

The Board observes that the prisoners who have been dealt with under the system of reformative detention are less prone again to offend than those who have been declared habitual criminals, but it is nevertheless a source of gratification that so large a proportion of the latter have proved themselves sufficiently trustworthy once more to take and to keep their places amongst their fellow-citizens. It is to be remembered that they are often heirs to criminal tendencies that have in many cases been aggravated by the surroundings of their youth: to discard this heritage and become useful citizens is no easy task.

The Board desires to point out that of the total number of habitual criminals released on probation 49 per cent. were returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of probation or for committing further offences. It is to be observed, however, that of the remaining 51 per cent. 7 have died, 21 have returned to their former places of residence, 1 has been committed to a mental hospital, and 38 are still under the surveillance of the Probation Officers.

In marked contrast to these figures are the statistics relating to the prisoners under reformative detention, which serve to furnish but further proof of the beneficial results of that system. The fact that 76 per cent. of the total number released after that treatment have not further offended is, in the opinion of the Board, a matter of considerable satisfaction.

The ultimate object of every system is, of course, to effect complete reformation in every case, but it is at once obvious that the vagaries of human nature will always, to a greater or a lesser extent, prove an insuperable barrier to this. Every system must be judged by the distance that it carries us in our struggle; and the Board feels constrained to point out that a system that apparently effects a complete cure in 76 per cent. of the cases subject to its operation must find strong commendation in the judgment of those upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of making adequate provision for the reformation of the offender. The Board cannot help feeling that the success now obtained is in a large measure due to the beneficial effect of the open-air life and useful work on the prisons farms established.

The Board wishes again to bring under the notice of the Government the recommendation made in the report for 1918 with reference to the amendment of the law in order to provide, in the case of petty offenders, for periods of reformative treatment, and respectfully directs attention to the details of that recommendation. In the same report it also indicated the need of some amendment of the law in respect of probationary release granted to hard-labour prisoners, under section 14 of the Act of 1917. To this matter also the Board respectfully calls attention.

The Board desires, in concluding this report, to place on record its appreciation of the manner in which the "open-air" prisons of the Dominion are conducted.

Dated at Wellington, this 29th day of July, 1920.

ROBERT STOUT, President.

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