

has become a pressing one, and it is to be hoped that time will be found to pass the necessary legislation during the present year.

OPERATION OF THE CRIMES AMENDMENT ACT, 1910.

The report of the Prisons Board for the year deals shortly with matters arising out of the administration of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, so far as it affects the release and discharge of habitual criminals and of offenders sentenced by the Courts to terms of reformatory detention.

Some years having now elapsed since the passing of the original Habitual Criminals Act, it is desirable that an effort should be made to arrive at the statistical position, and a return has accordingly been prepared by the Prisons Department covering the period from the first establishment of the Board until the present year, 1917. Prior to the passing of the amending Act in 1910 very few cases were dealt with. From the figures that have been compiled it appears that since the first sitting of the Board early in 1911 until April of this year 136 habitual criminals have been released from prisons on probation and 4 have been discharged without probation. Of the 136 released, 23 have been finally discharged after fulfilling the conditions of their probation for a substantial term. Of the total number released and discharged from prison (140), the return shows that 63 have been subsequently reconvicted or have broken the term of their probation and have been returned to prison, and 13 have absconded; 13 have joined the Expeditionary Forces (one of whom has since returned and been reconvicted); 13 have left the Dominion for the countries or States to which they belong, or have resumed their occupations as sailors, firemen, &c.; 3 have died, and 1 has been committed to a mental hospital. The foregoing statement accounts for 106 out of 140 habituals released or discharged from prison. The remaining habituals are still reporting to Probation Officers in different parts of the Dominion. A limited number have been released, returned, and released again. It will thus be seen that of the 140 men released or discharged by the Board 63 may be said to have failed to make good, while the position with regard to the 13 who absconded is uncertain. It is too soon yet to regard these figures as in any way final, in view of the fact that the men released in 1916 and 1917 have not yet been fully tested, nor in the natural course of things can any statistics on this subject ever be final; but the data are sufficient to demonstrate the fact that a reasonable percentage of those who have followed criminal careers during the greater part of their lives have again become law-abiding members of the community. Apart altogether from statistics, the Department is aware of many such cases. A sufficient period has not yet elapsed to enable us to make any useful comparison possible between the figures prior to the passing of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, and those for the subsequent period, but there is little doubt that the enlargement and extension of the original Habitual Criminals and Offenders Act passed in 1906 have resulted in improved administration, and that the Act has thereby assisted in bringing about better results.

A further return is being prepared to illustrate the results from the working of the reformatory-detention section of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, under the auspices of the Prisons Board, but owing to inadequacy of staff it has not been found possible to complete it in time to include it in this year's report.

CHANGES IN THE LOCATION OF PRISONERS.

Owing to the cessation of planting operations in the neighbourhood it became necessary to close the Waipa Tree-planting Prison in December last. The prisoners were transferred to the Kaingaroa camp.

Another change made was the transfer in January last of the habitual criminals from New Plymouth to a division of the Auckland Prison.

These changes effected a much-needed saving in staff, but it is hoped at a later period to again provide separate institutions for the two classes of offenders affected. Classification in our general institutions is extremely difficult, and it is only by reserving special prisons for each of the main classes that a really satisfactory system can be established and maintained. Very little can be done, however, until we have adequate staffs. Compared with other prison systems our staffs have always been below their proper strength, and under war conditions the deficiency has naturally increased.

INEBRIATES.

The inebriates' institutions at Rotorua and Pakatoa have been visited during the year. The Salvation Army authorities are caring for the men and women committed to the islands as satisfactorily as circumstances permit, but, as pointed out in previous reports, a large section of the inmates should be provided for in institutions where discipline could be more strongly enforced and a substantial amount of labour insisted upon. Without these two essentials the efficacy of the measures taken to deal adequately with habitual inebriates under the Reformatory Institutions Act is more than doubtful.

DEPARTMENTAL AND STAFF MATTERS.

During the year it has been found necessary to make a readjustment of the work at headquarters in order to permit of the Under-Secretary of Justice taking over the additional duties of Under-Secretary of Native Affairs and Secretary to the Cook Islands. It was accordingly arranged that the Inspector of Prisons, who possesses the necessary statutory powers, should carry on the whole of the administrative work of the Prisons Department. As this change necessitated the presence of the Inspector in Wellington for the greater part of his time, it became necessary to arrange for the carrying-on of the detail inspection of the prisons by the appointment of a Deputy Inspector. This position was filled by the promotion of Mr. M. Hawkins, Supervisor of Prison Works and Gaoler at Wellington. This alteration in headquarters management was made in August last, and has been working satisfactorily since that date.