

OPERATIONS OF THE CRIMES AMENDMENT ACT, 1910, AND OF SECTION 14 OF THE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 1917.

The operations of the Prisons Board under the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, and the amendment of that Act in 1917, extending its jurisdiction to certain hard-labour cases, are fully dealt with in the report of the Board that is being presented during the current session of Parliament.

Experience has proved that the question of the release on probation of all prisoners sentenced to imprisonment by the Courts should be dealt with by the Board, in order that the treatment of all classes of criminals may be placed on a uniform basis. It is hoped that at a later period the necessary amendments will be made to existing Acts to enable this to be done. In the meantime the measure of reform provided by section 14 of the Statute Law Amendment Act of 1917 has enabled the Prisons Department to carry out its work with greater equity than was previously possible.

DEPARTMENTAL AND STAFF MATTERS.

In spite of shortage of staff caused by war conditions the Prisons Department has continued to carry on its work as a separate Department with comparative efficiency. Now that we are at peace once more it will perhaps be possible to extend our work in various essential directions by the creation of branches that it has hitherto been impossible to establish. This particularly applies to the establishment of a section to deal more effectively with probation and preventive work. This branch has hitherto been hampered by the absence of a permanent staff, and the consequent lack of a thorough central system of organization. New Zealand has always fallen far short of its obligations in this direction, and it is quite time that this important branch of social-reform work received adequate State attention.

As stated in my last report, the various prison staffs were much reduced in number and quality by the demands of the Army, but the majority of our officers who have survived will soon have resumed duty, and it is hoped that conditions will again be normal when the time arrives to compile next year's report.

The vacancies that have occurred on the staffs of the different prisons and institutions have been filled, as far as possible, by the selection of applicants who have served with the Expeditionary Forces, but it has been our invariable experience that these men have soon left our service, either voluntarily or compulsorily, for other employment. Better results will no doubt be obtained when a longer period has elapsed since the days of their campaigning and the nervous strain engendered thereby.

The individual branch heads and their staffs have worked well and loyally under most adverse conditions, and the thanks of the Department are due to them one and all for their assistance in carrying on their somewhat thankless duties during a period of considerable stress. The influenza epidemic attacked both officers and prisoners severely, and much difficulty was experienced in carrying on the work of supervision and control while the "plague" was at its height. Warders W. W. Goddard, of Wellington, and C. G. Hall, of Paparua, succumbed to the epidemic. Both were valuable officers, and their loss was much felt by their comrades and by the Department.

Mr. H. McMurray, Gaoler at Napier, died in October last, after a lingering illness. He was a competent and conscientious officer of long and honourable service, who could ill be spared.

The opening of a new camp prison at Trentham, proclaimed as Wi Tako Prison, in April last necessitated the appointment of an additional officer in charge in the person of Principal Warder Dineen, who was promoted to the rank of Chief Warder on assuming his new duties.

So far as the prison staffs are concerned, the most important event of the year has undoubtedly been the substantial increase of pay granted to all officers of the General Division in common with other employees of the State. The average increment per man averaged about £45 above the rates paid to the different ranks for the year ended 31st March, 1914. This increase covered the war bonuses previously paid, and an additional sum to compensate officers for the much-enhanced cost of living due to war conditions.

The pay of new entrants to the Prison service is now £180 per annum, with a house allowance of £30 added for married men, compared with £130 per annum in the year 1909.

After the retirement of Lieut.-Colonel Hume from the office of Inspector of Prisons in 1909-10 a table was published in the first report of his successor setting out the names of the different prisons and prison camps then in existence, together with the number and rank of the officers employed, and the number of prisoners in each institution as at 31st March, 1909. Ten years having elapsed since that date, it is an opportune time to publish a similar table for the year ended 31st March last. The figures and particulars are interesting as showing the great change that has taken place in the decennial period in the distribution of the prisoners of the State and in the nature of their employment, as exemplified by the increase in the number of country institutions and the decrease in the number of men now confined in city prisons.

For purposes of comparison the tables for 1909 and 1919 are published together. An analysis of the figures shows that while in 1909 only 72 male prisoners out of a total of 857 were employed in country work—tree-planting—there were 527 out of a total of 983 employed at farming, roadmaking, tree-planting, reclamation work, &c., in our various institutions and camps in the year 1919. The policy of transferring prisoners from the close confinement and unsatisfactory conditions of the old city prisons to the healthier and more beneficial environment now being provided is still being vigorously carried on, and it is hoped that within a very few years our central prisons will be tenanted only by a small percentage of men who cannot be trusted outside the walls of a strong and self-contained institution.