

The following summary sets out in comparative form the number of receptions and discharges over the past five years :—

Receptions and Discharges.

	1931.	1932.	1933.	1934.	1935.	1936.
Number in custody at the beginning of year	1,569	1,657	1,583	1,443	1,234	1,150
Number received during the year ..	6,354	6,179	5,087	4,529	4,159	3,813
Number discharged or transferred ..	6,266	6,253	5,228	4,135	4,243	4,001
Number in custody at end of year ..	1,657	1,583	1,443	1,236	1,150	962
Daily average in custody	1,634	1,669	1,543	1,360	1,212	1,005

NOTE.—These figures include inter-institutional transfers.

The ratio of distinct prisoners received to each 10,000 of the general population has dropped from 13·76 for 1935 to 11·36 for 1936, which is the lowest figure for upwards of half a century. The constancy of the downward trend in the numbers of persons involved in crime resulting in imprisonment is indicated by the following figures :—

Year.	Ratio of Prisoners to 10,000 of Population.					
1890	..	..	..	..	..	38·61
1910	..	..	..	..	..	32·45
1914	..	..	..	..	..	31·05
1932	..	..	..	..	..	22·29
1933	..	..	..	..	..	17·75
1934	..	..	..	..	..	15·33
1935	..	..	..	..	..	13·76
1936	..	..	..	..	..	11·36

Reductions in Daily Average.—It will be seen from the above-mentioned table of receptions and discharges that the daily average number in custody was 1,005, which is 207 less than for the previous year. This is the lowest average for many years, and it is satisfactory to observe that the number is still falling, the daily average for the six months ended June last being 892. A factor which has a considerable bearing on the daily average is the length of sentences, and the tendency of the Courts in recent years, following the practice in England, is to commit for rather shorter terms than were imposed a few years ago. Whether this is a sound policy from the point of view of the protection of society it is too early to conjecture, but there is no doubt that the reactions to sentences of extreme severity were as harmful as those to sentences that are too short. Considered over periods of time the influences affecting the incidence of crime are many and complex, and changes in economic and social conditions may at times overshadow the influences of purely penalogical factors, thus it is well to bear in mind that inferences as to the state of crime must be drawn with great caution from statistics of prison populations alone.

Nature of Offences.—The following table shows the nature of the offences classified under three main headings :—

Nature of Offences.

Year.	Offences against the Person.	Offences against Property.	Miscellaneous Offences.	Total.
1936	189	599	1,002	1,790
1935	175	887	1,096	2,158
1934	155	889	1,332	2,376
1933	196	1,048	1,487	2,731
1932	194	1,313	1,893	3,401
1931	216	1,155	1,832	3,203

In my report last year I commented on the happy fact that New Zealand has no criminal gangs such as exist in countries with large metropolitan areas, and who prey on the community with an utter disregard for life and property. It is disquieting none the less to observe in the foregoing summary a small increase in the number of offences against the person. An examination of the detailed criminal statistics show that this increase has been made up largely by the greater number of persons imprisoned for negligently driving motor-vehicles causing death. It is also to be noted that whereas a few years ago crimes of deception and fraud figured prominently, during the past year crimes of violence involving aggravated assault and assault with intent to rob have swelled the figures. The number of indecent assault cases also showed a small increase.

Although the aggregate number of imprisonments for offences against property showed a drop from 887 for 1935 to 599 for 1936, the detailed statistics reveal that there has been a considerable increase in the number of offences of burglary.