

Under the old system of automatic remission every man whose conduct in prison was reasonably good was discharged from prison after serving three-quarters of the sentence imposed upon him by the Courts. He at once became free from all control and all supervision, except by the police. Under the Prisons Board system few prisoners are discharged absolutely unless their sentences have nearly expired. Those who work and behave in such a manner that there appears to be a probability of their making good—after careful consideration of their history and records—are released upon probation. They are still under control, however, as in terms of their licences their liberty is conditional upon their good behaviour and industry while at large. Each probationer is required to report at short intervals to the Probation Officer for the district in which he is residing. The Probation Officer keeps the probationer under supervision, and assists him to obtain suitable employment and generally to lead a self-respecting life. A report is furnished once in each month to the Chief Probation Officer regarding all the probationers under his control. The Chief Probation Officer or his deputy reviews all the reports, and admonishes or warns any of the probationers who are getting too far away from the beaten track. If a further conviction follows, or if conditions of probation are flagrantly broken after a warning has been issued, the probationer concerned is deemed unworthy of further confidence being reposed in him, and the Governor-General is recommended to cancel his probationary licence. He is then returned to prison, where he remains either until his original sentence is completed or until (in the case of habitual criminals, particularly) the Prisons Board is of opinion that he merits another chance on probation.

For a number of years a close co-operation has existed between the Prisons Department, the Mental Hospitals Department, and the Prisons Board. This co-operation results in the Board being furnished regularly with reports concerning the inmates' progress under institutional regime, also with psychiatric reports and advice. More recently the Mental Hospitals Department has been able to reinstate the pre-war arrangement of a psychiatrist regularly visiting the Borstal institution at Invercargill. The services of the Department's specialists are also more readily available again at the other Borstal institutions and the various prisons.

While employment for the average person released is plentiful, the arrangement, before release, of suitable work and after-care in certain cases is very desirable. In this respect the assistance rendered by the after-care organizations and public-spirited citizens generally is of great help.

In former reports tribute has been paid to the success of the Department's numerous undertakings and to the methods of treatment of prisoners. The high standard of these varied activities continues to be well maintained.

During the year under review the Board considered 1,041 cases, or 39 more than the previous year. It recommended a remission of sentence in 546 cases, as compared with 544 in 1945.

The statistics, when compared with those of former reports, show that from year to year the percentage of successes remains fairly constant. Approximately 24 per cent. only of the total number released on the recommendation of the Board after serving terms of Borstal detention and sentences of reformatory detention or hard labour have been reconvicted or failed to comply with the conditions of their release, while of the habitual criminals paroled since the Board was constituted in 1910, 59 per cent. have been returned to prison for non-compliance with the conditions of release or for further offences. The latter, of course, are more inclined to recidivism, being the small residual group upon whom reformatory influences have had little effect. Nonetheless, it is satisfactory to note that during the year the Board was able to recommend for complete discharge as habitual criminals an additional 4 persons who had made good.

In terms of the Offenders Probation Act, 1920, 15 probationers applied to the Board for relief from the conditions of their probation. Discharge was granted to 9 petitioners, modification of the conditions was made in 2 cases, while 1 case was deferred and 3 cases declined.