

DEPARTMENTAL AND STAFF MATTERS.

Beyond the usual ebb and flow of junior officers, there have been very few changes in the staffs during the year. I have again to express my appreciation of the work of the different controlling officers and their staffs. We have carried on further pioneering work in the backblocks that would necessarily have failed but for the energy, initiative, and organizing ability displayed by the officers specially selected to control these important undertakings.

C. E. MATTHEWS,
Controller-General of Prisons.

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

SIR,—

Prisons Department, Wellington, 18th June, 1922.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year 1921–22, dealing with the work of inspection of the institutions and prisons under the control of the Prisons Department, and the supervision of the various works and industries being carried on during the year by prison labour.

During the year I have been fully occupied in visiting and inspecting the various institutions, also in supervising the various works and industries being carried on by prison labour. The more important institutions have been visited as far as possible every two months; the smaller prisons have been inspected as opportunity offered. I am pleased to state that in very few instances have I found much to complain of, and, generally speaking, complaints from either officers or prisoners have been few. The improvements introduced of late years for the benefit of officers, both as regards rate of pay and hours of duty, appear to be bearing good fruit, officers with a few exceptions appearing to realize that the Department is doing everything possible on their behalf; whilst in the case of the prisoners themselves, even the most hardened seem to recognize that every endeavour is being made in the direction of treating them, as far as possible, as men—certainly men who have erred, but for whom there is still hope that they may yet become honest citizens.

During my thirty-eight years' experience of prison administration I have seen many changes. I am, however, satisfied that the present-day method of employing men outside prison-walls on farms and in roadmaking camps, and in many instances without direct supervision, is having a good effect upon the men themselves. The rifle and the baton have given place to firm but kindly supervision; and, speaking from personal experience, the change has been for the better, not only in the case of prisoners but also in regard to the officers themselves. As a result the relations between prisoners and officers have improved enormously, hence the almost total absence of complaints.

As each year passes an improvement is being made in our system of classification: slowly no doubt, on account of the difficulties in the way, but nevertheless surely, we are progressing in this direction. The fact that in many cases it has been found possible to dispense with the use of arms of any description, whilst a number of prisoners are being trusted by placing them on their honour, with practically no guards, tends to prove that we are advancing in the matter of prison reform. I have had experience of both systems, and am therefore in a position to judge as to the relative value of both methods.

The question of staff still continues to give a certain amount of trouble. Candidates there are now in plenty, but it is still most difficult to get men possessed of the right qualifications: such men are born, not made. We are, however, slowly getting rid of officers who have long been a source of trouble to the Department owing to their unfitness for the work. By continuing the culling process we may in time hope to get a really efficient staff.

I am pleased to record that the standard of industry amongst the inmates of our prisons and institutions still continues to improve. The saner system now obtaining, of employing men at useful occupations, is having the desired effect. In order to get the best out of a man—and a prisoner, after all, is just an ordinary individual—he must feel that he is being treated as an ordinary human being, and that the work he is being called upon to perform is useful, not only for the benefit of the community as a whole but also to his own personal advantage, by fitting him better to earn a livelihood when he is released, and also enabling him to earn something for himself against the time of his release.

The payment of wages to prisoners, and in some cases to their dependants, also has been a step in the right direction. In this connection I am speaking of the effect it has upon the prisoners themselves whilst in prison. Judging from my own observation, such an arrangement acts as a stimulus, and much better results are obtained than would otherwise be the case.

The improving of the classification system, as I have already remarked, is going on slowly, but particularly good work is being done at Invercargill and Waikeria. Strange to say, the chief objectors appear to be the prisoners themselves. Prisoners as a rule do not take kindly to our system of classification, according to conduct and fitness, to enable them to uplift themselves and to break away from bad habits. Those who are left behind in the lower grades exhibit a considerable amount of jealousy and in many cases bitter hostility towards those who have been promoted. The principle, however, is perfectly sound, and I am pleased to state that, in so far as it is possible to judge, the results continue to be most encouraging. Intelligent classification has come to stay, and should be extended whenever and wherever possible. The provision instituted by yourself of special prisons or special camps for different classes, however, continues to give a maximum amount of benefit with a minimum of friction.