

A brief review of the operations of the Board for the year 1936 shows that the satisfactory results reported in former years have been more than maintained. The percentage of those who respond and evidently “make good,” as revealed by the statistics, is on the whole very gratifying.

Of the number released after undergoing terms of borstal detention and sentences of reformatory detention or imprisonment with hard labour, approximately 21 per cent. only have been reconvicted or failed to comply with the conditions of their release.

In dealing with persons undergoing the above-mentioned sentences the Board endeavours, unless the step is distinctly contra-indicated, to permit a substantial portion of the sentence to be served on license, regarding, as it does, the measure of conditional release as the final stage of treatment before the discharge becomes absolute.

Of the habitual criminals released on parole, 55 per cent. were returned to prison either for committing further offences or for non-compliance with the conditions of their license. Approximately 21 per cent. of those released remained in the Dominion and did not further offend. It is probable, of course, that of the remaining 24 per cent. a proportion of them may offend in other countries, but we know that many of them do not so offend, and that with changed environment they have been successful in rehabilitating themselves. It has been pointed out in previous reports that many of these men are heirs to criminal tendencies and have had the misfortune to live in an environment degrading in its influences.

In dealing with habitual criminals and offenders it is the duty of the Board to decide whether and when such prisoner can be recommended for release on probation with safety to the public and for his own good, he having a clear understanding that he will be returned to prison if the terms of the license are not strictly adhered to. Where a person has committed a number of offences none of which is of a dangerous character, and all of which are associated more or less with the adverse circumstances of his environment, he would, in a very large number of cases, have to serve what is virtually a life sentence had one to wait till all doubts of a possible relapse ceased to exist. After such a man has served a reasonable sentence, is reported to have shown definite signs of improvement, and has impressed the Board with his desire to go straight, the Board feels that an opportunity should be given him by conditional release, and has so acted.

Between the form of remission in operation prior to the inauguration of the Board and the subsequent system are two broad distinctions: in one case the actual date of discharge was more or less fixed, in the other it is left open; in the one, discharge from prison was absolute, in the other there is power to release on license. The fact that the prisoner may be conditionally released is regarded by the Board as a highly valuable and essential part of the scheme, a stage in the process of the treatment which provides a gradual widening of the environment, and allows a prisoner to get a firm footing before stepping into complete liberty.

The growth of the Board’s work, since its inception in 1911, due primarily to legislation from time to time extending the Board’s functions is indicated by the following figures:—

Year.	Cases considered.	Releases recommended.
1911	170	21
1912 (first complete year)	418	65
1916	424	165
1921	841	312
1926	1,138	379
1931	1,514	610
1936	1,322	633

The Board, when interrogating prisoners in the exercise of its functions and inquiring into their personal and family history, concluded that in some cases the prisoner was not entirely responsible for the acts committed, on account of mental defect or deficiency, though not so pronounced as to be certifiable as insane. Some of these unfortunates, who can only be classed as socially inefficient, were being provided for better in the prisons or under the conditions of open-air life and discipline at the reformatory institutions and camps than they would be at large in the community. Where the Board has entertained doubt as to the mental condition of an inmate in relation to his suitability for release it has had the ready co-operation of the Mental Hospitals Department and its experienced psychiatrists in furnishing reports and advice.

When visiting the prison farms and farm properties in course of development by the Department the members of the Board have been impressed with the beneficial effect of this work upon the inmates and of the manifest interest displayed by many of them. “Make men diligent and they will be honest” was the dictum of that great reformer, John Howard.

It is gratifying to note from the criminal statistics that the steady decline in recent years, in the number of distinct prisoners received, has continued. The current year’s figures are 1,790, or 368 less than the number of distinct persons committed to prison in 1935. This represents approximately a 50-per-cent. drop in five years, the 1932 figures being 3,401.

The Board desires to pay a tribute to excellent service rendered by the members of the different after-care organizations and the numerous other public-spirited citizens who render invaluable practical assistance in the very necessary matters of employment and oversight of discharged prisoners.