

1914.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER, 1913;

ALSO

OPERATION OF THE FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1908

(REPORT ON), FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER, 1913.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The UNDER-SECRETARY, Department of Justice, to the Hon. the MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

Department of Justice, Wellington, 15th June, 1914.

I HAVE the honour to present the report of the Inspector of Prisons for the year ended 31st December last, together with extracts from the Gaolers' reports and the annual prison statistics.

There was an increase in the number of prisoners received during the year, but this was due to abnormal conditions prevailing during a portion of the year, and not to a general increase of crime. The daily average throughout the year shows a decrease on that of 1912.

The expenditure shows an increase over last year, but this is principally due to developmental work at Invercargill, Waikeria, and Addington, increase of staff in connection therewith, purchase of necessary plant, and expense of transfer of prisoners to these prisons. The credits received, however, show a considerable increase—£7,382, as against £5,431 last year.

The work of providing for more up-to-date prison buildings has been steadily pressed forward, and additions at Auckland and Invercargill have been completed. Further additions to these prisons are in hand. A number of improvements in the more unsuitable buildings—notably at Lyttelton, where the removal of the female prisoners to Addington has enabled the female wing to be converted for the use of prisoners sentenced to reformatory treatment, and the separation of waiting-trial prisoners and debtors—have been carried out. This is a distinct improvement on the conditions hitherto prevailing at this prison. At Waikeria the work of erecting the new building is well in hand, and the first section should be completed in about twelve months' time. At Wellington the accommodation for single officers has been greatly improved.

The question of the profitable employment and payment of prisoners is one that is often referred to by prison critics, and as it may appear that nothing is being done it may not be out of place to again refer to this subject. As has often been said before in the Prison Reports, necessity of avoiding competition with free labour cannot be disregarded. Without remunerative labour, either to the State or as a return from commercial industries, there can be but little extension in the direction of the payment of wages to prisoners, and the matter is one that must be approached with extreme caution if an undue burden is not to be placed on the general taxpayer. A beginning has been made in the case of habituals and reformatory prisoners, but until sufficient remunerative employment can be found it is well to hasten slowly.

It may, however, be fairly claimed that at no time in the history of prison administration in the Dominion has the profitable employment of prisoners been so great as at the present time.

In this connection reference may be made to the work being done at Invercargill, Waikeria, and the tree-planting camps.

At Invercargill a concrete-block-making industry has been established, and blocks are being made for public buildings and for sale to the public for private dwellings. Vegetable-gardening is being carried on, and the produce is sold to the public. A large reclamation scheme is being carried out for the Borough Council by prisoners under the supervision of the Gaoler, who has been practically responsible for the whole work. The work has included bridge-building, dredging, and the various works incidental to such an undertaking. The total area reclaimed is about 2,000 acres. The return to the Department for the prisoners' labour will be the acquirement of an area of 650 acres of first-class farm land which, it is stated by those in a position to judge, will be worth at least £20 an acre, and this land will be utilized as a prison farm for