

PRISON CHANGES.

FUTURE OF ST. HELENA.

HOME SECRETARY'S VIEWS.

An explanation of the reasons which actuated him in deciding to carry out the prison reforms, by which St. Helena Island will be used largely for reformatory purposes; the prisoners reclassified, the Brisbane gaol used to accommodate additional prisoners, and a measure of economy secured through reduction of staffs and lessened upkeep, was made by the Home Secretary to-day.

Mr. McCormack said he considered it fatal to associate short sentence prisoners, convicted of minor offences, with the burglar and other professional criminals. Proper classification and separation would avert to a great extent, the dangers arising by allowing old hands to associate with the first offender.

When the scheme was brought into operation, St. Helena Penal Establishment would be mainly used as a farm colony, and well-conducted, long-time prisoners would be sent there for special treatment during the latter stages of their sentences. The rigours of prison discipline would be relaxed, and the prisoner would learn to act for himself, and gain that confidence which would enable him to combat the temptations of the outside world on his release. It was also intended to afford better facilities for the instruction of prisoners in useful trades. Prisoners who had been actively engaged in productive work were, on their liberation, better fitted to earn an honest livelihood than those who had not been so engaged, and in point of fact few returned to crime. A knowledge of a trade or some useful occupation was worth more to the prisoners than all the support and succour of a benevolent society. It was intended, further, to make better provision against fire risk. The buildings at St. Helena were constructed of wood, more or less decayed, in bad condition, and as they became older the risk of fire increased.

The question of closing St. Helena and removing the prisoners to a mainland prison had been raised. His own opinion was that it should be closed and a suitable prison erected in a district where good agricultural land was available. But that would cost a considerable amount of money, and the present was not a time when such an expenditure could be undertaken. The island was not the best place for a prison, because it was a most costly place to administer. St. Helena was a beautiful island, but it had been made and kept beautiful by prison labour, and he was afraid, when it was created a recreation reserve, it would be no one's business to meet the expenses of upkeep.