

Justices available for these prisons, while the separation of the better class of prisoners from the hardened criminals, with the attendant dangers, is of the utmost importance and value. There have been no escapes and few complaints from the inmates of these tree-planting camps. When the prisons above referred to are opened, out of a total of 664 male prisoners 176 will be at tree-planting prisons.

25. Now, as regards the supposed increasing criminal class of the colony last year, it will be recollected statistics were taken from the decade 1892 to 1902, and since commencing to write this report information as to statistics of crime in the United Kingdom for the same decade has been published by the Home Office. We find that there was a moderate decrease in the number of indictable offences in the earlier portion of the decade, and a very slight increase in the last two or three years, and exactly the same results are shown for the decade for New Zealand. Then, again, the Home Office report says, "The recent increase in indictable offences is ascribed in part to the increased energy and efficiency of the police, and in part to the return of persons to this country from South Africa who did not find employment after the conclusion of the war." The increase in New Zealand was put down to the influx of stowaways, the better identification of criminals, and consequently less undetected crime. The Home Office report then goes on to say, "What is more serious is the significant increase during the decade of persons received into prison, whether considered absolutely or relatively to population—from 183,143 in 1892 to 287,384 in 1902." The above quotations have been made for the purpose of showing how closely the fluctuations in the prison-population of the United Kingdom tally with those in this colony, and how inexplicable the increases and decreases are in either country. It is satisfactory, however, to find the New Zealand barometer steady, with a downward tendency, as at the present time the prison-population is 727, as against 732 on the first day of the year.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table K shows that 110 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 127 in 1902. Of these, 23 have satisfactorily carried out the conditions of their licenses and have been discharged, 2 were rearrested, 1 absconded, 1 died, and 83 still remain under the supervision of Probation Officers, completing their respective terms of probation.

The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £252 17s. 5d., of which £175 15s. has been actually paid, and there is every reason to believe the balance will be paid by instalments as it becomes due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders had they been sent to prison would have amounted to £3,786, which sum, added to the amount of costs, &c., actually paid in, represents a saving of £3,961 15s. 10d.

Of the 1,566 persons placed on probation since the introduction of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," 1,333 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 93 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 1 committed suicide, 2 died, 1 was sent to the lunatic asylum, 35 absconded, and 101 still remain fulfilling the terms of their licenses.

From the foregoing it will be seen that a percentage of 85·12 per cent. have done well, while only a percentage of 2·23 have eluded the vigilance of the Probation Officers and police and have escaped. Comment is needless. There is a certain amount of diversity of opinion on this Act, some thinking it too freely used, and others that it should be extended; but as long as the matter of recommending remains in the hands of Probation Officers it is believed that no widening or contraction of the Act is necessary at present. The success of the carrying-out of the Act is in a great measure due to the efforts of Probation Officers, who deserve every credit for the satisfactory manner they have performed their onerous and unpaid duties.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME,

Inspector of Prisons.

The Hon. the Minister of Justice.

GAOLERS' REPORTS FOR 1903.

AUCKLAND PRISON.

H.M. Prison, Auckland, 18th January, 1904.

I REPORT as follows regarding this Prison for the year ending the 31st December, 1903:—

There were received during that period 780 males and 106 females, being an increase of 63 males and 6 females over the year 1902; the daily average also was high, within a fraction of 200 of both sexes, which was about 13 above the previous year.

The health of the prisoners has been very satisfactory. There were 4 deaths—3 in the Prison (one of whom was dying on admission) and 1 in the District Hospital, a Maori, who died of phthisis. Inquests were held in the three former cases, and verdicts of "Death from natural causes" returned in each.

The conduct of the prisoners has, on the whole, been excellent, only 18 punishments having been inflicted. There was one attempted escape, but the man did not get outside the Prison walls.

The work done by the prisoners during the year has been most satisfactory and valuable, and includes labour for the following Departments, &c.: viz., Defence, at Fort Cautley; Supreme Court; Magistrate's Court; Government House; Police-station; Veterans' Home, &c.

The supplies received from the contractors have been of a good quality, and there has been an absence of complaints, which is most gratifying.