

PRISONERS DETENTION ACT, 1915.

One male and two female prisoners were dealt with under the provisions of the Prisoners Detention Act during the year 1918. The total number detained beyond the period of their sentences since the Act was passed, in order that they might be treated for venereal disease, is now nineteen. The period of additional detention under the Act seldom exceeds a few months, but we have one case on our books where a detainee remained in the prison-hospital section, under treatment, for twenty-six months after his period of imprisonment had expired.

PREVENTION OF CRIME AND GENERAL PROBATION WORK (FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1908, AND PROBATION SECTION OF CRIMES AMENDMENT ACT, 1910).

Since my last report was written this section of the Department's work has been carried on steadily by the various honorary officers employed. During the year death has claimed two of our oldest and most valued workers—viz., Mr. T. I. Smail, of Christchurch, and Mr. W. Brakenrig, of Auckland. Both these gentlemen had devoted their lives to the great work of social reform, and their loss has been severely felt among those for whom they laboured so long and so earnestly. The number of men and women who are prepared to make the great sacrifices that are necessary to enable this work to be carried on sympathetically and intelligently is indeed limited, and we can ill afford to lose the pioneers who have borne the heat and burden of the day, and who for so many years have been the rallying-points of the forces for good in the communities in which they laboured.

The First Offenders' Probation work at Christchurch is now being carried on by the Rev. Frank Rule, while the Crimes Amendment probationers have been placed under the supervision of the Salvation Army officers, who in recent years have greatly assisted the Department in looking after the interests of those who have been released on probation by the Prisons Board.

Mr. Brakenrig's duties as Crimes Amendment Probation Officer have been taken over by the Rev. F. R. Jeffreys, who for some years past has occupied the position of honorary First Offenders Probation Officer at Auckland. In view of the fact that the probation work of both classes in the northern city district is far heavier than in any other probation district in the Dominion, a departmental officer was assigned to Mr. Jeffreys to enable him to keep pace with the large amount of clerical and other work involved in carrying out the dual duties.

Owing to the limited scope of the First Offenders' Probation Act it has become the practice, during the past two or three years, for Judges and Magistrates to deal with offenders who cannot be legally brought under the provision of that Act by suspending sentence and ordering them to come up for sentence when called upon. Such offenders have been placed under the control and supervision of the Probation Officers with satisfactory results. A system of informal probation has thus grown up that, while serving a useful purpose in the absence of the necessary statutory provision, is uneven in its application, and is outside the general departmental organization. In previous reports I have urged the extension of the provisions of the First Offenders Act to cases where minor previous offences were recorded, and to other cases that might be considered by the Courts to be fully met by the granting of probation. In other words, my suggestion has been that Judges and Magistrates should be given the widest possible discretion to deal with offenders of all classes, as they think fit, either by sentencing them to a term of imprisonment or by granting them probation under strict conditions. In view of the number of persons of both sexes who have been given "informal probation" during the past two years, it is clear that an amendment of the First Offenders' Probation Act in the direction I have recommended is urgently required, and I trust that time will be found during the current session of Parliament to introduce and pass the necessary amending Bill.

Although the First Offenders' Probation Act was passed in 1886, and New Zealand was thus in the van of progress so far as the institution of a probation system was concerned, little or no advance has been made in the past thirty-three years, either in the method of administering the Act, in building up reformatory agencies in connection therewith, or in extending the scope of the Act itself to cover a wider field.

Now that the war is over and the work of reconstruction can be resumed, it behoves all those who are conscious of the necessity of social reform to press forward every agency that will assist in preventing the "scrapping" of lives that are yet young and vigorous, and that under a more enlightened system can be profitably used as part of the economic fabric. Under existing conditions there is a shameful wastage that must not be allowed to continue.

New Zealand, unlike other countries, has no Department or central organization established for the purpose of attacking the root causes of crime, of checking anti-social tendencies in the rising generation, or of dealing intelligently with the large and growing class of juvenile delinquents we have among our population. I refer advisedly to our "growing class of juvenile delinquents" for the reason that our latest returns show that at the present time we have a larger number of young offenders under twenty-five years of age in our prisons and prison institutions than has been the case for many years past.

What is wanted in New Zealand in regard to crime-prevention and probation, as in other matters, is a concentration of effort. At the present time we have two or three Departments of State and certain private organizations controlling, more or less ineffectively, different phases of probation work, social-reform work, prisons, reformatories, special institutions for juvenile delinquents, inebriates' institutions, &c., with inevitable overlapping and lack of efficiency. Much better results would be obtained if we were to emulate the State of Illinois, U.S.A., where a Department known as "The Public Welfare Department" has been established to co-ordinate all the services in connection with what might be called the social-reform work of the State. All the various branches I have referred to have been placed under the control of this Department, and it would appear from the reports on the subject that the system is working satisfactorily.