

PAYMENT OF WAGES.

Closely and inseparably allied with the question of prison labour is that of payment to prisoners in the form of earnings or wages. It is clear that the prisoner has no right to payment as against the taxpayer who is heavily taxed in contributing to his support, but the idea of some definite reward following effort is generally accepted in all prison systems. In this respect New Zealand leads the way. In some countries we have heard of habitual criminals being enabled to earn considerable sums of money while in prison; but, taking prisoners as a whole, the payments to prisoners, and especially to their dependants, the New Zealand system is one of the most humane. Last year approximately £7,000 was paid to prisoners' wives or mothers for the support of their families, while about £4,500 was paid in the form of earnings to the prisoners themselves, either on discharge from prison or subsequently through Probation Officers in suitable instalments. This arrangement has been found necessary in the interests of the prisoners themselves. The payment of wages has come to stay, but the greatest care has to be exercised in the matter of seeing that only deserving cases are helped, as otherwise abuses are liable to occur.

PRISONERS' AID SOCIETIES.

The work of aiding prisoners on discharge is one of supreme importance. To be effective, however, it is necessary that the prisoner whom it is desired to aid should not only be met on discharge but visited whilst in prison, and a personal interest taken in him and his family. By such means only is it possible for a social worker to really help a prisoner on his release. The holding-out of a helping hand, and the realization that some one takes an interest in him or her and is really concerned as to whether he or she makes good or not, has saved many from again drifting back into prison. We are fortunate indeed in New Zealand in having men and women who are ever willing to devote both time and money in trying to help their fallen brothers and sisters, and I cannot speak too highly of the good work performed by the Prisoners' Aid Societies. Their help is invaluable, and is given at the time when it is most needed. It is in dealing with short-sentenced prisoners that the help of the society is most needed. In the cases of the longer-sentenced prisoners monetary help is not required, but those sentenced to terms not exceeding three months are not credited with earnings and are often penniless when discharged.

AFTER-CARE OF PRISONERS.

The question of the care and supervision of prisoners subsequent to their release from prison has had the Department's attention for some years back. From time to time suggestions relating to after-care have been made by social workers, but the Department is unable to give effect to them. The conditions in this Dominion are different in many respects from those existing in other countries, and the time has not arrived for establishing an extravagant system, which some people consider desirable. In dealing with the treatment of criminals a more than superficial knowledge is very necessary, and the views put forward by persons who profess an interest in criminal reform are often of very little assistance to the Department. In the case of short-sentenced prisoners the Prisoners' Aid Societies and other bodies of Christian men and women look after their welfare, while in that of the longer-sentenced prisoners after-care is attended to by the Probation Officers, who are ever ready with kindly advice and help in the matter of obtaining employment; and, as the average payments to prisoners on release amount to £15 per head (varying from £5 to £35, according to length of sentence) it follows that no offender has occasion to revert to crime on his release through lack of food or clothing. The men are well provided for, and quite capable of looking after themselves. Almost every one is willing to help a young man to make good, but in the cases of young female offenders it is much more difficult. I am therefore of the opinion that for the latter class the providing of a home or hostel to which they could go on their discharge from prison is a real necessity, and would save quite a number from again lapsing into crime.

CLASSIFICATION.

Considerable progress has been made of late years in the matter of classifying prisoners. Experience has taught that classification should be according to age and character, irrespective of the nature of the offence; further, that instead of one large building divided into sections for the treatment of each class, separate institutions give much better results, especially in the case of the young offender. Therefore year by year the work continues of setting apart separate institutions wherein the treatment of those who are more often unfortunate than really criminal can be attended to with a reasonable prospect of success. During the past year a Borstal institution for the treatment of girls and young women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five has been established at Point Halswell, and arrangements are at present being made for a second Borstal institution for young men, which is to be located in the North Island. Invercargill will then deal with all youths between the ages of sixteen and twenty, while the North Island institution will receive those between twenty and twenty-five. Classification on proper lines is a great preventive against recidivism.

AWAITING-TRIAL AND REMAND PRISONERS.

Provision has been made for the erection of a building set apart for the treatment of awaiting-trial and remand prisoners. Such a building is now in course of erection near Wellington, and should be ready for occupation in about six months' time. This is a decided advantage on the usual system of housing the unbailed trial and remand prisoners together, and it is hoped to do more in the way of segregation during the coming year.