

I do not think it necessary to carry the particular references any further. That some of the men complaining received what might ordinarily be termed rough handling I think very probable, but I am satisfied to say that the charge of wilfully ill treating prisoners made against Major Matheson is not proved.

GENERAL, AS TO ALLEGED ILL TREATMENT BY GUARDS.

A good deal was said about the fact of two young men escaping and swimming to Petone, as they said, to report to the police the alleged ill treatment of men. I cannot determine what importance should be attached to their act, or what their real motive was for escaping. One of the men, Bilke, gave evidence. He did not say that he escaped because he was himself ill-treated or that he had seen any ill treatment. It occurred in March, 1915, when there was something verging on a revolt among a large number of insubordinates, to repress which strong measures were used. In the same way stress was laid on an alleged attempt at suicide. The young man in this case had undoubtedly made cuts across both wrists, but I cannot determine whether suicide was really attempted. The cuts were not deep enough to injure the sinews. Even assuming that suicide was intended, I cannot see what importance should be attached to it. A high authority dealing with suicide as a race question points out that, per million of a population, it varies from 392 in Saxony to 17 in Ireland.

There were many statements in the evidence about ill treatment by the guards when inflicting disciplinary punishments. Only three or four of the men referred to were here to speak for themselves. Charges affecting those who are not here cannot be investigated. Those who are here denied the charges so far as they were concerned. To deal with each such charge would require almost a separate trial for each case. The general impression left on my mind is that there has been some ill treatment, or, at any rate, rough handling; but I should find it impossible to treat any individual case as proved, and I think it would be improper to specify cases where an absentee was concerned, nor has it been such as to cause serious ill health. The greatest difficulty in investigating the subject arises out of the manifest exaggeration in the narratives of the greater number of witnesses. I must add that I do not think that the guards have been in all cases men of such character as to justify placing them in positions of responsibility.

As to the nature of the acts to which I refer, I have to say that I have no reason to think that in any case the guards picked a man out for ill treatment, but that they were probably over-rough in handling men who resisted disciplinary punishment. In such cases any one who has attended Courts of justice knows how extremely difficult it is to sift contradictory evidence on such a subject, and how many grades there are between using necessary force to overcome resistance and using unnecessary violence against a man who is resisting. Cases, for instance, of resisting the police are notoriously of the class that gives rise to the greatest difficulty.

4. COMPULSORY WORK BY INTERNED CIVILIANS.

The British Government has laid down a definite policy with respect to the treatment of alien enemies of civil status. It starts with the assumption that they are at large. A report of a speech of Sir Auckland Geddes, headed "Organization of the Nation's Man-power," outlines this policy, and in it is the following passage: "It has been decided," Sir Auckland said, "that enemy aliens shall not be allowed any longer to grow fat at the expense of British subjects taken for military service, and that every enemy alien, regardless of age, in the country has either to undertake work of national importance under the direction of the Ministry, or else be interned, in which case they will be put to roadmaking or other suitable work."

These conditions appear, as to German prisoners of war, to be inapplicable in New Zealand, where the popular voice requires that alien enemies shall not be allowed to work in the public interest. They are therefore left at large under police observation, excepting that about four hundred out of six thousand are interned. In England the more able-bodied of these would be put out on useful public works, such as roadmaking, but here there are difficulties which have not been overcome.