

BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.

Invercargill Borstal Institution for Lads.

(Superintendent, Mr. C. G. L. POLLOCK.)

At the beginning of the year there were 210 male inmates in custody, 199 of whom were Borstal inmates and 11 inmates of the Reformatory for Men. During the year 152 were received into the Borstal Institution and 107 discharged or otherwise disposed of, leaving 244 in custody at the 31st December, 1927; 87 males and 3 females were received into the prison, and 88 males and three females were discharged, leaving 10 male inmates in the Reformatory for Men at the end of the year. Eighty-seven Borstal inmates were released on the recommendation of the Parole Board, and three on expiration of sentence. The total daily average of inmates in custody was 228·12 in the Borstal Institution, and 6·06 in the Reformatory.

The conduct and industry of the inmates have been very good, and there were no escapes during the year.

Eight Borstal inmates were admitted to the public hospital, mostly for operative treatment; two of these were in hospital for eighty days and sixty days respectively, the remainder for periods from eleven days up to twenty-nine days. Apart from this there has been a marked improvement in the health of the inmates. This it is thought can be attributed to the improvement in the dietary.

School classes have been held regularly throughout the year, and work of sound merit has been accomplished by the three specially appointed visiting teachers. The results have been enhanced by the ready response of the pupils, and the good tone prevailing in each class. But the limited time allotted for school-work limits also its usefulness, and the need for extending its scope is becoming manifest.

On Saturday mornings two special classes are held by Mr. T. Matthews, Agricultural Instructor under the Southland Education Board. One is for instruction in wool-classing, for which there was erected a building designed and equipped on the model of an up-to-date wool-shed. The other takes up agricultural science from both the theoretical and practical standpoint. For the latter purpose a selected area of about an acre has been set aside, in which are grown the various vegetables, grasses, clovers, and root crops. In all these sowings, experimental value is gained by marking off plots in which different manures have been used, the comparative yields in the case of each variety of crop being recorded. In order to encourage the students who take up this course, the trustees in the estate of the late Reginald McKinnon have awarded two special book prizes, of value £1 and 10s. respectively, for the highest points gained in the agricultural class. Mr. Matthews's work is voluntary, and the institution is greatly indebted to him for his valuable services ungrudgingly given.

The technical classes in bricklaying, signwriting, and carpentry furnished practical evidence of their efficiency. From them came the skilled labour which did all the block-laying and plastering of the new wing, and which constructed on approved lines all the furniture required. Training that proves itself in such shape cannot but help its subjects to a place in the industrial world, and so safeguard them from drifting.

The Borstal Band, under Mr. Wills, continues its successful career, to the benefit of the performers and the institution. The unavoidably frequent changes of membership render it difficult to keep this band up to standard, but it rises superior to this handicap.

Great importance is now attached to the physical training of our lads. Undoubtedly they show marked improvement of physique, and this is partly due to the graduated course of Swedish drill exercises in which Mr. Page gives effective instruction throughout the year. Whenever called upon, the senior class, which represents high proficiency in this form of culture, has been able to give a very fine display. But games, because of their moral and social reactions as well as their physical benefits, have a strong claim to a place in our educational scheme. They have been organized so that, when weather permits, every Saturday afternoon, on holidays, and in the evenings, every one is able to join in some form of sport. Under the capable direction of Mr. W. F. Sutton, who has given his services as coach every Saturday afternoon and at other times during the week, our Rugby football team has become a credit to the institution. This led to a new departure of far-reaching importance in the form of visits from outside teams, which meet our boys in the institution grounds. The opening match, played against the Southland Boys' High School, proved a great success, and augured well for future contests. The visitors declared that their opponents in this instance had played the game in every sense of the phrase: that, in fact, the spirit of the match was similar to that which obtains when rival colleges meet—keen rivalry, a hard, fast game, fair and sportsmanlike play. Other visiting teams were Marists, Star, Invercargill, Pirates, Technical College. The aggregate points for the season stood in favour of the Borstal team, which in every match extended its opponents' playing-powers to the utmost. The executive of the Southland Rugby Union has given every assistance and encouragement, and arrangements have been made for the Borstal team to enter the competitions of the coming season.

When football closed for the year cricket was taken up with a zest, which will be increased when the kindly offered visits from outside teams put our players on their mettle. Tennis, now fully provided for, is proving an exhilarating pastime, and here, too, friendly matches with visitors would be welcomed. A distinct impetus is lent to our recreative activities by such visits. More than that, they advance the Borstal another step nearer to its aim of being a recognized part of the educational rather than of the penal system. When its boys can meet on the playing-field their contemporaries from without and spend with them a pleasant time in friendly emulation on a common footing, the delicate service is rendered of getting these boys in touch with normal society again. A hopeful breach is made in that intangible barrier which, to them at any rate, seemed to cut them off from the fellowship of decent citizens.