

Of the total number dealt with by the Courts during 1935, over 50 per cent. received less than three months, and over one-third received less than one month. This would indicate that the incidence of serious crime is not wide.

Term of Sentences.	Number of Prisoners.		Percentage to Total Number sentenced.
	1934.	1935.	
Under one month	927	782	36·3
One month and under three months ..	488	452	20·9
Three months and under six months ..	310	259	12·0
Six months and under twelve months ..	208	174	8·1
One year and under three years ..	321	367	17·0
Three years and under five years ..	93	100	4·6
Five years and over	29	24	1·1
Totals	2,376	2,158	100·0

It is frequently stated that “a short sharp lesson will often bring an offender to his senses.” The consensus of opinion among prison authorities is that this is a fallacious idea. Prison conditions in recent years have been so ameliorated that there is nothing of a sharp nature about it. The experience of a short sentence merely serves to accustom a man to gaol conditions and diminishes what should be a wholesome dread of penal institutions. The Lord Chief Justice of England recently observed that short sentences are worse than futile, and that, if the offence is not one that really calls for a worth-while term of imprisonment, it is far better to try some alternative method such as probation.

A factor which materially adds to the number of prison commitments is that “stage army” of petty recidivists (between 30 per cent. and 40 per cent. of the total receptions), many of whom are in and out of prison several times. Their offences in many cases are really more in the nature of nuisances than crimes, but society is entitled to be protected, and it is plain that a more effective method of dealing with them than the imposition of repeated short sentences should be resorted to. There is already statutory provision for persistent offenders of this class to be declared “habitual offenders” and held on an indeterminate sentence.

It is observed also that in England greater care is exercised by way of inquiring into the capacity of offenders to pay fines before imprisoning them for default. If it is considered that an offence in the first instance could be appropriately met by way of imposition of a fine, there is nothing to be gained by committing the offender to prison because of his inability to pay the fine, and unless there is something in the nature of contempt of Court, or other special circumstances calling for drastic measures, it is far better to allow time to pay in instalments. This matter is dealt with in a special paragraph later in this report.

Lord Hewart stated: “Imprisonment is the last resort, necessary, of course, for cases that really call for serious punishment; and in those cases a substantial term may do some good. A short sentence hardly ever does any good.”

HEALTH OF PRISONERS.

The health of prisoners has been uniformly good throughout the year. There were no illnesses of an epidemic character, and most of the treatment required has been due either to the debilitated condition of prisoners before committal or to ailments suffered by them on reception. Many offenders have either lived under poor conditions or undergone a period of acute mental anxiety before actual conviction, which has tended to undermine their physical health, and it is noteworthy that prisoners almost invariably improve in physical condition and put on weight under the ordered regimen and simple diet in prison.

An improvement in the dietary scale was made during the year by increasing the milk-ration, the addition of cocoa, and the allowance of extra puddings. With the exception of small isolated gaols, the whole of the bread consumed in the prisons is now made by the inmates. This is valuable from a vocational point of view, as men in rotation learn a useful trade, and it also enables alternate issue of wholemeal bread to be made with dietetic advantages. Special consideration is also given to the matter of the supply of vegetables, a liberal allowance of fresh root and green vegetables being provided.

Out of a total daily average in custody of 1,212, there was a daily average on the sick-list of 18. There were 60 admissions to hospital during the year, and 6 deaths, 5 of whom were undergoing sentences of imprisonment and 1 Borstal detention.

Sixteen persons were transferred to Mental Hospitals for examination or for treatment, and, in every case where there has been an indication of mental unbalance, examinations have been arranged for by the psychiatrists attached to the Mental Hospitals Department, through the courtesy of the Director-General of Mental Hospitals.

A special milieu under the direction of Dr. Sydney Allen, a mental specialist attached to the New Plymouth Prison, has been arranged. All homo-sexuals are transferred to this