

*Escapees.*

Eleven prisoners and six Borstal detainees escaped during the year, and all were recaptured. Five made unsuccessful attempts to escape. It is satisfactory to be able to record that every prisoner who has escaped during the past ten years has been accounted for. The last one outstanding who escaped from Mount Eden some two years ago has recently been located in a penitentiary in Los Angeles.

It is recognized that under the present method of dealing with prisoners, particularly at the camps, opportunities for escaping are bound to exist. Experience shows that the reposing of trust within practical limits is an essential element in any scheme of reformation, as it contributes in no small measure in the building-up of self-esteem, and it is exceedingly satisfactory that so few violate the trust placed in them. In the Dominion the likelihood of avoiding detection is undoubtedly remote, and the futility of escaping is gradually being realized by the inmates themselves, but many prisoners are creatures of impulse. Whenever prisoners who are placed in positions of trust betray the confidence reposed in them and escape from custody the Department usually presses for a salutary penalty, because an escape not only involves serious inconvenience to the authorities by dislocating the routine of the institution, but the escapees in their short period of freedom usually leave a trail of crime in their wake.

*Capital Offences.*

There were three persons convicted on capital charges during the year, all of whom were executed—one at Mount Eden and two at Wellington Prison.

*Health of Prisoners.*

The general health of prisoners during the year has been particularly good, the daily average number on the sick-list (26·60) being the lowest recorded over the past seven years. There is no doubt that the regular life, the plain and wholesome diet, and liberal vegetable ration in recent years have contributed to an improved standard of health in our penal establishments. The majority of prisoners put on weight and improved in general physique.

Most of the sickness amongst prisoners is due to causes existing prior to their committal to prison. The health of those who are received in a physically fit condition usually continues satisfactory during their detention. Venereal disease is still more prevalent than in past years, but no prisoner is released until certified as non-infective.

The total number of inmates transferred to public hospitals for treatment during the year was 124. There were no outbreaks of any of the common epidemic diseases at any of the institutions during the year.

There were twenty-two inmates transferred to mental hospitals either upon certification or for observation as to mental condition before being finally dealt with by the Courts.

It is certainly desirable that the Courts should be aware of a person's mental condition before dealing with him where there is any doubt on the matter, as this has definite relation to the question of responsibility, but there is also the matter of the protection of society. Where an offender is certifiable no difficulty arises, but there are many who are abnormal and who could be regarded as socially defective but are not certifiable. These, in the interests of themselves and the community, must be sentenced to imprisonment, as there is no other appropriate place of custody. The need for the establishment of a suitable institution for the detention of this type of case is becoming year by year more apparent, and is at present under consideration by the Director-General of Mental Hospitals. A typical case illustrates the problem:—

“A” was found guilty on a charge of indecent assault on a female child aged five years; on a similar charge in respect of a female child aged six years; on a charge of common assault on another little girl of tender years; and on a charge of assault on a woman with intent to do bodily harm. The trial Judge, in passing sentence, stated that the prisoner had been examined by two competent medical men who testified that although he was a degenerate he was not insane. The Judge considered that the prisoner should be put out of harm's way for a substantial period and sentenced him to a total of eleven years' imprisonment. During detention the prisoner has been examined from time to time by mental specialists who have expressed the opinion that he is a social defective of the “schizoid type,” but is not certifiable as insane, and therefore cannot be committed to a mental hospital. He is subject to strong perverted sexual impulses, and does not inhibit them but prefers to follow their dictates. He knows, however, that the acts he committed were wrong, but, like many of this type, prefers to gratify his desires than to control them. He is recognized to be a dangerous man to be at large, and according to medical opinion there is not likely to be any improvement in his mental condition. A fixed term of sentence is obviously not appropriate to such a case, because when such term expires he will be a potential menace. Permanent segregation would seem to be the only course in such cases for the protection of the community.

*BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.*

The foregoing statistics include committals to Borstal institutions established under the Prevention of Crime Act, 1924.

There are three Borstal institutions in the Dominion, one for lads under twenty-one years of age at Invercargill, and one near Te Awamutu (Waikeria) for young men under twenty-five years of age. There is also an institution for young women at Point Halswell, Wellington.