

education, 4,200 males and 556 females were able to read and write, 91 males and 8 females could read only, whilst 258 males and 39 females could neither read nor write.

21. A comparison of the previously convicted prisoners, as shown in Table F, sentenced during last year with those sentenced five years ago—viz., in 1900—shows in those once convicted an increase of 159 males and 11 females, in those twice convicted an increase of 116 males and 10 females, and in those thrice convicted an increase of 417 males with a decrease of 67 females.

22. A reference to Table J shows that there was an increase of prison punishments—viz., 121, as against 106 in 1903. Of these 113 were minor offences and dealt with by the Visiting Justices, while 8, being aggravated prison offences, were dealt with in the Supreme and Stipendiary Magistrates' Courts. The percentage of prisoners punished was only 2.23, which again goes to prove that we are getting the maximum amount of discipline and efficiency with a minimum amount of punishment.

23. There were 7 reports against subordinate officers last year, as against 2 in the previous year—viz., Auckland, 1, late for duty; Invercargill, 1, absent from duty; Wellington, 4, neglect of duty, gross neglect, insubordination, absent from night duty; Waiotapu, 1, assaulting a prisoner. With the above-mentioned exceptions, the conduct of the officers has been satisfactory, and the interest they have shown in their duties commendable.

24. As regards new prisons, a female-prison wing is much required in Wellington, and as there are a large quantity of bricks stored at Mount Cook, the expense should not be very great. The present wooden wing is out of date, and should be pulled down. Married officers' quarters are required at Auckland, Wellington, and Lyttelton; but as regards Dunedin, there is, unfortunately, no ground available near the prison. A new prison is required at Gisborne, as pointed out last year, as that district is fast increasing in population. The new building at Mount Eden is progressing very satisfactorily, and it bids well to shortly be one of the best prisons in the Australasian Colonies. The ground for the foundations of the new prison at Invercargill is ready and drained.

25. House-rents having gone up so much of late years in the four chief centres of the colony, it is quite impossible for an officer with a family to get anything like the accommodation he requires for the annual house allowance of £20. It is also essential that officers should live adjacent to the prison to which they belong, which can only be accomplished by building quarters where sites are available.

26. The question of indeterminate sentences has received considerable attention, and it is thought that the time for legislative action to deal with the few real habitual criminals with which this colony is cursed has not yet arrived; meanwhile the way is being gradually paved by educating public opinion in the matter. The indeterminate-sentence system seems to favour too much of the ticket-of-leave system, which, it is to be hoped, will never be introduced into this colony. The principal difficulty in the indeterminate-sentence system is: Who is to be vested with the authority of determining when a prisoner has reformed sufficiently to admit of his being released with safety to the public? The prison authorities can be the only competent judges, and they can only form their opinions on persons who are not exposed to temptations such as drink, gambling, and the like, but who if so exposed might relapse at any moment. As stated before, there are very few real habitual criminals in the colony who are never safe out of gaol, and our Prisons Acts admit of His Excellency the Governor, on your recommendation, granting a special remission at any time to such prisoners as it seems desirable to deal with in that way. No prisoners should be liberated on special remissions without being recommended by the gaol authorities, who should be satisfied that there is employment ahead for such released persons.

27. The recommendation of the Wellington Gaoler, that the Stipendiary Magistrates should hear all aggravated prison offences within the prison-walls with open doors, the Press reporters present, instead of taking the offenders and a crowd of witnesses to the Court, is worthy of consideration, and, no doubt, if the Gaolers applied to the Stipendiary Magistrates to hear the case in the gaol it would be favourably considered, and it is quite within the meaning of the Prisons Act. Some of the witnesses who are taken to open Court against their will resent it very much, and it is thought they have reasonable grounds for complaint.

28. I regret I am constrained to admit that I agree with the Wellington Gaoler's suggestion that flogging should be legalised for insubordinate and mutinous conduct in prisons. Last year in Lyttelton Prison, and this year in Auckland Prison, there were outbreaks that never would have occurred had flogging been permitted; but there are just a few, recent arrivals, in the various prisons that corporal punishment alone will curb, and whose only real complaint is that they cannot escape, and it is wonderful how easily they lead others away. If it was once known that the cat could lawfully be used, I believe many of these undesirables would choose some other country to reside in when released.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table K shows that 91 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 110 in 1903. Of these 25 have satisfactorily carried out the conditions of their licenses and been discharged, 1 was rearrested, 1 absconded, and 64 still remain under the supervision of Probation Officers.

The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £202 5s. 6d., of which £103 19s. has been actually paid, and there is every reason to suppose the balance will be forthcoming when due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders had they been sent to prisons would have amounted to £3,820, which sum added to the amount of costs actually paid shows a saving of £3,917 19s.

Of the 1,657 persons placed on probation since the introduction of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," 1,421 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions