

were heard in the Stipendiary Magistrates' Courts. It is considered that the conduct and industry of prisoners have been satisfactory, and a maximum amount of discipline has been kept up with a minimum amount of punishment.

20. There were 13 reports against subordinate officers last year, as against 15 during 1907—viz., Dunedin, 4; Invercargill, 2; and Wellington, 7. It is with pleasure that I report the class of officers now in the service has very much improved during the last few years; as a rule, they are sober, reliable, and painstaking, studying the habits and tempers of those over whom they are placed. The positions are much sought after, and appreciated when gained.

21. At the reformatory prison at New Plymouth, where the habitual criminals are detained, there was 1 male prisoner in custody at the beginning of the year. He was afterwards released on probation, and after doing well for a couple of months (a situation having been obtained for him) he absconded, was rearrested, and again declared an habitual criminal. During the year 3 males and 1 female were received into the reformatory.

22. A great deal has been said as to why a better system of classification of prisoners has not been carried out. To show the difficulty of carrying out entire classification as it should be, the following figures are quoted: Of the 811 males and 55 females in custody on the 31st December last (not including those in police gaols) only 57 males had still upwards of five years to serve, while 443 males and 44 females had less than six months to serve. Sixty males and 11 females were serving sentences for offences in connection with drink, 112 males and 3 females were serving sentences for sexual offences, and 54 males and 28 females were serving sentences for having no visible means of support, or being rogues and vagabonds. These offenders are in prisons from Auckland to Invercargill, and any proper system of classification will involve considerable transfers from one prison to another. The object aimed at in the prisons has been to keep the young prisoners entirely separate from the adults, and to keep the incorrigibles by themselves as far as possible. Of the 811 males and 55 females above alluded to, 333 males and 21 females were born in New Zealand.

23. The Department has to regret the death of the Hon. H. Feldwick, M.L.C., a Visiting Justice to the Invercargill Prison, who took a great interest in prison matters, and never spared himself when his services were required; and also that of Dr. Coughtrey, Gaol Surgeon at Dunedin, whose loss I greatly regret not only because he was a personal friend of mine, but because he was in all respects a model prison doctor, and his loss was felt by both officers and prisoners.

24. As I am now leaving the Department, after a service of upwards of twenty-eight years, my thanks are due to all ranks for the cheerful, unhesitating, and prompt manner in which they have at all times carried out my instructions; and the present state of all the prisons, when compared with what they were when I arrived from England in 1880, proves that the assistance of all ranks has brought about this satisfactory state of affairs. To the retiring Gaolers, Messrs. Cleary, Bratby, Armstrong, and Flannery, my special thanks are due for the advice and assistance they have always so readily given, and the conscientious manner in which they have during their very long service carried out their onerous duties.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

Table K shows that 133 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 111 in 1907. Of the 133, 20 have so far satisfactorily carried out the terms of their licenses and been discharged, 6 have been rearrested, 4 absconded, and 103 still remain under the supervision of the Probation Officers.

The amounts ordered to be paid by the various Courts towards the costs of prosecution amounted to £428 18s. 6d., of which sum £220 6s. 11d. has already been paid. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders had they been sent to prison would have been £4,652 10s., which, added to the amount of costs actually paid, makes a total saving of £4,872 16s. 11d.

Of the 2,113 persons placed on probation since the passing of "The First Offenders' Probation Act, 1886," 1,771 have been discharged after properly carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 116 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 1 committed suicide, 4 died, 2 were sent to industrial schools, 46 absconded, and 173 still remain fulfilling the terms of their licenses. It will be seen, therefore, that, while a percentage of 83.81 have done well and completed their probation, a percentage of only 2.17 have eluded the vigilance of the police and Probation Officers by absconding.

The primary objects of the Act were to place first offenders under surveillance, and to give them an incentive to good behaviour, and thereby check what might be the beginning of a criminal career, without sending them to prison, and to save them from the contaminations which are almost inseparable from prison life, and in this the Act is certainly effecting both these objects.

I cannot conclude this report without returning my best thanks to Mr. Gollan, the clerk and accountant, who is a thoroughly reliable and competent officer; and I feel sure my successor will find his services most valuable.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME,
Inspector of Prisons.