

BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.

The foregoing prison statistics include commitments to Borstal institutions, but a separation shows that 164 lads and 12 girls, a total of 176, were committed by the Courts, while 11 youths and 3 young women were transferred to Borstals from industrial schools and penal institutions for the purpose of training and discipline.

The idea of the Borstals, which were constituted under the Prevention of Crime Act, 1924, is to endeavour to carry out a programme of training in citizenship for young offenders who have passed the age or who are regarded as unsuitable for commitment to industrial schools. It is a recognition of the possibilities of reformation in the youthful offender whose mind is still plastic and impressionable, and whose outlook on life is hazy and distorted. It is a departure from the purely penal idea, and stresses the matter of training and discipline rather than punishment.

Each year witnesses a further development of a programme of activities that will conduce to the development of a higher ideal of citizenship, and in this respect special reference is made to the reports attached hereto of the Superintendents of the Borstal institutions. These give an interesting outline of the varied activities of the three Borstal institutions.

The Department is greatly indebted to the many voluntary helpers who give valuable assistance in connection with lectures, special classes, and the training of the inmates. It has been suggested that the Department does not provide facilities for training inmates in any useful trade or industry. In this connection it must be borne in mind that New Zealand is essentially a primary producing country, and in consequence there is a natural bias towards the teaching of farming pursuits. Besides there being little scope for the absorption of labour in what may be termed secondary industries, the terms of detention of inmates do not as a rule allow sufficient time to enable an inmate to undergo a full course of apprenticeship in any particular trade. At the same time 35 tradesmen officers are employed by the Department as instructors, and these are paid specially by the Department to give regular courses of instruction to the inmates. The trades taught are the following: Carpentering, bricklaying, blacksmithing, motor (mechanical repairs), gardening, dairying, cooking, bootmaking, tailoring, painting and signwriting, plumbing, bridge-building, wool-classing, and plastering.

The aim is to teach inmates a useful artisan trade which will involve the minimum of outlay in technical equipment, and at the same time enable an inmate to take up an honest calling on release. The Department has evidence by way of numerous letters from ex-inmates, and reports from Probation Officers, showing that a large number are in useful employment of a nature that is directly associated with the training received whilst in detention.

After the expiration of a term of Borstal detention, the Prevention of Crime Act provides for a period of twelve months' supervision or oversight to ensure as far as possible complete rehabilitation. It is recognized that much institutional effort would be futile in the absence of some system of after-care. The Women's Borstal Association continues to function most helpfully in this respect with regard to young women discharged from the Point Halswell Borstal. This organization arranges for voluntary associates to maintain friendly oversight in whatever town a discharged girl takes up domicile, and there is no doubt that this is a material factor in preventing subsequent lapses.

As an indication of the splendid manner in which voluntary Probation Committees exercise a similar function in regard to discharged Borstal lads, an event which is probably unique in the history of prisons may be mentioned. The Dunedin Probation Committee arranged for the Superintendent of the Invercargill Borstal to give an address on the work of the Borstal, and at the same time invited all the ex-Borstal lads under its care to a tea at the local Y.M.C.A. to meet the Superintendent. The fact that over thirty lads, some coming a considerable distance, took the trouble to foregather to meet the Superintendent, besides reflecting creditably on the organization of the Probation Committee, is not only striking evidence of the abandonment of the repressive official relationship, but also is an eloquent testimony of the attitude of friendly esteem in which the Superintendent is held, such being the very essence of the Borstal system.

The Borstal scheme is now past the experimental stage, and the satisfactory results amply justify the great amount of thought and attention given by the staff and by a large band of voluntary helpers in both in-care and after-care work.

A summary of the case records show that of the total of 3,208 young offenders who have passed through the Invercargill and Waikeria Institutions, only a fraction over 10 per cent. have again been reconvicted during the past eight years and a half. The total number of committals to the Point Halswell Borstal Institution since its inception five years ago up to the 31st December last was 123. Of this number 88 have been released and only 6 have again appeared before the Courts. Of the total number of persons (male and female) released under the Prevention of Crime Act only 16 per cent. have turned out to be failures.

It has been suggested that these remarkably high percentages of successes are probably due to the majority of those committed to Borstal being first offenders. This is by no means the case. Out of 176 direct committals to Borstal last year no less than 113 had been previously convicted or dealt with on one or more occasions by the Courts for delinquency.

INDUSTRY AND DEVELOPMENT.

It is axiomatic, so far as the Department is concerned, that the welfare of prisoners should not be subordinated wholly to economic considerations, and for this reason the choice of industries is restricted according to their suitability as prison undertakings. It is also noticeable that the improved conditions and the greater privileges now granted prisoners are bearing fruit in the shape of better discipline and increased industry.