

The total committals to prison last year—viz., 5,340—exceeded those of the previous year by 431. This increase may be regarded as symptomatic of the times, for it is the experience, both here and abroad, that industrial depressions show their reflex in the criminal statistics. According to recent official reports from England the disproportionate increase in crime in that country during the past few years is ascribed largely to the adverse economic conditions. It is significant also to observe that whereas the Courts in England in recent years have tended more and more to show leniency by the greater use of probation and by passing shorter sentences, they have latterly been obliged to change their practice and to have greater recourse to imprisonment and to the infliction of more substantial sentences than hitherto.

Although the past two years have witnessed a decided upward turn in the number of committals to prison in the Dominion—particularly in respect of offences against property—as mentioned in my report last year, the general trend of the prison population in New Zealand for some years past has been downward; and it is hoped that the present state of affairs is but an ephemeral reaction to the existing unhappy social and economic conditions.

The following summary shows the nature of the offences and the number of distinct persons imprisoned during the past five years, as compared with the quinquennium immediately preceding the war:—

Year.	Offences against the Person.	Offences against Property.	Drunkenness, Vagrancy, and other Offences.	Total.	Ratio to 10,000 of Population.
1909	181	727	2,251	3,159	32·51
1910	238	772	2,232	3,242	32·45
1911	153	587	2,137	2,877	28·33
1912	153	598	2,272	3,023	29·10
1913	220	685	2,324	3,229	30·22
1927	192	937	1,582	2,711	18·84
1928	165	977	1,506	2,548	17·37
1929	196	854	1,546	2,596	17·62
1930	194	968	1,703	2,864	19·19
1931	216	1,155	1,832	3,203	21·17

Of the total number of 3,203 distinct persons received during the year, 1,963 offenders had been previously convicted. In connection with these, in 247 cases the former convictions had been met by way of fine; in 396 cases probation had been granted; in forty-six cases the offender on a previous occasion had been committed to an industrial school; in ninety cases Borstal detention had been ordered; in 225 cases reformatory detention had been prescribed; and in 1,430 cases simple imprisonment or hard labour had been imposed. These figures give some indication of the intractable material dealt with, some of the criminals having graduated through successively from one form of sentence to another.

The following statement summarizes the age groups of persons not previously convicted and those previously convicted:—

Age Group.	Not previously convicted.	Previously convicted.	Total.
Under 20	118	85	203
20–25	273	282	555
25–30	202	286	488
30–40	297	525	822
40 and upwards	348	781	1,129
Not stated	2	4	6
	1,240	1,963	3,203

An analysis of the figures relating to those previously convicted (though not necessarily previously imprisoned) shows that 471, or 15 per cent., of the total distinct persons dealt with had one former conviction; 255, or 8 per cent., had been twice previously convicted; 192, or 6 per cent., three times; and 1,045, or 33 per cent., had been convicted more than three times, and some of these several times during the same year. Of course it must be borne in mind that a large proportion of these are petty recidivists (as persistent repeaters are called), and were concerned in what may be regarded as more in the nature of nuisances than crimes. In this connection it is to be observed that 374 persons were committed to prison for drunkenness, 347 for vagrancy, and 1,111 for more or less venial miscellaneous offences. These account for 57 per cent. of the total persons sentenced to imprisonment.