

BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.

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

The Borstal system in New Zealand is based on the principles of the English Borstal system, and the maximum age for admission is twenty-three years. The maximum period for which an offender can be committed is five years. It will therefore be seen that the ages of the inmates can run up to twenty-eight years.

The Borstal system is an integral part of the prison system attacking the problem of crime in the incipient stages in order to arrest anti-social trends before they become deeply established habits. There is a distinct line of cleavage between the juvenile delinquent, towards whom the State adopts a *parens patriæ* attitude by placing him under the supervision and care of the Child Welfare Department, and the post-adolescent offender who is regarded at law as being more responsible for his conduct and is required to learn in the stern school of experience that crime does not pay. This latter class of offender is sent to the Borstal for rigorous training and discipline, and the aim is to inculcate habits of industry and orderliness of conduct that will fit inmates to take their place as useful law-abiding units when released. Child-welfare is essentially preventative, whereas Borstal is reclamationary, and experience shows the urgent desirability of adopting prophylactic measures in the young, as the older and more habituated to crime an offender becomes, the more difficult is the problem of reform. This view is supported by a recent commentary by an English writer on the English system, which reads as follows:—

“The authorities have learnt that it is much better to deal with a boy or girl of fourteen or fifteen than to wait until he or she is old enough in crime to be sent to a Borstal institution. This attitude is confirmed by the fact that the percentage of successes obtained in the industrial schools of this country is from 85 to 90 per cent., whereas in Borstal institutions—where, it need hardly be emphasized, those under treatment are to some degree more hardened—the percentage of success is 65. This difference is attributed by the authorities to leaving the problem for three or four years after it should have been faced.

An order made by a Juvenile Court is intended not with the idea of punishment, but of making a good citizen.”

The number sent to Borstal last year was the smallest since 1925, comprising 81 young men committed direct by the Courts, and 18 young women. In addition, 21 young men were transferred to Borstal from other institutions, making a total of 120, as compared with 153 for 1933 and 242 for 1932.

This fall in the number of commitments is in sympathy with the general reduction in the number of young offenders as shown by the statistical tables referred to above, but it also indicates that the Courts are now sending to Borstal only cases where such a course is absolutely necessary for the protection of the community and in the interests of the offenders themselves. Many of them have been previously dealt with under the Child Welfare Act, or have been tried out on probation, and they represent a residuum of intractable material, many of whom are of the “hooligan” type, quite undisciplined and uncontrolled.

Notwithstanding the difficult material handled, of a total of 4,555 young men who have passed through the Invercargill and Waikeria institutions since they were first established only a little over 15 per cent. have again been reconvicted, and of the 214 young women who have been released from Point Halswell only a little over 11 per cent. have again appeared before the Courts.

Of the total of 2,376 offenders received into penal institutions during 1934, only 4 per cent. had previously been in Borstal, so that ex Borstal detainees do not loom largely in the total commitments by the Courts. At the same time, it is noted that with the diminishing numbers of receptions and discharges of Borstal cases, coupled with the accumulating yearly totals of recommitments, the ratio has been steadily rising each year. The aggregate number of cases under the Prevention of Crime Act reconvicted over the past ten years is approximately 25 per cent. of the number released.

These figures show the necessity for close attention being given to the problem of after-care, for, as previously pointed out, institutional efforts at reclamation are rendered futile if young persons on release are allowed to drift back to their previous environment and the influences that led to the original lapse. At the present time, on account of prevailing industrial conditions, it is difficult enough for persons, who have no handicap by way of stigma of conviction, to secure regular employment, but it is particularly difficult for ex inmates, for whom the need of set employment is even more vital to their rehabilitation. Many of these persons are temperamentally unstable and are not so equal to the strain of the economic struggle as normal persons.

Splendid work is being done in this direction, and the Department is specially indebted to the Women's Borstal Association for their unflagging efforts both in co-operating with the staff for the well-being of the inmates at Point Halswell and for their interest in the after-care of released inmates. The comparatively small percentage of failures of young women is attributable largely to the association's organized system of placement and after-care through the medium of voluntary associates in various parts of the Dominion.

The Probation Officers and the Voluntary Probation Committees associated with them also do good work, but they all stress the difficulty of finding suitable employment for the lads, and, although the Department is grateful to the Unemployment Board authorities for their helpful co-operation, work of a permanent nature is more ideally suited to lads of the characteristics that pass through our hands. It is in cases where an employer can be induced to take a personal interest in the dischargee that the best results ensue.

Profiting by the experience of the Women's Borstal Association, steps were taken during the year to constitute a Borstal Association at Invercargill for the local Borstal institution, and it is hoped that fruitful results will follow by way of more organized after-care.