

HELP FOR RELEASED PRISONERS.

If, however, we are to look for improvement in the conduct of those who come out of prison, something more must be done by society for the released prisoner than has yet been done. The burden that he carries has to be remembered. He has a dishonoured name. Even his own relatives have often lost confidence in him, and he is generally without character or credit. He looks for work and sometimes finds it, and the kindness of his employer often helps him in his struggle to live well. All employers are not always considerate. He sometimes gets out of work and loses heart. To whom can he turn for assistance? There are prisoners' aid societies in larger towns who help those just released from gaol, and considering the small funds they have to expend in assistance they often do good work; but it is hardly their function to keep in touch with men or women who have been for some time free. Other associations connected with some of the religious organizations help, but the released prisoner wants some additional help. His fall, when he again falls, arises often from two causes—first, want of suitable employment; second, indulgence in alcohol. Could society through its organism, the Government, help? We venture to suggest that there should be some Government farms—pastoral, agricultural, horticultural, or fruitgrowing—to which every prisoner would know that when he was out of work he could go and get lodging, food, &c., on his giving a satisfactory return in work. He would also be entitled to some wages, but as the institution would not be a place for any but casual work he would have to be content with less reward than is obtained where work is of a permanent character. If such an institution were founded it would be self-supporting, and it would give no excuse for a man relapsing into crime through lack of the means of subsistence or lack of work. Care would have to be taken that the manager of such an institution would be possessed of strong common sense, coupled with kindness of heart and demeanour. There are institutions in other countries akin to what we suggest, and they have been successful in helping many who required assistance.

CHANGES IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD.

The Board is at present constituted as follows: The Hon. Sir Robert Stout, K.C.M.G., Chief Justice, President; Messrs. G. Fenwick, C. B. Jordan, W. Reece, F. Waldegrave, and Dr. Hay.

Mr. Waldegrave, one of the original members, resigned in 1912, but was reappointed on the resignation of Mr. F. G. Ewington.

The Board placed on record its high appreciation of Mr. Ewington's services, and their regret that ill health prevented him longer continuing a member.

Mr. J. R. Blair, another of the original members, died in November last. In the minutes were recorded the Board's sense of the loss of a valued friend and colleague, and its recognition of his devotion to public duties and of his great services in the work of the Board.

The remaining members were reappointed, and with the above changes the Board remains as it was in 1911.

During the term the Board has been in existence it has watched with interest many changes in the administration of prison work following upon the legislation of 1910. It desires to place on record its appreciation of the difficulties which have met the Department, and the manner in which many of them have been overcome. The Board has seen much improvement in every way in discipline, in general administration, in the hopefulness of many prisoners, and in their conduct in and out of prison. Much, no doubt, remains to be accomplished. The reformation of prisoners is, like the improvement and advance of the rest of humanity, a slow movement, and if progress is being made something has been accomplished. Too much must not be expected from reformatory detention. In some instances the sentences are so slight that men trained to a career of crime have not time to learn industrious habits. The Courts, no doubt, in awarding short reformatory sentences, does so as an equivalent for probation out of prison, and in cases where probation cannot well be given leaving it to the Board to grant probation should such be considered advisable. Any probation, however, less than two years is of little avail. As we have, however, said, the results on the whole are satisfactory.

RETURNS.

We append some returns that may be useful in showing the results of the methods adopted in treating prisoners in our Dominion.

Signed on behalf of the Board,

ROBERT STOUT, President.