

18. STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS.

The original buildings were four large barracks built about 1874 for quarantine purposes, when there was an extensive immigration project initiated by the Government. They were built of wood, as are all dwellinghouses at Wellington. In August, 1914, they were devoted to the purposes of an internment camp. Prisoners have accumulated (taking half-yearly intervals) in the following numbers :—

1914—August	12	..	..	..	..	80
1915—February	3	..	..	..	..	141
July	31	..	..	..	..	184
1916—January	1	..	..	..	..	231
June	30	..	..	..	..	280
1917—January	1	..	..	..	..	277
June	30	..	..	..	..	270
1918—January	1	..	..	..	..	279
May	21	..	..	..	..	313

A limited number have been released on parole, and a few have been transferred to Motuihi, a small internment camp on a larger island near Auckland. Though the buildings were old they have been kept in repair, though not completely so.

From time to time hopes have been formed of an early ending of the war. Had it been foreseen in 1914 how long it would last the subject would perhaps have been treated differently. It is to be observed as a matter of certainty that nowhere among the belligerents were the prospects of a short war more clearly defined than in the advisers of the enemy Governments.

Structural questions have been faced, in this view, from time to time as requirements increased. Two large hutments have been added to the buildings, one for the soldiers and one for prisoners of war.

During the sitting of this Commission discussions have arisen from time to time, and the following matters have been dealt with or have formed the subject of recommendations :—

HOSPITAL.

Hitherto a portion of one of the barracks has been used, while all bad cases and cases for operations have been sent to Wellington Hospital. Before this commission was issued the authorities had adopted a plan for a local hospital, for the construction of which material is now being transported to the island.

WATER-SUPPLY.

The supply of fresh water has been generally deficient. There are two large concrete tanks in the yard, but the amount of water led to them is small. The buildings are on the top of the island, with no catchment area available. It was therefore considered necessary to transport water by steamer to the island, pump it into iron tanks on the wharf, and thence have it carried in buckets to the buildings, a height of 150 ft. The prisoners of war have made it one of their grievances that they were obliged to do this work without remuneration.

During the sitting of the Commission an official of the Public Works Department was asked to visit the island and advise whether it would be feasible to connect the two newest buildings with the concrete tanks, and so utilize a large amount of rain-water falling on their roofs. This was found feasible, and will of itself give relief. I then saw Mr. Seddon, the official of the Public Works Department in question, and asked him whether it was feasible to utilize in the same way the roof area of the four older buildings, or some of them, the guttering of which was obviously in such a decayed state that it was probably not worth while to patch it so as to make it carry water. He told me that he thought the whole of the guttering would have to be renewed, and that the cost would be about £100, but that with this the whole roof-space would become available. I have no hesitation in recommending this expenditure, as it will entirely or almost entirely avoid the present cost of transporting water, and will practically put an end to all the irritation arising out of employing prisoners of war to transport it. I should give the same advice even if the cost was considerably to exceed £100.