

VISITORS TO PRISONS.

I desire to record the Department's deep sense of appreciation of the efforts of that self-sacrificing body of workers, including ministers of religion, social workers, rotarians, and others who regularly visit institutions and endeavour to bring solace and cheer to the men detained therein. Prolonged isolation and solitude makes for the repression of the social instinct, and engenders a feeling of resentment against society generally. The kindly and judicious visits from people of discretion and understanding tend to dispel this attitude of mind and make the prisoners realize that although they have offended against society and consequently must pay the penalty of their wrongdoing, society is not remorseless or justice wholly retributive. The voluntary worker in this regard can approach the prisoner from a much better angle than can the official, and many a man leaves prison with a determination never to return, largely because his better nature has been touched through the disinterested kindness and charity of some prison visitor. On the other hand, many prisoners are purely sycophants. Their eye is always to the main chance, and their attitude of mind is just such as is best calculated to lead to their release from custody. Consequently visits from people, however well-meaning, who do not understand the mentality of prisoners, lead only to deception and serve no useful purpose.

Much useful work, both in regard to reformation within the prisons and in connection with the after care of prisoners on release, is being done by Official Visitors and the various Prisoners Aid Societies. The question of extending a helping hand when a prisoner again emerges on the threshold of society is probably the greatest factor in preventing a subsequent lapse. At the present time, with unemployment so prevalent, the difficulty surrounding the discharged prisoner in re-habilitating himself is most acute.

Regular visits to the several institutions have been made by Honorary Visiting Justices. These gentlemen co-operate with the Department in maintaining good order and discipline, but in addition they take a keen interest in the proper care and welfare of the prisoners, making frequent inspections of all equipment, clothing, and rationing arrangements. They also provide a most useful outlet for the ventilation of grievances, besides acting in a more or less judicial capacity in dealing with breaches of the prison regulations.

The Honorary Justices' Association have contributed liberally in necessitous cases to the aid of dependants of prisoners, and have given assistance by way of orders for fares and lodging to deserving impecunious men who have been released from prison. The Department is deeply indebted to these gentlemen for the splendid work they are doing.

THE TREND OF CRIME.

The prisons statistics deal only with offenders who have been sentenced to be detained in prison or a reformatory institution, and contain no particulars of those placed on probation, fined, or otherwise dealt with. In order to make a complete review of the trend of crime it is necessary to refer to the Court statistics which are summarized in the following table :—

Comparative Table of Offences, showing the Total Number of Convictions in the Magistrates' Courts and Persons sentenced in the Supreme Courts for the Five Years 1922-26.

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Offences against the person	..	..		784	918	744	908	914
Offences against property	..	..		3,854	3,672	4,000	4,135	4,822
Offences against good order	..	..		17,150	19,087	21,342	25,499	27,244
Forgery and offences against currency	..	..		50	72	70	75	91
Other offences	..	..	..	13,276	13,980	13,993	13,911	13,703
Totals	..	..	..	35,114	37,729	40,149	44,528	46,774

The principal increases are in the classes "Offences against property" (theft) and "Offences against good order."

This steady increase in crime calls for consideration of the underlying causes, and of the possible means of remedying this undesirable development. The underlying causes of crime are chiefly biological and sociological, although many authorities assert that not nearly the extent of crime is attributable to impaired mentality as is generally supposed. Tests have shown that the average standard of intelligence in certain prisons does not show any appreciable variation with that of other groups of the community. It is entirely wrong to suppose that the entire prison population is comprised of the "great unwashed." There is quite a sprinkling of educated men, including men of professional attainments. The aberrational reaction in the circumstances which have led to their confinement is not so much due to mental instability, as ordinarily understood, as to selfishness and lack of consideration for the rights of others. This condition is attributed in most of these cases, as also in the case of many young offenders, to a neglect in early training in the qualities of self-control and development of a proper ethical standard of outlook.

It is necessary to make a distinction so far as the habitual criminal or recidivist is concerned. He is an offender either from deliberate choice or because of some constitutional defect. In fact, in