

that falls to each square inch. Wherever possible we have continued to improve our system of interclassification, and have made a marked advance in this branch of our work at Invercargill, where, as each year passes, we intensify the curriculum of mental, moral, and physical training of the youths and young men who are drafted there from the larger centres.

As stated in my remarks on the criminal statistics for the year, the number of youthful offenders committed by the Courts continues to increase. Some years ago our scheme of primary classification provided for all offenders of twenty-five years of age and under being sent to Invercargill, but the influx of young men and boys has recently become so marked that the accommodation at the Borstal Institution proved totally inadequate, and as a consequence I found it necessary to reduce the age-limit to twenty-three. From present indications it is apparent that unless the wave of juvenile crime diminishes, the maximum age for Invercargill will require to be reduced to twenty-one, which is the general maximum age for committals to the English Borstal Institution. Young offenders between twenty-one and twenty-five are now sent to the Waikeria Reformatory, near Te Awamutu, where we have established educational classes under a full-time Board school-teacher, and where also we are carrying on farming, dairying, &c., and are thus training youthful offenders of this class to become useful members of the community.

PAYMENT OF WAGES TO PRISONERS FOR SUPPORT OF DEPENDANTS.

The payment of wages to prisoners with wives and families dependent upon them has been continued, and, so far as can be judged, the system is working satisfactorily. This somewhat novel departure from the ordinary methods of prison administration was inaugurated in 1920. In the Budget of that year it was announced that, owing to the economic advance that had been made in the management of the prisons, the production of a substantial revenue where formerly there was no revenue at all—the healthy growth, in fact, of our agricultural and works policy, and the demonstration of the earning-power of the prisoners of the State—the Government had decided to pay a small wage to all prisoners who, prior to their committal, had wives, families, or others dependent upon them. The amount to be paid was at the rate of 3s. per day, or 16s. 6d. per week, to the dependants of such prisoners, rising in the third month to £1 2s. 6d. per week. The regulations providing for this payment and the rules governing the payment became effective as from the 1st January, 1921. The amount per head may seem small, but care had to be taken at the inception of the scheme that the burden on the taxpayers was not unduly heavy or the scheme might readily have broken down of its own weight. Even at the rates fixed, the cost to the Prisons Department now averages about £5,000 per annum, the total amount actually paid out to prisoners' dependants between the 1st January, 1921, and the 31st March, 1923, being £10,459. The Department's reason for bringing the proposal before the Government was that in so many cases that came under the notice of the administration it was painfully apparent that the worst sufferers from a man's misdeeds were the man's dependants, usually his wife and family. While the man himself went to prison, where he was comfortably housed and fed, had no responsibilities, and suffered no reproach among the other offenders he found there, the wives and families were often left in a destitute condition, and had to suffer in other ways that are known to us all. In addition to this it was considered that, as the individual prisoner under present-day management had become to some extent self-supporting, it was only common justice that his dependants should benefit from the result of his labour. While the new system is by no means as liberal nor as complete as we would wish it to be, yet it has been the means of giving a measure of relief in numbers of necessitous cases where formerly we had no means of giving any relief at all.

HEALTH OF PRISONERS.

From returns of sickness given in Table A of statistics it will be seen that the daily average number on the sick-list in all the prisons and prison institutions of the Dominion in 1922 was 20.68, an increase of 4.63 over 1921. Although the average on the sick-list shows an increase, the general health of prisoners has been exceptionally good. As in former years, a large number of old vagrants suffering from various infirmities were received into the prisons. Some of them served the greater portion of their sentences in prison infirmaries, whilst others with more serious complaints had to be temporarily transferred to public hospitals for treatment. This is the class of prisoner who is responsible for the greater portion of the sick-list average.

PRISONERS DETENTION ACT, 1915.

There were four prisoners, all males, dealt with under the provisions of the Prisoners Detention Act during the past year. The total number who have been detained under the provisions of the Act since it was first passed is now thirty.

DEPARTMENTAL AND STAFF MATTERS.

It is with great regret that I have to record the loss by death of two valued officers since my last report was written. Mr. P. McMillan, Gaoler at Lyttelton, died in February last after a severe illness. He had served the Department well and faithfully for a number of years, was always active in the discharge of his duties, and was of that vanishing class that puts the interests of his employer before his own. Mr. H. J. Bathgate, Deputy Superintendent of the Invercargill Borstal Institution, died very suddenly early in the present year. It may be said of him that he lived for his work. He was originally in the service of the Education Department as second in command of the Burnham Industrial School, but was transferred to the Prisons service at Invercargill in March, 1920. His influence over the inmates under his charge at Invercargill was beneficial in the highest degree, and his loss as a high-principled and experienced instructor of youth has been much felt. The only retirement on