

GOVERNMENT REFORMATORY FOR WOMEN.

ADDINGTON, CHRISTCHURCH.

Having obtained a gracious and cordial permission to visit this Institution from the new Minister of Justice (The Hon. T. Wilford) through Mr Matthews, Inspector of Prisons, I gladly availed myself of the opportunity when passing through Christchurch, on my way to settle on the West Coast.

I made a special appointment by telephone with the lady superintendent, and on entering the precincts I was gratified to see various improvements since the last time I was there. The old unsightly building at the entrance has been pulled down, and from the debris has been thrown up in picturesque fashion, various rockery arrangements which had been planted with flowers. On going further I noted that the garden and grounds generally, indicated that the women prisoners (or shall we say "patients," to use the term of the lady superintendent) had not only been industrious in carrying out directions, but had put their hearts into their work. The flower-beds had yielded a good supply, and the vegetable garden too, had been remunerative, which could be made more so with larger space.

After inspecting the kitchen and laundry, where women were busily employed, I visited the sewing rooms in which much useful and valuable work is turned out for the Red Cross and patriotic efforts. I saw, also, the hospital ward, the surgical theatre, and the Institution Chapel, which had been furnished and decorated by the late Mrs Cunningham, whose long-continued and effective services in the welfare of the prisoners of New Zealand are well-known and appreciated. Services are held in this Chapel by the Anglican Church and the Salvation Army, each Sunday. The Roman Catholic Church being represented by members of St. Paul de Vincent.

The "first offenders" were occupied in making up shirts for the men prisoners of other gaols. They did this, together with Red Cross work, in a separate sewing room.

I was glad to hear that there is a system in vogue whereby "habitual criminals," on indeterminate sentences, if well behaved, are able to earn 6d or 9d per diem so that they are enabled to purchase little extra indulgences, such as cheese, cocoa, butter or sugar from time to time. Those on

"reformatory detention" can also earn, and are paid their wages at termination of sentence, as well as being able to provide new clothing wherewith to begin afresh on re-entering the world.

But as it was pointed out, the present method of giving short sentences only for inebriates, gives little chance of a radical cure—it is constantly the case that the women return over and over again—some of them having from 20 to over 100 convictions against their record in the official books! This makes the magisterial convictions for a month—three months—or a year—so discouraging to any reformatory officers who wish the true welfare of the patients.

Naturally, I enquired what new reform was specially desirable in the interests of these cases, and was answered most emphatically, "**Prohibition**"—"Prohibition." For at least 90 per cent. of these prisoners find their way to the Reformatory in the first place, and constantly return, through indulgence in alcoholic liquors. If drink were done away, the result later on would be—"No cases and an empty prison." I was glad to assure the lady superintendent that our W.C.T.U. always stood for National Prohibition, consistently and constantly working for its being secured.

I was told that we should urge for longer sentences with a hope of remedial results, while the women could secure by good conduct those privileges given to "indeterminate sentence" cases. (There are now 57 inmates, including all grades, not only old women, but younger; though as is well known young girls are committed to the Te Oranga Reformatory School, Christchurch.

An "Inebriate Department" is much needed, whereby a "farm colony" could be started in the country with sufficient area for keeping cows (with a dairy), fowls, pigs, etc., and where fruit and vegetables could be grown, not only for prison requirements there and elsewhere, but in exchange for other commodities. The serious war-conditions at present, seem to preclude this purpose being carried out, though it appears to my own judgment that the existing premises are not very suitable, abutting on a main thoroughfare in a populous district, Addington. These valuable premises, I should think, could be sold to great advantage, or an exchange made, for a larger property some miles from any town. All the necessary labour for carrying it on would be free labour, and the

produce could be obtained without much cost accordingly.

It is gratifying to know that the open air work is not only beneficial to the health and character of the women, but that it is thoroughly congenial to them and helpful in uplifting them morally, as always strongly advocated by Lady Henry Somerset.

The longer sentences by retaining the patients for an adequate period would be more remedial, giving a better chance for a real cure, and would also save the pockets of the ratepayers, inasmuch as the upkeep of the police and prisons with all the machinery of the law courts, is a costly business, and the short sentences frequently mean constant recurring convictions of these poor women.

There is another point—for the protection of society generally, and the welfare of the young people (of both sexes) particularly, it is most important that these "hardened offenders" or weak-willed "patients," as others would say, should be kept safely away under reformatory care. To send them loose again into ordinary life is to harass the public and contaminate the younger citizens. Surely when 20 or more convictions are recorded, such a person should be under continued control in country surroundings for 3 to 5 years, or even longer in such cases!

As the W.C.T.U. is such a strong body, we should be represented officially and an appointed official visitor should be chosen who is practical, kindly and judicious. She could then be furnished with the name, age and date of any woman's leaving the Reformatory at the expiration of sentence—meet her, convey her to a respectable lodging if necessary, or to a suitable place of employment, see that any necessary clothes were ready, and continue an occasional general supervision. A few other ladies could form a small sub-committee to assist the official visitor as needed.

Books and magazines are issued freely, and such would be welcomed, as there is much spare time spent alone in the cells after the day's work is over. As to diet—plain, nourishing food is given, but personally I feel that a liberal supply of fruit (which outsiders could send) would lessen the drink craving. At British and American Inebriate Institutions, apples are largely distributed with this special object.

As women workers, our W.C.T.U. ought to make an effort in the lines