

The conduct of the permanent officers has been good, and I am pleased to say that they have proved themselves most efficient, and have carried out their onerous duties in a highly satisfactory manner. I consider the officers attached to this prison are a credit to the Service. One probationary warder's services were dispensed with, he having proved unsuitable; while another was severely reprimanded for failing to carry out his duties in a satisfactory manner.

The quality of the rations supplied by the contractors has been uniformly good, and consequently there has been a total absence of complaints.

The conduct of the majority of the prisoners has been good, but punishments consistent with a proper standard of discipline had on a number of occasions to be meted out.

The Crimes Amendment Act still continues to work satisfactorily. The system of payment of a small wage to prisoners undergoing reformatory detention is proving of great benefit, as the knowledge that they are in a position to earn something for themselves against the time of their release acts as an incentive towards doing their best. The fact that they may be called upon to forfeit a portion of the amount so earned also tends to act as a deterrent against wrongdoing, and materially assists in maintaining a higher degree of discipline than was possible under the old system. The Act has now passed beyond the experimental stage, and provided the various Gaolers see that it is properly administered in their respective prisons great good should result.

Two hard-labour prisoners attempted to escape from the prison-works during the year, but both were recaptured within a few minutes of the attempt. Two other prisoners made a determined attempt to escape from the prison by endeavouring to overpower the officer on night duty and so gain possession of the keys. The officer, although seriously injured about the head, managed to prevent his assailants from gaining possession of the keys, and with great presence of mind threw the keys out of a cell-window. Both prisoners were brought before the Supreme Court. One received a sentence of five years' hard labour, and the other twelve months' hard labour and twelve months' reformatory detention, the sentences to take effect at the expiration of the sentences they were then serving.

The work of prison-extension still continues. The new south wing, capable of accommodating 38 additional male prisoners, has been occupied, also a thoroughly up-to-date hospital wing containing six beds, and, in addition, an isolation ward with two beds for infectious cases has been completed. Attached to this wing, quarters with all necessary conveniences for five additional single officers have been provided, thus bringing the prison still further up to date. A further addition to the prison is now well in hand, and should be ready for occupation in about twelve months from date. This will provide accommodation for another 84 prisoners—78 males and 6 females—with quarters for a matron. This additional accommodation is much needed, as, besides assisting in relieving the congestion existing at other prisons, it will provide the opportunity for the introduction of a proper system of classification, without which it would be difficult to arrange on a proper basis.

There are at present over 60 youths in this prison undergoing various terms of reformatory treatment: nearly all of these are first offenders and under the age of twenty-five years. The remainder—about 30—have been sentenced to various terms of hard labour. These also, with few exceptions, are first offenders and under twenty-five years of age.

During the year 28 prisoners were released on probation on the recommendation of the Prisons Board. There cannot be any doubt but the system of granting release on probation, with good conduct, is sound. The fact that a youth knows that in the event of his not continuing to conduct himself in a proper manner on release he will inevitably be returned to prison certainly has a steadying influence and tends to keep him in the right path. As the result of careful observation I have come to the conclusion that it is advisable, whenever possible, to make it a condition of release that the person so released should, during the period of his probation, obtain work in and remain in the country and keep away from towns. By so doing the chances of his lapsing are greatly reduced. In nearly every case of a recommittal the temptations of a town life have been the cause.

During the year Mr. McLean, City Missionary, took over the duties of Probation Officer under the provisions of the Crimes Amendment Act. Mr. McLean is well fitted for the position, and is of great assistance to those placed under his care. It is upon a prisoner's release that he most needs a friend and counsellor.

Divine service continues to be held every Sunday. All the ministers of the various denominations, assisted by the City Missionary, attend in rotation. The Roman Catholic prisoners have service once a month. The Rev. Dean Burke also conducts a class of instruction for Roman Catholic youths every Tuesday evening. The officers of the Salvation Army hold monthly services on Sunday afternoons. On the whole, the spiritual welfare of the prisoners is being well attended to.

The general health of prisoners has been good. Owing to the large amount of machinery used in connection with the reclamation-works, coupled with the inexperience of many of the prisoners, accidents of a minor nature are of frequent occurrence. During the year, however, only one accident of a serious nature occurred. In this case I regret to state that a prisoner employed on the trestle bridge by some means lost his footing and fell into the water, which was flowing swiftly, and in a few seconds was swept away and drowned before a boat could reach him. The usual inquest was held, and a verdict of accidental drowning was returned.

The manufacture of concrete blocks for building purposes still continues. The whole of the prison buildings are being constructed of this class of material. The wireless station at Awarua, also the large new drill-hall at Invercargill, have been built of concrete blocks, about 15,000 being used in these two buildings alone. This number is equivalent to 350,000 bricks. Blocks to the value of several hundred pounds have also been supplied to private contractors.