

Schoolmaster's Report on the Work in the Prison School.

I have the honour to report on the work of the Prison School for the year ended 31st March, 1925.

The aim of the work has been to give the men a good grounding in English, arithmetic, geography, and commercial correspondence. The material to work on varied considerably. Some of them readily gripped the work and rapidly attained to the standard of proficiency certificate, but quite half of them had never been beyond Standard IV, while a few could barely read or write. In all classes the interest in the work was well maintained, and a number advanced from Standard IV to Standard VI. At intervals a debate was held: this proved to be a source of additional interest, and was a valuable training in oral expression and logical reasoning. For those men who had advanced beyond Standard VI a course of bookkeeping and higher mathematics was provided. The fine spirit with which the men entered into the work has been a most pleasing feature, and has considerably lightened my labours. They seem to realize that while in prison they have a chance to improve their knowledge and so have a better chance, at the expiration of their term of imprisonment, of earning their living. The discipline of the men at school has been all that I could desire, this being mainly due to the firm yet tactful manner in which they were handled by the warder in charge.

My best thanks are due to you, sir, for the facilities you have placed at my disposal and to the officers of the prison for the kind and courteous manner in which they have aided me at all times.

WAIKERIA REFORMATORY.

There were 83 inmates in custody on the 1st January, 1924, and 96 were received during the year. The discharges were 20 hard labour and 3 reformatory-detention prisoners on expiration of sentence, while 11 hard-labour and 24 reformatory-detention prisoners were released on the recommendation of the Prisons Board, and 13 were transferred to other prisons, leaving a total of 108 remaining in custody at the 31st December. The daily average number of inmates in confinement during the year was 95.37.

Progress during the year can, I think, be regarded as satisfactory. The "honour system" has further demonstrated its efficacy in the work done and in the fact that the liberty allowed has been seldom abused. There has actually been only one escape during the year. Under cover of night inmate K. H. Armstrong dashed from the main building, but was recaptured two days later.

The inmates who on discharge have been placed in employment have in all cases done well. Unfortunately, the prejudice in the public mind against the individual who has broken the law dies hard, and as a result it is not always possible to find positions for men who might be expected to acquit themselves creditably. However, nothing but time and the continued success of the system will overcome this.

The main avenue of employment for inmates is farm-work, and in this department the year has been successful. The dairy herds by their increased returns have shown very forcibly what can be achieved even in a short time by culling and attention to feeding.

Tree-planting for timber and shelter was carried out during the winter, and should, I think, be continued from year to year. The varieties mostly planted have been *Pinus radiata*, *Eucalyptus viminalis*, and *Eucalyptus Macarthuri*. Unfortunately, the seeds obtained through the High Commissioner have not, for some reason, germinated satisfactorily.

There has been a considerable amount of work carried out on the Mental Hospital property by Waikeria inmates, who, in addition to ordinary farming operations, have been engaged in roadwork and blockmaking, and have broken in some 300 acres of virgin country. The co-operation between the two institutions has been of material benefit to both, and I am convinced that this policy is of concrete advantage to the State. In addition the experience gained by inmates fits them for employment in the country, which supplies a much more hopeful environment than does work in the towns.

From the kitchen-garden, in addition to our own requirements, vegetables have been supplied to other institutions. The growing of tomatoes as a crop on a considerable scale has been discontinued. The prices realized have been very variable, and this, combined with the risks of deterioration in transport and the distance from the railway, makes the proposition too risky for the amount of labour which must be employed.

I must express my indebtedness to Superintendent Vincent of the Auckland Prison for his careful selection of cases transferred here. My thanks are also due to members of the staff, to whose loyalty and energy such success as has attended the year's operations is largely due.

WANGANUI PRISON.

At the commencement of the year there were 29 males in custody and no females; there were 144 males and 7 females received during the year, against 130 males and 12 females for 1923; there were 144 males and 7 females discharged during the year, leaving in custody 29 males at the end of the year.

The health of the prisoners, who are nearly all old men, has been wonderfully good. With good food, clean bodies and clothing it is wonderful how well they keep. Not only do they keep well, but they often improve considerably after admission. There was one death during the year, of an old man of eighty years, who was ill with an incurable disease when received here. An inquest was held before the Coroner, and the verdict of "Death from natural causes" was returned.

During the year Dr. Earle was appointed Medical Officer to the prison.

The electric light has been installed during the year, and is much appreciated by the inmates and staff. The work that is now in progress is that of a new dining-room, dormitory, bath-room with new plunge and shower baths, also the painting of the exterior and interior of the prison, and other minor repairs. Good work has also been done by the prisoners in keeping the grounds in order, laundry and cleaning work, &c., and a party has been employed by the Wanganui City Council in stumping and levelling plantation grounds, adjoining the Prison Reserve. The work was only started in April, and what was a menace to the city is now a valuable asset. The sum of £340 8s. has been received in cash from the Council for the work that has been done, and the Council has supplied all tools, &c.