

The reclamation embankments at Invercargill, which have engaged the attention of the Department for some time past, have progressed steadily during the year, and the question of draining and clearing the area now vested in the Department, as compensation for the labour involved in carrying out this work, will soon require attention.

The making of concrete blocks for the prison buildings and for private sale has been continued, but owing to the small amount of building that has been undertaken by private owners since the commencement of the war there has been a considerable reduction in the demand for this product of prison labour.

TREE-PLANTING.

Tree-planting operations at Kaingaroa and Waipa were carried on successfully, the amounts credited to the Prisons vote by the Forestry Department in payment for the labour of the prisoners employed being somewhat in excess of last year's return. The total return from Kaingaroa was £1,795, compared with £1,568 in the preceding year, while that from Waipa was £1,702, compared with £1,223 in 1914.

In addition to afforestation work a crop of oats and some root crops were produced at Kaingaroa, and preparations have since been made for bringing a larger area into profitable cultivation during the present year. In addition to providing forage for the prison horses and so saving the heavy expenditure involved in obtaining supplies from elsewhere, the prison management has thus been able to further demonstrate the cultivability of the pumice lands of which the extensive Kaingaroa Plains are composed. When shelter-belts of suitable trees have reached a suitable height and a system of irrigation is available it should be quite possible for the plains to carry a reasonable amount of settlement.

The progress and labour value of tree-planting operations since the inception of the work fifteen years ago are shown in the table below:—

Area planted by Prison Labour from 1901 to March, 1916.	Number of Trees planted.	Labour-value of Prisoners' Work.
11,188 acres	33,091,425	£54,502.

In addition to the large number of trees planted, many miles of roads and tracks through the various plantations are constructed by prison labour each year.

FUTURE PROVISION FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF PRISON LABOUR.

Experience has proved that the best means of employing prison labour in the interest alike of the State and of the prisoners is in agricultural pursuits, and it is becoming increasingly evident that if adequate employment in this direction is to be provided in the future provision must be made at an early date for the acquisition of further areas for this purpose. I have therefore to repeat the recommendation contained in last year's report that a further block of land be obtained and utilized as an additional prison farm. It is possible that some of the swamp land at present lying idle in both Islands could be drained and cultivated by prison labour, and thus converted into a valuable State asset. The reclamation-work now being carried on at Invercargill is of this nature, and it would not be a difficult matter for the Department to extend its operations in other directions.

Other Employment.—While the desire of the Department is to employ the bulk of the prisoners on reproductive agricultural work, there is always an appreciable percentage of criminals who cannot be given the liberty that outside employment involves. In order that these men may be profitably employed in the future it is advisable that the bootmaking, clothing, and other industries should be extended so that the principal articles of apparel and footwear required in all Government institutions might be made by prison labour. This is the practice in other countries, and there should be no objection to its being followed in New Zealand.

EDUCATION AND DRILL.

Where it has been possible to do so educational classes have been continued in the prisons during the year with fairly satisfactory results. The schoolmasters at Auckland and Invercargill have shown a commendable interest in their work, which, owing to the low standard of education among their pupils and to other disabilities common to prisoners, is by no means of an easy or encouraging nature.

Drill.—The drill instructors at Auckland and Invercargill have carried out their duties satisfactorily, and their work has resulted in an improved physique and a greater alertness among the younger prisoners.

CLASSIFICATION OF PRISONERS.

Attention must again be drawn to the difficulty the Department has in carrying out an effective primary classification so long as the Courts continue to give such a wide interpretation to the sections of the Crimes and Crimes Amendment Acts relating to the sentencing of prisoners to reformatory detention and to their declaration as habitual criminals or offenders. It has happened on several occasions during the past year that habitual criminals who have committed offences while out on probation have been recommitted by the Courts under sentences of reformatory detention. It is needless to comment upon the difficulty with which the Department is faced in the reclassification of individuals who are dealt with in this way.