

PROGRESS DURING THE YEAR.

Buildings.—During the period since the last annual report was prepared a considerable advance has been made towards the completion of the buildings and works upon which the Department was then engaged, but war-conditions have caused considerable delay in the delivery of necessary material, and consequently our building operations have progressed more slowly than was anticipated. In spite of this, however, the first wing of our institution at Waikeria, together with the necessary offices, &c., is now practically ready for occupation, and it will not be long before drafts will require to be made from other prisons to fill it. The administrative block, comprising the Gaoler's and clerks' offices, board-room, stores, library, lecture and drill hall, &c., has been commenced, and if funds are available fair progress should be made in its erection during the next twelve months.

The building of the south-wing extension of the Mount Eden Prison has proceeded methodically, and the work is approaching completion. When the additional accommodation provided in this wing is available an improvement can be made in the general arrangement of the Prison and the exercise and other yards.

A considerable amount of preliminary work has been carried out during the year preparatory to commencing the erection of the new Canterbury Prison at Templeton. As the building now proposed, together with subsequent additions, is intended to be the principal penal establishment in the South Island, the undertaking is one of some magnitude, and the completion of the whole of the buildings required will absorb a large amount of prison labour for some years to come. In the meantime temporary structures have been provided to accommodate the officers and prisoners employed upon the work.

The extension to the Invercargill Prison building has been delayed owing to a variety of causes, but as all the material required is now in hand the work should advance more rapidly. A main wall round this institution has been under way during the year, and it is intended that internal dividing-walls and necessary outbuildings shall be commenced as soon as the main building is completed.

Other Works.—As in 1914, the whole of the able-bodied prisoners have been very fully employed during the past year on work of various descriptions. As time passes the activities of the Department increase, and there is now no difficulty in finding ample employment of a useful character for every available man—in fact, our difficulty is to find enough men to adequately man the undertakings upon which we are engaged.

This has been especially noticeable at Waikeria, where, in addition to the extensive building operations that are being carried on, we are making traffic roads and bridges, carrying on farming operations, and developing the property. Fair progress has been made in every direction, but the pace will be accelerated when the available labour is increased, as it will be on the completion of the first wing of the building.

The principal work at Auckland has been, as heretofore, the completion of the south wing of the building, stone-quarrying and stone-dressing. A commencement has also been made on an extensive wall on the boundary between the Prison reserve and the Grammar School property. The making and repairing of boots for officers and prisoners has employed a limited number of men.

Progress on the Roto Aira Road between Waimarino and Tokaanu has been well maintained. The slowest and most difficult parts of the work (bridges and heavy cuttings and fillings) have now been practically completed, and a connection made with the old and long-disused service-road to Tokaanu constructed by the Armed Constabulary over thirty years ago. As this road, with the bridges that were built at that time, has fallen into disrepair, and in places has become almost obliterated, considerable work will require to be done before through connection with Tokaanu can be established. When that is accomplished there will be further work for the Prisons Department in constructing a deviation over the range round Lake Roto Aira that will shorten the journey between the northern and southern ends of the road by some miles. This deviation will take the road directly into Tokaanu Township, and in addition to being shorter will be far more picturesque than the old line, which joins the Waiouru Road about five miles from Lake Taupo.

The brickworks at the Mount Cook branch prison, Wellington, have been fully employed during the year manufacturing bricks for the new Parliamentary Buildings and for other Government works.

A gang of prisoners has recently been started on the work of excavating to prepare the Mount Cook site for its future purpose. The spoil from the excavation is being deposited on an adjoining low-lying section that the Government is acquiring in order to provide an extension to the existing area of Crown land in this locality.

A number of short-sentence men have been busily employed at Point Halswell excavating a site for the prison that is to be built there, erecting temporary buildings, and generally preparing for the erection of the permanent structure.

Work on the farms and reserve acquired at Templeton for prison purposes has been prosecuted as vigorously as circumstances permitted, but the drought that prevailed in Canterbury during the summer months prevented an adequate return being obtained for the labour expended. With the increased number of prisoners that will soon be available progress during 1916 should be more marked than it has been during the past year. The success of farming operations will necessarily depend upon the nature of the season, but if the weather-conditions prevailing in Canterbury during the last two years continue the question of providing a thorough system of irrigation for this property must be seriously considered at an early date.