general break-up of the natural system, accelerated by a morbid and despondent temperament, rather than to any particular complaint, for despite all his sickness he gained in weight. On admission to prison on the 31st May, 1897, he weighed 144 lb.; on discharge, on the 13th June last, 158 lb., thus gaining 14 lb. This clearly proved that the three years' detention in goal was not detrimental to his health. The only case of serious sickness was that of a girl who had a severe attack of influenza, consequent upon a severe cold contracted before coming into prison, she having spent the previous night out of doors, hiding from the police. I am pleased to say that credit is due to the Matron for her very careful nursing and attention to this girl during her illness.

It gives me much satisfaction to report that the general conduct of the prisoners throughout the year has been excellent. The rations throughout the year have been of excellent quality.

During the year the prisoners have chiefly been employed cutting and preparing stone for and building boundary-wall. A small gang was for some time employed clearing the gorse, fennel, acacias, &c., off the Police Reserve on Marsland Hill and the Prison Reserve. This work was carried out on Saturday mornings or other occasion which might occur and which did not interfere with building operations. When old and infirm prisoners are received, and who are not capable of working at the stone-cutting or building, they are employed stone-napping.

One great improvement that has been carried out during the past year is the laying on of gas through the Prison and male division. This work was carried out chiefly by a warder, and, when it is taken into consideration that holes had to be cut through the concrete wall in each cell and a 2½ in. pipe, required as smoke-escape and ventilator combined, had to be embedded in the wall, very great credit is due to the officer for the excellent manner in which he carried the work through.

It affords me the greatest pleasure to report that the conduct of the officers during the year has been exemplary.

The net cost per prisoner, as shown by annual return No. 3, may at first sight seem proportionally great, but when taken into consideration the amount of work done at the boundary-wall, and for which no credit is taken, it will, I think, be admitted that it compares favourably with other years.

First Offenders' Probation Act.

There was only one admitted to probation during the year—a Maori—and who has, so far, conducted himself well. Four others completed their various terms of probation satisfactorily. The First Offenders' Probation Act continues to give satisfaction to all concerned, and, when judiciously administered, is, I consider, one of the most humane and beneficial Acts of legislature ever placed upon the statute-books of the colony. Many a man and woman in their declining years will be able to look back with gratitude to the benefit of the First Offenders' Probation Act, for experience has taught us that, no matter how deterrent or reformatory gaol may prove, once inside the walls of a prison, the associations are too vividly impressed upon the memory ever to be entirely obliterated, and the reminiscences of prison life cling to the person for all time.

B. L. O'BRIEN,
Gaoler and Probationary Officer.

WANGANUI PRISON.

The prisoners have been employed in repairing the rifle-range, and a large amount of work has been done during the latter part of the year in scraping and repainting the roof and iron fences of the Prison. Work has also been done in Cook's Gardens.

The health of the prisoners has been very good, there having been only six males and one female sick in the Prison during the year, and in all cases, except that of a man who attempted suicide, the prisoners were sick on admission. During the plague scare all prisoners were examined by the Gaol Surgeon as soon as possible after admission. There have been no serious prison offences during the year, and no attempts at escape.

The various contracts for rations, &c., have given complete satisfaction, and we have not had a single complaint from the prisoners during the year.