

INSPECTOR OF PRISONS to the CONTROLLER-GENERAL OF PRISONS.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year 1928-29 relative to the inspection of the prisons and institutions under the control of the Department.

The larger prisons and Borstal institutions were inspected at regular intervals throughout the year, and the minor prisons and police-gaols less frequently, when opportunity offered. In terms of the regulations all prisoners were given facilities on each of my visits to interview me regarding any matter affecting their detention and treatment. At the larger prisons about 25 per cent. of the men availed themselves of the opportunity to see me, but the percentage of complaints regarding institutional conditions or general treatment were somewhat less than in previous years. Allegations of harsh or unreasonable treatment at the hands of officials are very rarely made by prisoners, but any complaints of this nature are promptly investigated by Visiting Justices. During the past few years the "disagreements" between officials and prisoners have steadily diminished in number as well as in degree of seriousness. The mutinous disturbances and assaults upon warders which were not uncommon occurrences in prison-yards and workshops some years ago are now unknown. This would indicate that the present-day prison official is dealing with a less desperate type of criminal than the warder of a decade or two ago. The change in the attitude of the "long-timer" towards the prison system of disciplinary control is no doubt due to a realization of the fact that he is being treated in a fair and reasonable manner without any sign of vindictiveness or desire to punish. The officials on their part are making a commendable effort to give effect to the Department's policy by studying and treating the men individually with the one aim only, to effect a change in outlook and character.

The standard of industry in the prisons is in a satisfactory state. At the farm and road camps, where the men are specially selected, the standard is somewhat higher than in the town prisons, where the prisoners as a body are considerably below the outside average worker in industrial efficiency. Notwithstanding the fact that few are tradesmen and that a considerable number are physically unfit, the industries are so organized that each man is given some class of work to suit his abilities. There is a noticeable improvement, more especially in the country institutions, in the manner in which the officers supervise and train the men in their work. In farm-work the officials make a point of explaining not only how the work should be done, but why it is done. This system makes the work more interesting as well as instructive, and tends to promote a spirit of co-operation and a better understanding between the officials and the men.

Prisoners appreciate the interest taken in their welfare by voluntary social workers, particularly those who assist the men on discharge by providing employment and the wherewithal to tide them over the difficult period between the date of release and the time when they obtain their first wage. It would seem, from statements made from time to time by discharged prisoners, that owing to the altered conditions under which men now serve their terms and the present unsatisfactory state of the labour-market the necessity for assistance after release is greater than the need for visitation and advice while in prison. It happens occasionally that men who have served short sentences return to prison within a day or two of their release, and sometimes the interval between discharge and reception is a matter of hours. Invariably the plea of the recidivist is lack of employment after release; and, although some ex-prisoners may not be genuinely anxious to obtain work, it is a fact that there are others who deserve assistance in this direction but fail to get it. It is considered that in effecting a change in the character and attitude of delinquents greater success attends the efforts of the social worker who assists and keeps in touch with the men after release, rather than the adviser in morals who confines his work to within the walls of the prison.

The officers as a body take a keen and intelligent interest in their duties. The examination-papers of both probationary and senior warders submitted to you during the year indicate that the officers are familiar with the Acts and Regulations relating to the institutions, and that those whose desire it is to qualify for promotion are making good use of the facilities which you have provided for the study of their duties from the works of well-known writers on criminology.

D. A. MACKINTOSH,
Inspector of Prisons.