

As mentioned in earlier reports, unless the circumstances relating to an offence are such as to call for serious punishment, it would seem to be preferable to have recourse to some alternative to imprisonment by way of probation, &c., rather than to minimize the initial dread of imprisonment by requiring the offender to serve a short term less irksome than he anticipated. Short sentences as an alternative to the payment of fines is an unsatisfactory feature of our present methods of dealing with offenders, swelling as they do the total of receptions to prison, and it is hoped that shortly it will be practicable to introduce legislation along the lines of the Money Payments Act in England.

It is interesting to observe in the last report of the English Prison Commissioners that imprisonments for non-payment of fines fell, in England, from 10,542 in 1935, to 7,022 in 1936, the first year in which the Act was in operation.

PUNISHMENTS AND INFRACTIONS OF DISCIPLINE.

Capital Punishment.—No executions took place during the year.

Floggings.—No floggings were administered.

Corporal Punishment.—Recourse has not been had to corporal punishment or mechanical restraint upon any refractory prisoner for a breach of the Prisons Regulations for many years. There is no statutory provision for any form of corporal punishment for breach of discipline in either prisons or Borstals in New Zealand. It is interesting to observe that the special Committee recently set up in England to deal with the subject of corporal punishment recommended the retention of this form of punishment as an ultimate sanction in prison discipline. Our experience is that the necessity for rigorous methods diminishes in inverse ratio to the development of humanitarian standards.

Escapes.—During the year 22 persons escaped, and all were recaptured. Eleven of these were from Borstals and 11 from the prisons. The number is not higher than the average, and, as has been mentioned previously, at the farms and camps, where a greater degree of trust is reposed in the inmates, greater opportunities for escape exist. In view of the few cases in which the trust is abused it is considered that the risk taken is justified, as undoubtedly the reposing of trust, an essential ingredient of the honour system is an important factor in the development of self-reliance and self-respect.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES.

The necessity of economy of space precludes a detailed recital of the many and varied activities carried on at the several institutions under the Department's control, but these are described at some length in the institutional reports annexed hereto, and a glance at them will reveal the methods adopted by the Department with a view to the reformation of those committed to its care.

The general basis of classification in vogue is founded largely upon age, character, and criminal propensity. The methods used at each institution are designed to provide a milieu most calculated to promote habits of industry and self-reliance, and to stimulate the impulse to live more worthily and at the same time to equip the offender vocationally so that he can be readily absorbed as a useful member of the community on his release.

With this objective in view a wide range of socializing influences are brought to bear. Extensive educational facilities are provided, under which scheme, in addition to the more formal teaching of those of primary grade, there are special classes and regular lectures designed to develop a sense of social responsibility and a higher cultural appreciation. As one institutional teacher has aptly stated in his report: "The aim has been to quicken an intelligent interest in current topics, augmented by studies of summaries of economic, geographic, and historic changes in world affairs . . . provision is made for different abilities within the classes . . . an endeavour is made to make New Zealand history and civics a 'live' subject."

In addition to the formal educational classes, W.E.A. lectures and other lectures are regularly held, and at several institutions first-aid classes and life-saving courses are provided. Every institution is now equipped with a wireless, and suitable radio programmes are regularly given.

Films are used at several institutions for educational purposes, and at present plans are in train for the regular exhibition of educational and topical sound-films at the farms and camps.

Special attention is given to library facilities, and at every institution there is a wide range of reading-matter. The Department provides an extensive list of magazines, both technical and fictional, and during the year several libraries were augmented by the acquisition of books through the medium of a gift from Lord Nuffield.

In the local controlling officer's reports on the Borstals it will be seen that emphasis is placed on training and education rather than on punishment, the aim being to inspire a better appreciation of the ethical values to create a more understanding and purposeful objective in life. Throughout the training the ideals of citizenship, and the necessity for combating anti-social habits and the effects of undesirable early environmental influences, are stressed.

During the last two years modern mechanical plant has been installed in connection with the various intra-mural activities carried on. This has not only enabled the industrial output to be maintained, notwithstanding the heavy fall in the number of prisoners, but it affords an opportunity for those engaged in these industries to obtain valuable experience in the use of up-to-date plant and machinery, thus aiding them in securing and holding employment at their particular trade on release.

On the farms far greater use than hitherto has been made of mechanical aids. In this industry also the work now affords greater opportunities of gaining experience in up-to-date methods. New Zealand being mainly a primary industrial country, farming, of course, furnishes the greatest scope for useful training and offers the readiest avenues of employment when inmates are released, besides causing the least competitive friction with private enterprise.