

1902.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1901;

ALSO

THE OPERATION OF "THE FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1886"

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1901.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of JUSTICE.

SIR,—

Department of Justice, Prisons Branch, 1st May, 1902.

I have the honour to present this my twenty-first annual report on the prisons of the colony, together with the sixteenth annual report on the working of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886."

1. The system, adopted for the first time last year, of publishing extracts from the annual reports of the various Gaolers is continued, and their suggestions and remarks will be found interesting.

2. The satisfactory part of this report will be found in the facts that there has been a considerable reduction in punishments for prison offences without efficiency or discipline being interfered with in any way, a decided advancement in classification, and a substantial reduction in expenses; but the unsatisfactory portion is that there has been a large increase in the number of prisoners.

3. In December, 1900, there were confined in the various prisons of the colony 563 persons, while in December, 1901, these numbers had risen to 713; but in February of this year the numbers had dropped to 648. This large increase last year does not indicate an increase in crimes proper, but may be accounted for by extra exertion on the part of the police in arresting drunks, vagrants, and users of obscene language in public places.

4. The new departure referred to in my last year's report of establishing a tree-planting prison at Waiotapu has turned out a complete success, and the prisoners fully appreciate the steps taken for their benefit and reformation; while a reference to the extracts from the Gaoler's annual report shows the work that had been done by the prisoners there up to the end of last year.

5. The contractors for food, clothing, and necessities for the various prisons have faithfully carried out their contracts, there being few, if any, complaints, and much credit is due to the Visiting Justices for the careful consideration they give to this matter of tenders before making their recommendations to you.

6. Eight prisoners escaped from the works during the past year, as against six in the previous twelve months—viz., two from Mount Cook, four from Point Halswell, and two from Hokitika. There were no cases of prison-breaking. Some of these escapes are undoubtedly attempted not with the slightest hope of getting away, but in many cases with the hope of getting some prison official dismissed, or in others with a view to appearing before the Courts to air some imaginary or concocted grievance which the public are always too ready to believe. With a fluctuating population such as that of a prison, where some are daily coming in and going out, it is beyond conception that any serious maladministration could be practised without very soon becoming known to the outside public. The Gaoler of Dunedin demonstrates the futility of such an idea when he shows that the prison under his charge was last year visited some 1,225 times by what may be termed "outsiders." It is worthy of mention that an escapee when rearrested invariably has no cause to assign for running away, but after having time to think over the matter, and perhaps seeing a legal adviser, it is marvellous the number of acts of maladministration he has noticed for some time past; and it is equally marvellous to find the public gulled by such statements. Prisoners have every facility for seeing the Visiting Justices or myself, either in the presence of the Gaolers or privately if they so desire, at any time we visit.