

in last year's report, the reduction is not nearly so marked as it has been in the United Kingdom. The Department is well aware that a number of ex-prisoners and probationers who have been released in terms of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, have left New Zealand with the Expeditionary Forces, and the reduction in numbers was therefore expected. It yet remains to be seen what effect a military life will have on their future when they return to the Dominion.

AMENDED PRISON REGULATIONS, GENERAL ORDERS, ETC.

In compliance with your instructions a general order was issued early in the year removing previously existing anomalies in regard to the treatment and dietary of remand and trial prisoners, debtors, first-class misdemeanants, and prisoners sentenced to imprisonment without hard labour.

The new system has now been in force for nearly twelve months, and has worked smoothly and satisfactorily. It was certainly an anachronism that unsentenced men and the other classes I have named should be placed on a similar, and in some respects on a worse, footing to convicted criminals, and the alteration that has been made has removed a long-standing reproach against our prison administration.

Another much-needed amendment in the Prison Regulations has also been made by your direction to enable us to employ on "light labour" prisoners who are sentenced to imprisonment "without hard labour." Prior to the passing of the Statute Law Amendment Act, 1917, ours was one of the few prison systems in English-speaking countries under which prisoners of this class could not be given even the lightest tasks during the period of their incarceration. This has now been remedied, to the advantage alike of the discipline of the prisons and of the individuals concerned.

Additional regulations have also been made, and brought into operation during the year, classifying the prisons under their proper headings as reformatories, Borstal institutions, prisons, gaols, &c., and so enabling us to make a more satisfactory classification of the inmates than was possible under former conditions. The powers, duties, and responsibilities of the Inspector of Prisons as Permanent Head of the Prisons Department have also been defined.

Your instructions that the ration scales in vogue in the prisons should be varied and improved have been carried out, and the change from the monotony of the dietary in existence previously is already having a beneficial effect on the general health and spirits of the prisoner.

A general order has also been issued giving effect to your direction that the time for "lights out" in all the prisons of the Dominion should be extended from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. Experience has shown that such an extension of the lighting-period was necessary in order to give the prisoners a greater opportunity of self-improvement.

During the past year the Ministerial decision to segregate sexual perverts and remove them from association with other prisoners has been carried out. New Plymouth Prison has been set apart for this class of prisoner, the habitual criminals formerly incarcerated there having been removed to a special division of the Auckland Prison. The change is an important departure from previous methods, and has a direct bearing upon the general question of primary classification, which has been recently engaging the attention of the Department.

PRISON POPULATION.

Comparative Figures.

A comparison of the Government Statistician's figures for 1917 with those for 1916 shows that the total number of distinct persons received into the prisons during 1917 was 4,112, and during 1916 it was 4,256, a decrease of 144. The daily average number for 1917 was 914·26, while for 1916 it was 942·77, showing a decrease in the daily totals of 28·51. In spite, however, of this slight reduction the daily average still exceeds considerably that for the pre-war year 1913, when the number was 893·24. While, however, these figures show an increase on the pre-war totals so far as the prison population is concerned, allowance has to be made for the appreciable addition made to that population by the committal to prison by military courts-martial of a number of objectors to military service and of soldiers who have offended against Army regulations. A table accompanying this report shows that the total number of offenders of this class who were received into prison during the year was 166. The daily average number of court-martialled prisoners during the past financial year was 176·5. It will thus be seen that the actual number of prisoners sentenced by the Civil Courts was less than for 1913, and that therefore, so far as the Prisons Department is concerned, we can now record a decrease in crime compared with the pre-war period, and a very material reduction in the criminal population of our prisons for the year 1917 compared with the previous year. The Military Service Act was not passed until August, 1916, and consequently the "objectors" who form the bulk of the "court-martial" prisoners did not appear on the prison records until the following year—the first committals of such persons being made in March, 1917.

Notwithstanding the reduction that has taken place in our criminal population compared with the figures for the previous year, the decrease in no way approximates to that shown in the annual report of the Commissioners of Prisons for England and Wales, where, as stated in my last year's report, the prison population was less by nearly 57 per cent. than it was during the year 1913-14.