

1915.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, PRISONS BRANCH:
P R I S O N S B O A R D
(ANNUAL REPORT OF) FOR 1914

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—1st May, 1915.
I have the honour to forward herewith the report of the Prisons Board for the year 1914.
I have, &c.,
The Hon. the Minister of Justice, Wellington.ROBERT STOUT, President.

REPORT.

DURING the year 1914 the Board held eight meetings. The following table shows the dates and places of meetings, and the number of cases considered at each meeting :—

Date.	Place of Meeting.	Cases considered of		Total.
		Habitual Criminals and Offenders.	Persons undergoing Reformative Detention.	
March 18	Wellington	26	114	140
April 24	"	..	1	1
May 11 and 12	New Plymouth	36	45	81
May 14 and 15	Auckland			
August 13	Wellington	28	25	53
September 22	Kaingaroa	3	59	62
" 23	Waipa			
" 25	Waikeria			
November 3	Addington	22	84	106
" 3	Lyttelton			
" 5	Invercargill			
" 27	Wellington	1	2	3
December 24	"	1	2	3
Totals		117	332	449

Many of the cases were those of persons who came more than once before the Board. The total number of distinct persons who came under the jurisdiction of the Board as habitual criminals was sixty-nine, and as undergoing reformative detention 190. These were dealt with as follows :—

Fifteen habitual criminals were recommended for release on probation, and were released; 101 persons undergoing reformative detention were recommended for release on probation, and were so released; four habitual criminals who had been released on probation were recommended for discharge, and were discharged; and two persons on probation under reformative detention were recommended for discharge, and were so discharged.

The results of these releases on probation and discharges were that out of the total of those who had been under reformatory detention fifteen were returned to prison, and five failed to report themselves and may possibly have left the Dominion. Nine who had been declared habitual criminals were returned to prison, and the whereabouts of three is unknown. Of those returned to prison who had been under reformatory detention, nine were found guilty of a specific new offence, and eleven committed breaches of the conditions of their licenses; and of the nine habituals returned to prison, five were found guilty of fresh offences, the others having otherwise broken the conditions of their probationary license. Satisfactory reports of the conduct of the others released on probation have been received.

Of the habitual criminals and offenders, the total number released on probation during the years 1911, 1912, 1913, and 1914 was eighty-nine, and of these twenty were convicted of fresh specific offences—namely, in 1911, five; in 1912, six; in 1913, four; and in 1914, five. Considering their past history in the large number of previous convictions against them—some having over thirty—the result may be considered satisfactory.

FEMALE PRISONERS.

The number of female prisoners in our prisons is, relatively to the number of male prisoners, very small. In 1914 the total number of females that came under our jurisdiction was only four habitual criminals and offenders and eight sentenced to reformatory treatment. Of these two habituals were released on probation, and three under reformatory treatment were released on probation. One habitual who had been released on probation was recommended for discharge; one habitual was found guilty of a new offence, and returned to prison; and the whereabouts of the other female is unknown.

The female prison at Addington has now been established for two years, and, so far as the Board can judge, it has proved a useful institution. Classification of female prisoners, because of the smallness of the number, is difficult, for separate institutions cannot be established for the small number of female delinquents. There is a class of female prisoners—and it is the largest class—who do not commit any serious crime, but who lead drunken and criminal lives. They rarely come under the jurisdiction of the Board, and are coming in and going out of prison every few months. It seems to the Board there is need of an alteration of our criminal law to deal with these, and a need also of some small but special reformatory institution to which they could be sent for a term long enough to give them a chance of being reformed. Many of them can hardly be said to have done more than to have entered on a career of crime. If those having a baneful influence were kept in ordinary prisons, and the young and thoughtless were treated in a reformatory institution, many of them might be rescued from a career of vice and crime and made good citizens.

CLASSIFICATION OF PRISONERS.

The classification of prisoners is ever difficult, as the crime committed, or even the frequency of convictions, is not always a test of criminality. Efforts have been made, however, to classify the prisoners, and it is understood that a more complete scheme is dependent on buildings now in course of erection. Suitable first offenders, to whom the Courts were unable to give probation, have been sent to Waipa, where, residing in cubicle huts, living and working in the open air at tree-planting and gardening, their physical condition has much improved. Kaingaroa is also a tree-planting camp. Here the prisoners have been selected from other prisons because of their good conduct, and live in the same conditions as at Waipa. Waikeria is a large prison farm, and a class similar to those at Kaingaroa has been sent there. Youthful prisoners are sent to Invercargill, where they are taught the habit of industry.

At Roto Aira there is a road-making camp, mainly of habituals, who it is believed have improved and can be trusted, and after they have spent some time in Roto Aira the Board hopes to be able to recommend them for release on probation. A prison farm is being established at Templeton, near Christchurch, on a considerable area of land, and it is hoped that these new prisons will serve a similar purpose to those at Waikeria and Kaingaroa. An open-air and industrious life are two of the main means that can be employed to lead those who have erred to walk in new paths.

EMPLOYMENT OF PRISONERS.

In the prisons occupation is found for all the prisoners, mainly out-of-door work, quarrying, stone-breaking, land-reclamation, tree-planting, farming, gardening, &c. Trades are not taught, as it is very difficult, considering the terms of imprisonment and the class of prisoners and their numbers, to teach specific trades. We have to remember that the main industries of New Zealand are what may be termed primary industries—farming, mining, and gardening. It is better then to aim at getting prisoners trained for those industries in which labour is most in demand, and therefore to train some to manual labour such as road-making, quarrying, &c.; others to farm work; and some, with perhaps less physical strength, to gardening. This is being done, and a great improvement is being effected in the prison life. When the new prison at Templeton is ready for the reception of prisoners, and the old, unsuitable prison at Lyttelton is no longer in existence, further efforts will no doubt be made to train prisoners as expert farm labourers, gardeners, and orchardists. We think that gardening might be further encouraged. Warders who have had training in scientific gardening might be appointed at Waipa, Waikeria, Templeton, and Invercargill, and some prisoners be trained to be efficient gardeners. The life would be healthy, and its reforming effect can hardly be overestimated.

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.

I.—RETURN SHOWING THE NUMBER OF REFORMATIVE DETENTION CASES DEALT WITH BY THE PRISONS BOARD SINCE THE ACT CAME INTO OPERATION—VIZ., 1ST JANUARY, 1911.

Total number sentenced	456
Total cases considered	429
Total number released on recommendation of Board	281
Returned to prison on conviction for further offences	25
Returned to prison for breach of probationary license	29
Absconded	11
Whereabouts unknown	2
Discharged	16
Reformatory detention period expired, and presumably doing well	132
	215
Reporting on probation	66
	281

II.—RETURN SHOWING THE NUMBER OF HABITUAL CRIMINALS DEALT WITH BY THE PRISONS BOARD . SINCE THE ACT CAME INTO OPERATION—VIZ., 1ST JANUARY, 1911.

Total number sentenced	141
Total cases considered	136
Total number released on recommendation of Board	96
Returned to prison on conviction for further offences	24
Returned to prison for breach of probationary license	18
Absconded	10
Whereabouts unknown	3
Discharged and presumably doing well	12
	67
Reporting on probation	29
	96

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