

The conduct of the officers has been good, and they are both fairly efficient men, but I regret that they have not pulled together as well as they might have done, and the usefulness of one of them is somewhat impaired by advancing years. It is naturally most unpleasant to have to say this, and it must be patent to every one who has the welfare and efficiency of the service at heart that a provident fund such as the Police Force has is a thing much to be desired.

The recently introduced classification scheme has given great satisfaction, and were the prison service blessed with a provident fund there would be very few discontented officers in that branch of the Justice Department.

I feel that I should be leaving a duty undone if I neglected to draw attention to the old-fashioned cruelty of sending lunatics and prisoners suffering from delirium tremens to prison. There is no proper accommodation for them, neither are the officers experts in lunacy or medicine, and it is a great injustice to both the officers and other prisoners, who are frequently kept awake for two or three nights in succession by the noise made by these unfortunates.

Crimes against women and children are becoming much more prevalent—at all events, in this district.

I think the difficulty that discharged prisoners frequently experience in obtaining employment is a matter worthy the attention of the authorities, and I have often thought that some portion of the public works in each Island might be set apart for discharged prisoners, who, if they wished honestly to amend their ways, would have the opportunity of earning their bread and proving for a time the honesty of their intentions.

We have suffered considerable inconvenience during the greater part of the year through only having two Visiting Justices available. Mr. Parsons died during the year, and Mr. Carson was incapacitated through sickness, and is still so.

First Offenders' Probation Act.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to state that this Act continues to work in a most satisfactory manner. There have been nine persons placed on probation by the different Courts during the year, and one transferred from the Napier district. With one exception, these have all, so far, faithfully carried out the conditions and are working and doing well. There are only £3 in arrear out of all the costs that offenders have been ordered to pay during the twelve years that I have been Probation Officer in this district, and the total paid has been £97. The saving to the colony for the maintenance of offenders who but for this Act would have been sent to prison would amount, speaking roughly, to about £2,000.

I have been fortunate in being able to place a number of young boys in really good situations far back in the country, in every instance with the happiest results. Young girls I find it much harder to place, and the results have not been nearly so satisfactory as with boys. But, notwithstanding some discouraging matters, there can be no doubt that the Probation Act is one of the best Acts ever passed in connection with crime.

I think it is a matter of serious regret that the Amendment Act of 1898 was ever passed, and I frequently find it difficult to elicit information from people, they fearing that they will be called in Court to give evidence. It is, however, a matter which, I am glad to say, has not placed so many difficulties in my way as I anticipated, as none of the Judges or Magistrates presiding over Courts here, with one exception, have thought fit to either show my reports or subject me to cross-examination by defending counsel.

R. T. N. BEASLEY,
Gaoler and Probation Officer.

WELLINGTON PRISON.

The conduct and industry of prisoners has been good. The sickness amongst prisoners has been at a minimum—mostly old drunks getting repaired. There were seventeen prisoners punished during the year, as against eight in 1899, the increase being caused by attempted escapes, and by a gang, composed mostly of spielers, refusing to work at Point Halswell. The system of prison punishments by the Visiting Justices gives entire satisfaction. I have, as you know, been averse for the last twenty years to Gaolers having authority to punish prisoners either by putting them on bread and water or by fining them in marks.

Prisoners were employed brick-making and at the fortifications, repairing rifle-range and damage done to Newtown Park by the contingents who were encamped there, and, everything considered, worked very well. The rations were good. The conduct of officers good; only one case of misconduct, viz., being absent from duty.

The officers are not all young men, and many would retire—and it would be in the interests of the service—if there was a superannuation fund on a basis similar to that existing in the Police Force.

The new classification system, granting prisoners extra gratuity, visits, and letters, was much appreciated by the prisoners. I am certain of its good results.

The abolition of grades and the putting of the warders in second-class prisons under the new classification system you issued has had a splendid effect.

The prison at Point Halswell fortifications is answering its purpose. The staff is small, but the works can be carried out satisfactorily if the Defence authorities finish one work before entering on another. Subdividing the working parties is not advisable; to get them to work they must be supervised at all times. The accommodation consists of two large wards with room for twenty-five prisoners in each, a cook's cell, and a punishment-cell. The fact of so many men being in each ward is not, in my opinion, as bad in its results as some would imagine. For various reasons, I think fifteen or twenty men in a ward preferable to five or six. The rooms are healthy in the