

Regarding our prisons, speaking generally, errors in design and construction make the difficulties of classification extreme. Of the larger prisons, those at Auckland and Invercargill are the only ones which possess any facilities. At Auckland the buildings are well constructed, and the progress being made with the new wing ensures the early abandonment of the last of the old wooden cell-houses. The work once completed, and the female wing transferred to the male prison, there will be separate sections and exercise-yards for different classes of prisoners. A small female prison conveniently situated within the estate should take the place of the female wing. The buildings are being erected by prison labour. The principal industry at this prison is stone quarrying and dressing for the buildings, and stone-breaking for road-metal, which is sold, and provides a profitable outlet for unskilled labour.

The Invercargill Prison is in the course of being built; at present it is a one-story structure with foundations permitting a second story, which is to be added. During the year a chapel-schoolroom with a basement for engine, dynamo, and cells for electric-light installation was completed, and a start was made with a two-story block of hospital ward and accessories, warders' quarters, and prison cells. The whole work has been and continues to be done by prison labour. The cement blocks used in the construction are well and expeditiously made by prisoners. The good quality of these blocks has raised a local demand, which has been supplied at a profit. The principal employment of the prisoners is upon the reclamation-works, which are being carried out in a very satisfactory manner.

The prison at Wellington has been added to at different periods under different emergencies, with no completed plan in view. The result has been that, save in the last substantial brick addition, there is difficulty in carrying out the supervision necessary, and there are some decidedly weak points which it is almost impossible to remedy satisfactorily. In the workshops boots are manufactured, the work being of a very fair standard. The circumscribed site of the prison limits the chances of occupation, and, to find an outlet for the labour of the prisoners, brick-making is carried out at Mount Cook. There is a complete plant and the work done is distinctly good, but the gang of prisoners with attendant warders marching to and from work through the public streets affords an unedifying spectacle. It seems apparent that this prison will have to be abandoned for one built to an approved plan on a more suitable site. Most civilized countries are considering the question of reorganization of their prison systems, and all are agreed that the design of the buildings is a most important factor in any scheme. Our neighbours in New South Wales have realized this to the extent of abandoning large and substantially built prisons.

The Lyttelton Prison is a strong building, but its design frustrates any attempt at complete classification of the prisoners. The exercise-yard is disproportionately small, and adds to the difficulties of keeping the different classes apart. The removal of the female prison would assist to some extent in overcoming these difficulties. The space within the walls available for the employment of prisoners is inadequate.

There is nothing to be added to what has been said hitherto about the Dunedin Prison building, and the same remark applies to Napier. At both these institutions the work has been carried out as in former years.

New Plymouth Prison is becoming more and more a place for habitual criminals. The principal outlets for labour are in the quarry and garden. The number of habitual criminals here accommodated during 1911 were as follows: At the beginning of the year there were in custody 28 prisoners (m., 26; f., 2); during the year 27 (m. 24; f., 3) were received, and 15 (m. 12; f., 3) were released upon probation: leaving at the end of the year 40 (m., 38; f., 2). There was a male habitual criminal not included above detained in the Dunedin Prison throughout the year.

The prison camps at Hanmer, Waipa, and Waitapu are doing excellent work. Recognizing that these prisons could serve a valuable purpose in rehabilitating a certain class of offenders, the Department has exercised very careful consideration in the appointment of officers and the selection of prisoners. The result has been a substantial improvement in the order and discipline of the camps, the reduction of the evils of criminal contamination to a minimum, and, there is reason to believe, the introduction of a distinct reformatory agency. In addition to clearing fire-breaks, road-making, &c., the prisoners at the camps cleared 1,110 acres for planting, and planted 3,042,143 trees during the year.

The work of the Prisons Department has grown very considerably during the year under review, and I wish to acknowledge the substantial assistance and advice I have received from Mr. Kayll. You are aware of my opinion that he should be appointed Superintendent (or whatever may be considered the appropriate title) of the Waikeria Reformatory, an institution which it is intended to conduct on lines differing from the ordinary prison routine, but not, let it be clearly understood, upon any system of feather-bed and spoon-feeding.

I have stated that the work of the Department has grown and is growing. I wish to add that it is, with the time at my disposal, impossible for me, under present circumstances, to carry out the inspection of the prisons in the complete manner in which the work should be done. I am strongly impressed with the absolute necessity of a system of inspection by some officer whose duty it would be to continually move about to see that the daily routine of discipline and duty is carried out in an efficient and uniform manner. The want of uniformity is a fruitful source of discontent and complaint, especially with prisoners who have served a former sentence in another prison or been transferred; and I was particularly struck by a remark made by a prisoner who had served a sentence in another country, where the discipline was strict and the conditions hard, that he preferred it, because here different officers had different methods, and he never knew where he stood. The strictest discipline is compatible with the most humanitarian methods, when what constitutes discipline and responsibility is viewed from an enlightened standpoint.

I have, &c.,

FRANK HAY.