

The Board believes the new prison system that has been in force for the past eleven years—modified as it has been in some details—has, by establishing robust health and by sure reward for exemplary conduct and industry, been successful in reclaiming many from an evil career, and in helping the individual to lead the life of a good citizen. The Board, however, feels that much more must be done to continue and consolidate the work after discharge of inmates from our prisons and reformatory institutions. Suitable work must be found for inmates on discharge, and intelligent guidance and help afforded them. The Prisons Board as a body cannot undertake these duties. There are at least three Prisoners' Aid Societies and a few individuals doing that class of work, but that is not enough. It is urged by the Board that organizations should be formed on similar lines to those provided for by statute in England for the after-care of prisoners. It is apparent in many cases that unless men and women on their release from prison are cared for individually they have little opportunity of rehabilitating themselves, in spite of the training they have received while in prison fitting them to take up work for which they are well equipped. The inability of ex-prisoners to obtain employment on their release is one of the most frequent causes of their return to crime. The Board earnestly hopes that an endeavour will be made at an early date to create such after-care organizations.

There is also needed some institution for female derelicts—"the shavings from the workshops of humanity," as they have been termed. There has been established an institution of this class for men, but one is required for women, as we have pointed out before. It should be a small farm or a large market garden not far removed from some city or town, where the inmates should be able to maintain themselves by work in the open air.

To have females serving a few months and then being discharged to again offend and be imprisoned until, against many, even sixty or seventy or more convictions are recorded is of no benefit to any one. Old and irreclaimable offenders should be segregated under reasonably comfortable conditions, though freedom to roam as they please be denied them.

When visiting farm properties under development by the Prisons Department the members of the Board have been impressed with the good effect of this work upon the inmates, and of the satisfactory financial results obtained by the sale of butterfat and general farm-produce. We understand that the total cash receipts of the prisons have been during the last financial year £49,806, but the value of the prisoners' labour is more than that sum, for the public works of the country have been aided by prison labour to the extent of £21,000.

In view of the reformatory influence exercised on the individual inmates, and of the value to the State of the development of its lands, the Board desires to express its approval of the Department's latest undertaking at Hautu. Prisoners have been sent to reclaim pumice land near Taupo, and what may be termed an "open-air" prison has been established. When the land has been reclaimed it is proposed to open it for settlement. This system is capable of much development, and may be the means of encouraging settlement in many parts of the Dominion that are lying waste and uncultivated.

The Board would also again direct the attention of the Government to the resolution embodied in their last year's report. It was as follows:—

"Whereas an increasing number of sexual offences has been the subject of frequent and serious judicial comment, especially in cases where young children were the victims, or the very serious nature of the charge connoted a perversion dangerous to the moral well-being of society; and, as the experience of the Board in dealing with prisoners of this class accords, as far as it goes, with the now generally accepted opinion that, with certain exceptions, persons committing unnatural offences labour under physical disease or disability, or mental deficiency or disorder, or both, which accounts for the sexual perversion and the morbid character of the offence charged: It is resolved by the Prisons Board to strongly recommend to the Government an amendment of the Crimes Act under which such offenders could be dealt with scientifically—

"(1.) Before sentence is pronounced, by furnishing expert medical or surgical reports or evidence:

"(2.) By sanctioning an indeterminate sentence:

"(3.) By segregating persons so sentenced and subjecting them, under proper safeguards, to any medical or surgical treatment which may be deemed necessary or expedient either for their own good or in the public interest."

During last year the number of sexual crimes has increased, and it is necessary for our community that this request should be carefully considered, and, if possible, a remedy found for this evil.

ROBERT STOUT, President.

Wellington, 31st July, 1922.

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