

1903.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1902;

ALSO

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

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1902.

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, 1903.

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

1. The system adopted two years ago of publishing extracts from the annual reports of the several Gaolers is continued, and their remarks and suggestions give grounds for consideration of the improvement and well-being of prisoners generally.

2. Notwithstanding the prosperous state of the whole colony during the past year, it is satisfactory to find that on the last day of the year there was a considerable decrease in the prison population as compared with the numbers in prison on the last day of the previous year. It is admitted by those well versed in these matters that when times are prosperous, as they certainly have been and still are in the colony, there is an increase in crime, and when money is plentiful criminals are also plentiful.

3. The previously adopted system of publicly tendering for supplies for use in the various prisons has been adhered to, the tenders being addressed to and opened by the several Visiting Justices, and their recommendations as to the acceptance or rejection of tenders have invariably been given effect to, and the absence of complaints as to the quality of the provisions supplied, as shown in the reports from the various Gaolers, proves that a wise discretion is exercised by the Visiting Justices in this important matter of selecting contracts.

4. There were 13 escapes during the year, as against 8 in 1901—viz., Hokitika, 4; Invercargill, 1; New Plymouth, 3; Wanganui, 4; and Wellington, 1. In the Hokitika and Wanganui cases, it was clearly shown that the four prisoners concerned had deliberately concocted a plot by joint action to overpower the officers and get away, which they succeeded in doing, but in these cases, as well as in the other five, the escapees were very soon recaptured.

5. It is needless to point out that where prisoners, either in the prison or out on the works, combine and determine to attack the officers simultaneously, and carry out their purpose, they must succeed in getting away, but they are invariably speedily brought back. A prisoner who, when outside at work, suddenly sees a chance of getting away and goes is not deserving of the same amount of punishment as those who have deliberately planned an escape or breakout, but I am inclined to think that Courts do not always, in trying escapees, fully consider the circumstances surrounding the cases. Other escapes or attempts no doubt arise from the desire of the prisoner to be brought before the open Court, where he is sometimes allowed to make a long rambling statement of supposed improper treatment, and as no rebutting evidence is taken, though often available at the time, the Press and public are only too ready to believe the prisoner's statement, and comment accordingly.

6. It is believed that the prisoners in this colony have more opportunities of making their complaints known than elsewhere, as every morning they can ask to see the Gaoler, surgeon, chaplain, the Visiting Justices, and myself, either privately or otherwise, but their sole object is to get what they term a "public inquiry," at which the Press must be present, simply to gain notoriety. It appears to me that if the Visiting Justices or Inspector, or both, are not competent to hold fair