

18. In comparing the number of previously convicted prisoners received last year with those received five years ago, it will be seen from Table E that in those once convicted there is an increase of 93 males and a decrease of 18 females: in those twice convicted an increase of 49 males and 10 females: while in those convicted thrice or oftener there is an increase of 303 males and a decrease of 32 females.

19. From Table J it will be seen that there was an increase of prison punishments of 53—viz., 188, as against 135 in 1906. Of these 185 were for minor offences and were dealt with by Visiting Justices, while only three were aggravated offences, and, after being first investigated by Visiting Justices, were finally dealt with by the Stipendiary Magistrate's Court. The percentage of prisoners punished was therefore only 2·85, and in those numbers it must be recollected that many individuals appear several times, so it cannot be for a moment argued with any truth that unnecessary punishments are inflicted by Visiting Justices. It has been found very seldom necessary to place offenders on bread and water for any length of time. Deprivation of remission marks, with loss of tobacco, &c., generally mete out sufficient punishments for the offences. There are a few dangerous and refractory prisoners who have to be kept under separate treatment, picking oakum or some other suitable work.

20. There were 15 reports against subordinate officers last year, as against 8 in 1906—viz., Auckland, 1 (absent without leave); Dunedin, 8 (1 absent from duty, 2 neglect of duty, 3 absent without leave, 1 going off duty without being relieved, 1 absent and drunkenness. The last-mentioned report and two of those of absence were against the same subordinate, whose services were dispensed with); Invercargill, 2 (both late for duty); Wellington, 3 (1 trafficking with prisoners, in which case the officer's services were dispensed with, 1 absent, and 1 leaving his work without permission); and Wanganui, 1 (improper conduct). On the whole, the conduct and supervision of the subordinate officers has been satisfactory.

21. A new Gaoler's house at Hokitika is much required, the present one being in a very dilapidated condition; and a new prison is wanted at Gisborne, where a site has been already purchased. The want of warders' cottages is much felt at Dunedin, but it is next to impossible to obtain suitable sites within reasonable distance of the gaol. An officer living at any distance from the prison is practically useless for any crisis that may arise during the night.

22. It was stated in last year's report that some suitable place should be selected for a reformatory under "The Habitual Criminals and Offenders Act, 1906," and a wing of the New Plymouth Prison has been selected for that purpose. So far, there is only one prisoner under detention as an habitual criminal, and he is not associated or confined with other prisoners, so that he is virtually undergoing solitary confinement; but this will be overcome in a few months, when others will come under detention in the reformatory. There is ample accommodation for all that are likely to be declared habitual criminals within the next few years at New Plymouth, and time will prove the necessity or otherwise of building a central reformatory in the Dominion. Since the Act became law some of the gaol-birds have flown from the Dominion, and others are earning an honest living, so that there is reason to hope the list of habitual criminals will never be a very long one.

23. As regards the employment of prisoners: In Auckland the building of the new prison has gone ahead, and a large party has been located, and constantly at work, at Fort Cautley on fortifications; in New Plymouth the prisoners have been employed making the Western Park, cutting down Marsland Hill, and putting down drains; at Wanganui they have been improving Cook's Gardens; at Napier, working in quarry and building warder's cottage; in Wellington and Point Halswell, making bricks, &c., altering and improving the prison, and fortification-work; at Hokitika, preparing the reserve for flax, and keeping the roads and grounds round the Hospital in order; at Lyttelton, quarrying and fortifications, as well as tailoring, shoemaking, &c.; in Dunedin, and at Taiaroa Heads, fortification-work and mat-making; and in Invercargill, building the new prison, with which specially good progress has been made.

24. It is satisfactory to be able to report that during the past year situations have been found for several deserving prisoners on their discharge on remission, and the system introduced by the Hon. the Minister of Lands of giving employment at tree-planting to those who have, by their industry and conduct, proved themselves worthy of it, is working out very satisfactorily both for the discharged prisoners and the Forest Department.

25. The amount of work done at the tree-planting prisons, as shown by the Gaolers' reports, is creditable to all concerned, and has given entire satisfaction to the Forest Department. It was pointed out in last year's report that one of the most difficult duties the Department has to carry out is to select men who, if sent tree-planting, are likely to reform. Directly an escape is reported, judgment is passed without evidence by those who know nothing about the matter and will not take the trouble to inquire. During the past year there have been 4 escapes from tree-planting prisons—viz., 2 from Waiotapu and 2 from Hanmer—and in each case the escapees were speedily recaptured; but it is thought that the Courts before which such offenders are brought do not always view the offence as seriously as the case deserves, and the penalty is therefore not deterrent.

26. The object of the Department has been to make the tree-planting establishments special prisons for good-conduct prisoners. It is possible that mistakes are sometimes made in the selection of prisoners for tree-planting, but the Department claims to be judged by results, and when it is found that 619 have passed through these establishments and 23 have escaped, while in no case has any person suffered any personal injury at the hands of any escapee, it must be admitted that these "dangerous prisoners" are not so bad as they are painted, and are not yet beyond the bounds of possible reformation. No human being is without some good characteristics in his nature, no matter how depraved he may have become; and it is for those in charge of prisoners to endeavour to the best of their ability to find the good qualities and cultivate them. The aim of the Department has been to help those who are trying to help themselves, and our energies have not been