

cipline, subordination, &c., and as they maintain a high general level of intelligence and physique, they are proving themselves good officers.

24. As regards new prisons, a wing, giving accommodation for sixty prisoners, is now well on towards completion in Wellington, and when occupied will relieve the necessity of putting more than one prisoner in cells together. The new prison-site obtained in the suburbs of Invercargill is being drained and got ready for the new prison, which it is hoped will be begun ere long. A new small prison is much required at Gisborne, and when the Auckland prison wing now being pushed on with all speed is completed there should be ample accommodation for all prisoners of the colony for some years to come.

25. The tree-planting prison camp at Waiotapu has now got beyond an experiment, and is turning out a great success. There are at present 41 prisoners there and 4 officers. For the nature of the work done there, reference is directed to the extracts from the report of the Gaoler attached. There have been no punishments, and it has been only necessary to remove 3 prisoners for grumbling; while, on the other hand, there have been numerous requests to be sent there, and those prisoners who are there have certainly done good work. The class of prisoners suitable for such camp life is of course limited, but it is intended to establish shortly a similar establishment for a like purpose at Hanmer, which will take all suitable prisoners from Wellington and the South Island prisons, while Waiotapu can be made available for prisoners from the North Island with the exception of Wellington; and another party for tree-planting are likely to be sent to Somes Island this season.

26. As regards expenses at Waiotapu, which are not included in Table B, the prisoners were kept there at a gross annual cost per prisoner of £52 1s. 2d., made up as follows: Staff supervision, £23 4s. 11d.; maintenance, £21 8s. 8d.; incidentals, £7 7s. In the above no credit whatever is taken for the work performed, so that if the prisoners' labour was taken at 2s. 6d. per man per diem, which is considerably below its value, the amount of credit would be upwards of £900, which would reduce the net annual cost of each prisoner to about £14.

27. In a matter of this sort, however, it is not so much a matter of cost that has to be considered, as the good results tending towards reformation, and the separation of the better class of prisoners from the hardened criminals and from the attendant dangers. At a place like Waiotapu the work is not too hard, the climate is good, the prisoners do not mix up with the public, and the work does not in any way interfere with free labour. In a few years' time the work now being done, irrespective of the good it must do to the class of men located there, will be a very valuable asset to the Government of the day.

28. It has been stated from time to time, both by individuals and the Press, that prisoners are not in any way being reformed in our gaols, and, further, that we are breeding and tutoring a class of criminals who must ere long be a source of danger to the community, but my experience goes to show that those who talk loudest about our prisons and their management are those who know the least about such matters and do not care to take the trouble to make themselves fully acquainted with the true state of affairs. Reference to the visiting-books at the various gaols show how few and far between are visits made by those who fancy they know all about the treatment of the inmates, and I here reiterate what I have before written and said—viz., it is a matter of regret amongst all the Department officials that taxpayers and other philanthropic persons do not visit and see for themselves the interior working of these establishments. It is not argued for a single moment that the system is perfect or all that can be desired, but it is argued, on the other hand, that our prisons are neither schools for crime nor places where the reformation of the inmates is overlooked and neglected.

29. Now, as regards the supposed increasing criminal class of the colony, it seems that a fair conclusion may be arrived at by taking the statistics for a decade, not because the years 1892 or 1902 were more favourable to either side of the argument, but simply because an aggregate of ten years is a fair period for comparison. Now, in 1892 we had a population of 692,426 persons, and the number of prisoners was 477, an average percentage of 0.069 prisoner to population. In 1902, with a population of 851,072 persons, the number of prisoners was 653, showing an average of prisoners to population of 0.0767, the slight difference in the percentage therefore being in 1902 0.0767, as against 0.0690 ten years previously—a very favourable comparison, even without looking into detail; but when it is remembered that a very large percentage of the 653 prisoners above referred to are new arrivals in the way of stowaways, that the identification of criminals is now very much better than it was ten years back, and consequently there is considerably less undetected crime nowadays, it is thought the comparison with ten years ago must be considered satisfactory from every point of view. Then take the average daily number in prisons: we find in 1892 593.83 males and 62.76 females, as against 609.37 males and 58.92 females in 1902, and as regards gross cost in 1892 it was £45 16s. 10d, as against £46 1s. 10d. last year, though it will be readily admitted that the cost of living in the colony now is at least one-third more expensive than ten years ago.

30. There can be no doubt that a very undesirable class of immigrants—viz., stowaways—are now constantly arriving in large numbers. When brought before the Courts they care little for a fine or a few days' imprisonment; but if after having paid the fine, or suffered the incarceration, they were sent back to whence they came by the next boat leaving the colony for the particular ports of embarkation, it is thought that it would be a cheap way for the colony to get rid of these undesirable characters, and would very soon put to a stop to stowing away altogether.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table K shows that 127 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 97 in 1901. Of these, 24 have satisfactorily carried out the conditions of their licenses, and been discharged; 6 were rearrested, and 97 still remain under the supervision of Probation Officers completing their respective terms of probation.