

INSPECTOR OF PRISONS AND SUPERVISOR OF WORKS to the CONTROLLER-GENERAL OF PRISONS.

SIR,—

Prisons Department, Wellington, 31st July, 1921.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year 1920–21, dealing with the inspection of the institutions and prisons under the control of the Department, and the supervision of various works and industries being carried on by prison labour.

Throughout the past year I have been fully occupied inspecting the various institutions under the control of the Department, and in giving attention to the works and industries connected therewith. The larger prisons and institutions have been visited at least quarterly, while those of lesser importance have been inspected as opportunity permitted. In the majority of instances I found little to complain of, and, generally speaking, the inmates appeared to have very few grievances, and such grievances as arose from time to time were easy of adjustment.

As in former years, the main difficulty in connection with prison administration has been the question of staff; and, although there were sufficient candidates, many of them when appointed as probationary warders proved quite unsuitable and not fitted for permanent appointment, and consequently their services had to be dispensed with.

The standard of industry amongst inmates and prisoners, I am pleased to state, still continues to rise. This is partly due to the fact that the labour of the prisoners is being used to a greater extent year by year in a more interesting and intelligent fashion. The men therefore feel that they are doing something useful to the community at large, and at the same time fitting themselves for earning an honest livelihood when released. The additional improvements which you now contemplate putting into operation, by way of payment for services rendered, will certainly have a still further beneficial effect.

The work of classification has been still further advanced during the year, particularly at Waikeria and Invercargill, with highly beneficial results. Work in this direction must be necessarily slow, requiring as it does careful intelligent administration as well as properly constructed buildings and exercise-yards. Another difficulty is due to the fact that the prisoners as a whole do not take kindly to separation into classes; this is especially noticeable in the earlier stages. Almost every prisoner considers himself as being fitted for the higher grades of the system, and keenly resents being left in the lower division. This is only to be expected, but, at the same time, increases the difficulties of those responsible for the proper administration of the system.

PROGRESS DURING THE YEAR.

In my capacity as Supervisor of Works I have visited the various prisons and institutions where work is being carried on. The following is a brief summary of the progress made during the past year:—

Auckland.—Stone-quarrying and crushing metal for roadmaking purposes has, as of old, been the chief industry carried on during the year. The work of installing an up-to-date air-drilling plant was recently completed, with the result that the output of metal will be much increased. This plant, which is electrically driven, is capable of operating three sets of air-drills simultaneously, and has completely superseded the old hammer-and-drill system. It is to be hoped that you will be successful in your endeavour to have further additional plant established at an early date. To do so would be good business, as the increased output would prove immediately reproductive. Building additional cottages for prison officers has been pushed on during the year. One house is almost completed, while two others are well on the way. Concrete-block making for building purposes is another industry that has given a considerable amount of employment, fully 35,000 blocks having been turned out during the twelve months. The making of concrete roofing-tiles has also been begun. Stone-dressing provides employment for a number of men whom it is not advisable to send outside the prison-walls to work. Bootmaking is also being carried on in a fine up-to-date workshop.

Waikeria.—With the exception of the building of two additional officers' cottages, also quarters for single officers, nothing further in the way of building has been done. Widening and improving the new road has received attention during the year, resulting in a marked improvement. There now remains the providing of a large septic tank and the enclosing of the exercise-yards. Both are very necessary—one in the interest of sanitation and the other for classification purposes.

Wellington.—At the Terrace Prison a considerable amount of work by levelling has been carried out by prison labour for the Education Department. At Mount Cook Prison a very large undertaking is in progress on account of the Technical College Board; this work consists of the cutting-down of the hill and taking out of foundation for the new building which is now being erected. At Point Halswell, which is being used as a reformatory for women, and which was occupied towards the end of the year, work is still being carried on by way of improving the surroundings. At the Terrace gardening is also being carried out, the supply of vegetables for the Wellington prisons being raised therefrom; an additional work was the pulling-down of the old female division, which is now no longer needed.

Wi Tako.—The first instalment of the brickworks plant and machinery has been placed in position and is ready for work. By means of this plant, which was obtained from the Public Works Department, Taumarunui, it will be possible to turn out up to 70,000 bricks weekly. The building of a large continuous kiln capable of dealing with the combined output of the two machines is now well in hand. Arrangements have also been made with the Defence and Railway Departments for connecting up with the Trentham military siding, making it possible to bring railway-trucks right into the brickworks. During the year a residence of seven rooms has been built for the officer in charge; also two five-roomed cottages for subordinate officers; a further cottage is also in course of erection. It is worthy of note that the three cottages for subordinate officers have been constructed out of two seven-roomed cottages which formerly stood on the Terrace Prison Reserve, and which were removed to Wi Tako in sections and re-erected in the form of three five-roomed dwellings.