

EMPLOYMENT OF PRISON LABOUR.

The sections of this report dealing with the progress of prison work and industries, tree-planting operations, &c., illustrate clearly the varied nature of the employment now provided for the inmates of the Dominion prisons and prison institutions. It is a common fallacy among members of local bodies and the general public that the prisoners of the State are either kept in comparative idleness or that the ancient system of employing them on work of a useless or unproductive character is still followed. Old prejudices and old opinions die hard. Under present conditions there is not an able-bodied prisoner in any of our prisons, prison institutions, or prison camps who is not working to his full capacity, so far at all events as he can be made to do so. County Councils and other local authorities apply from time to time for the use of prison labour for the construction of roads and other works, their opinion evidently being that we have ample waste labour at our command. Such, however, is far from being the case. On the contrary, we have so much useful, reproductive work in hand that we are seldom able to keep all our works fully manned, and would find little difficulty in employing twice the number of men at present available.

The tables printed under headings "Receipts and Expenditure," and "Value of Prison Labour employed on Public Works, &c.," show in concrete form the value of prison labour to the State.

PRISON SCHOOLS AND PHYSICAL CULTURE.

The instruction of the younger prisoners in elementary-school subjects and in physical drill has been carried on satisfactorily at Auckland and at Invercargill during the year, but the time has arrived when the educational branch of the work should be carried further than has been found possible in the past. This is particularly the case at Invercargill, where a Borstal Institution has been established. The classes have now become too large for the limited teaching staff at present employed to grapple with successfully if even a full primary-school course is to be attempted. It is due to the inmates of this institution and to the public that further educational facilities should be provided, and recommendations will be made in this direction. At a time like the present the Department hesitates to recommend improvements that require additional expenditure. It has become apparent, however, that if the objects we had in view when the Borstal Institution was established are to be carried out we must be prepared to sacrifice to some extent the material or financial interests that have for the past few years been the guiding policy of the Department, and concentrate to a greater extent on matters that vitally concern the interests of the youths and young men who are drafted to this institution. The bodies of the inmates have received a full meed of attention by insistence upon the performance of a large amount of manual labour, physical drill, &c. The educational and to some extent the recreative side of our reformatory work must now be more effectively dealt with.

Financial considerations have also prevented us from establishing educational classes at the Waikeria Reformatory, and here, too, the failure to provide for the intellectual side of our reformatory work prevents us from entirely carrying out the original object of the establishment of this institution. Any one who knew the Waikeria property in its virgin state will realize the immense amount of hard manual labour that has been expended to bring it into its present condition, and will agree with me in thinking that it is time the men who have carried out the work were provided with some means of mental and spiritual improvement.

The reports of the schoolmasters in charge of the Invercargill Borstal Institution school and the Auckland Prison school are appended, and their perusal makes it clear, so far at all events as the Invercargill school is concerned, that an extension of our educational work is essential if the inmates of the institution are to benefit to the fullest extent from the periods of "reformatory detention" to which they have been sentenced by the Courts.

CLASSIFICATION OF PRISONERS.

During the past year your directions regarding the more complete separation of the various classes of prisoners have been carried out as far as the structural arrangement of our building permitted. Our first step was to segregate the sexual perverts. This was accomplished by setting apart the New Plymouth Prison almost entirely for this class of offenders, and drafting thereto all the worst cases from other prisons. The change that has been effected in this direction has already had a beneficial effect on the moral tone of the prisons, and has been welcomed as a useful and necessary reform by all our Gaolers and officers in charge.

Auckland Prison, as the strongest and safest institution under the control of the Prisons Department, has been constituted our chief penal prison, and steps have recently been taken to transfer there the longer-sentence and more dangerous criminals from the other prisons who cannot be safely drafted to the country reformatories and camps. The provision of internal subdivisional exercise-yards at Auckland has at last enabled us to carry out a primary inter-classification of the inmates that was impossible under former conditions.

In order to make room for the number of military prisoners committed to the civil prisons your approval was obtained to the transfer of the habitual criminals who occupied our No. 1 roadmaking prison camp at Roto-aira (Waimarino) to Auckland, where they were placed in the same division as the remaining habituals who had been sent there from New Plymouth at the beginning of 1917. Roto-aira No. 1 is now solely a military prisoners' camp.

The habituals at Auckland are housed in a separate division, and are worked and exercised entirely apart from the hard-labour and reformatory classes. When finance permits a separate institution, situated in some suitable locality away from the centres of population, must be provided for them, but until that time arrives they can be accommodated at Auckland.