

The Napier Gaol is the worst in New Zealand. It occupies a beautiful site, which could be utilised to much better advantage. It is inconvenient, and in parts insanitary, and there are no proper means of carrying out even a rudimentary system of classification. The only employment available is work in a Corporation quarry, and, as the Corporation only requires a limited amount of metal, and the quarry-yard is limited in extent, the work is carried out neither conveniently nor economically.

As soon as accommodation for the present inmates can be found elsewhere, the Napier Gaol should be closed. The land could be cut up and utilised for building-sites, as a small police gaol for short-sentenced offenders would meet all requirements.

THE TREE-PLANTING CAMPS.

The system of utilising prison labour for tree-planting has now passed beyond the experimental stage, and must be admitted to be a humane and rational method of giving prisoners a chance to alter their mode of life. The work has both a moral and an economic value. Many of our tree-planters do not come back again, while the result of their work is seen in the gradual change that is coming over the face of the country in which their operations are carried on. At the three camps over three and a half million trees were planted during last year, in addition to the general work of preparing the ground, digging pits, new buildings, and additions and alterations.

The chief difficulty is to keep the camps up to their strength. Not every prisoner is suited for camp-life, where discipline is necessarily not so strict as in town prisons. The prisoners in the camps are to a certain extent on parole, and I am pleased to be able to say that the large majority of them fully recognise their responsibility not to take advantage of the extra liberty and privileges accorded to them. A great deal of attention is given to the selection of prisoners for the camps, and many have to be rejected because they cannot be trusted.

If we had a sufficient number of suitable men, the planting operations could be considerably extended. Probably the difficulty will be overcome later on by the creation of a different class of camp, where the discipline and supervision will be more rigid than prevails in the present establishments.

POLICE GAOLS.

There are thirty-four police gaols, in which prisoners may be detained for a period not exceeding thirty days.

The gaols at Wanganui and Hokitika which were closed last year have been proclaimed police gaols. A small police gaol is being erected at Greymouth, and when it is completed the gaol at Hokitika will be handed over to the Mental Hospitals Department. I hope that the new building at Gisborne will be completed this year, as the present one is in a very dilapidated condition. Some very necessary additions and alterations are being carried out at Palmerston North.

It has been decided that in future, whenever practicable, prison officers shall be appointed to the charge of police gaols. The practice hitherto has been to give these appointments to police officers, and, as a police-gaolership is looked upon as a reward of long service, it is only fair that prison officers should have their turn.

INEBRIATES' HOMES.

The inebriates' institutions at Pakatoa Island, Auckland, and the Samaritan Home, Christchurch, though not prisons, come under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice, and are referred to here for the sake of convenience. Both these institutions are full at the present time—fifty at Pakatoa, and ten at Christchurch. The Salvation Army, which controls the institution at Pakatoa, is about to erect a large modern building on an adjoining island. I am afraid it will soon be filled. It seems probable that the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board will close the Samaritan Home, in which case I shall propose that the building (the old Addington Gaol) be converted into a prison for women.

When the Habitual Drunkards Act was passed it was not contemplated that a large number of the persons subject to its provisions would be cured of the drinking habit. It was admitted that the plan of sending these unfortunate people to gaol for short periods was a failure; they simply came out and became derelicts again. It was thought that by sweeping these derelicts off the streets, and placing them in healthy surroundings for at least a year, they would have a chance of reforming themselves. I believe the experiment so far as it has gone has been fairly successful, and I have in my possession a number of letters from ex-inmates, who speak well of the treatment they have received, and of the benefit they have derived from their stay in the Home. At all events, while in the Home they are properly cared for, and, to put it on the lowest ground, it costs less to keep them in a Home than in a gaol.

CONCLUSION.

I desire to express my deep sense of the loyal assistance I have received from the Gaolers and officers since I took charge of the administration of the prisons; and I also wish to record my appreciation of the desire they have shown to co-operate in any means to improve the existing prison system.

My especial thanks are due to Mr. Kayll, Visiting Adviser to the Prisons, whose ever-ready assistance has been most valuable in dealing with the many complex questions that arise in connection with prison administration.

I have, &c.,

F. WALDEGRAVE, Under-Secretary.