

Visits of inspection have been made without notice by the Hon. the Minister of Justice, by yourself, and by the Visiting Adviser, in addition to those paid by myself. On these occasions I found the prisons uniformly clean, and the cells kept in good order. The dietary is sufficient but monotonous. A larger selection of foodstuffs and a change in the methods of preparation would provide a higher nutrient value at the same, or approximately, the same cost. During the visits opportunity was given to all officers and prisoners to prefer any requests or make any complaints. Every case laid before me was dealt with upon its merits. I was particularly pleased by some genuine requests for educational facilities, which, as far as practicable, were granted. One found, as one expected, that the prisoners, mistaking the root principle of reform, expected at first to gain privileges to which they were in no sense entitled, and it was made plain to them that every privilege had to be earned by consistent good conduct and industry. Following this up there have been a number of requests to be allowed to work overtime in order to gain a larger mark-equivalent. Though we have not been able to make such concessions systematic and generally applicable, the first steps in progress towards a comprehensive scheme have been taken. At the tree-planting camp several men are already working overtime, and thereby establishing habits of industry which must necessarily stand them in good stead upon release, especially as their greatly improved physical condition will render them capable of undertaking any class of unskilled labour.

After having had interviews with a large number of criminals, and after exchanging views with responsible officers in the service, one is impelled to a conclusion which supports the experience of those penologists who advocate the principle of the indeterminate sentence. A prisoner knowing that he has a definite sentence to serve under a system of remissions, necessarily limited, has not the same incentive to that continuity of effort, and progressive effort, which is an essential feature in bringing about his own reformation. Generally speaking, continuity of effort is not found in the criminal—in fact, it is the want of it which in many cases accounts for his crime; and therefore imprisonment should be under such conditions as supply a constant stimulus to good behaviour and hard work. To obtain the best or even tolerably good results, the prisoner must serve his sentence with the full consciousness that its duration depends on his own effort. Be it remembered that this requires a great deal of the prisoner—in fact, the very most of which he is capable; but it has the double advantage of shortening the period of imprisonment and qualifying him, both by habit and ability, to earn his livelihood under easier circumstances when he is released. A man who has been imprisoned once is more likely to avoid a second experience when he has appreciated the fact that the conditions for earning an honest living as a free man are much easier than those under which he must earn his release from imprisonment. If a prisoner proves himself incorrigible under this form of discipline, he awards himself a long period of imprisonment; but should he decide to do his best, he will find that the indeterminate sentence is short, sharp, and salutary.

The following are the principal additions, alterations, and other structural works which have been carried out in connection with the prisons:—

At Auckland a new wing of the stone building is being pushed on, and I hope before long to report the removal of the old wooden structures. Good and faithful work is being done by the prisoners.

At Invercargill the new prison is in occupation. This for its size is undoubtedly one of the best penal establishments in the Dominion. The construction has been carried out in concrete by prison labour, and reflects great credit upon the Gaoler, Mr. Hawkins, who supervised the work. The accommodation so far provided is a considerable contribution to a scheme which, when completed, will furnish us with a thoroughly up-to-date prison. Each prisoner has a roomy, well-ventilated cell. The prison will be lighted by electricity.

At Lyttelton new sanitary arrangements have been completed, and, for the purposes of cleanliness, a hot-water system has been installed. The resulting advantages are obvious. These works were carried out almost entirely by prison labour.

At Wellington great improvements are being effected in the lighting and ventilating of the cells. The North Wing, in which the air tended to stagnate, now has an ample current circulating through it. I am glad to note that the prisoners appreciate the change. The quarters occupied by the single officers have been remodelled, provided with a comfortable dormitory and a suitable mess-room; and necessary alterations have been made in some of the cottages occupied by married officers. All the above works were carried out by prison labour.

At the tree-planting camps the single-hut principle is being carried out. The type of hut in which four prisoners were accommodated is being completely divided by a central partition into two cells, to accommodate one prisoner in each division. Each of the new huts, a number of which are already in occupation, is designed to accommodate one prisoner. The prisoners themselves appreciate the change, and discipline is rendered more effective. The whole area of land in the neighbourhood of the prison camp at Waipa having been planted, the camp was removed to a secluded and beautiful site on the shores of Lake Rotokakahi.

Appended are the usual statistics as heretofore supplied, and an epitome of the statistics contrasting the figures with those of the previous year.

I have, &c.,

The Under-Secretary for Justice, Wellington.

FRANK HAY.

PRISON STATISTICS.

Escapes.—There were 7 escapes during the year, as against 12 in 1908—viz, 1 at Dunedin, 1 at Hanmer, 1 at Wanganui, 2 at Wellington, 1 at Gisborne Police Gaol, and 1 at Palmerston North Police Gaol. All the escapees were recaptured, with the exception of the one who escaped from Palmerston North Police Gaol.