

depressing, and which tends to retard sublimation, for the association and surroundings are little conducive to loftier standards of outlook and objective.

The question of the segregation, particularly the separate treatment of subnormal and borderline cases is one upon which opinion is yet considerably divided. In this connection much has been written in recent years on criminal psychology of a purely speculative nature. A study of the position shows that in England and in America the problem is still in the experimental stages. It is undesirable that the Dominion should lag behind other countries in the matter of prison reform, but in this respect New Zealand is peculiarly and adversely situated geographically. The population is small and scattered, which necessarily makes experimental work particularly expensive. It will be wise to tread warily and cautiously, taking advantage of the experience of other lands before embarking upon a policy that must involve considerable outlay, but which may not be productive of the desired results. The following extract from the last report of the Medical Officer of the Lincoln Prison in England provides an interesting commentary on this important question :—

“ The Border-line Mental Department has been of small dimensions and has presented insuperable difficulties of classification. If the number were greater it would be possible, but division into categories must of necessity involve a demand for more assistance. Under existing conditions there are almost as many classes as there are prisoners in this department. An old senile and a young mental defective do not go well together. At first all were placed under an officer and employed in company at such work as their capacity would warrant. This gave rise to some dissension. One inclined to ‘ monkey tricks ’ would tease another, and in addition the highest-grade mental defective would be on his dignity and disposed to resent segregation with those of a lower category or seniles. In fact, they got on one another’s nerves, and, being more or less deficient in moral and mental control, the effect was an indulgence in amusing puerilities and therefore undesirable. One had to cope with a good deal of irritability and lack of reasonable discipline. It has to be remembered that this department usually includes one or two men of intelligence but of unstable mentality, and blessed with too easily provoked and ungovernable tempers. By degrees I came definitely to the conclusion that actual segregation for work and exercise was producing the reverse of one’s object.

“ It is interesting to record the opinion of the Medical Superintendent of a mental hospital with nearly a thousand patients and known to me. He is quite emphatic that the segregation, even of certified lunatics, is not the best method of treatment, often retarding recovery and in some cases aggravating the trouble. This has long been my own view, but as I am not a specialist I have waited for a lead. It is a psychological platitude that one should seize upon any element of management or treatment making for self-respect, self-reliance, and the rekindling of any slumbering embers of ambition. To make border-line mental cases conscious that they are a class apart, with low potentials of mental and moral efficiency, does not help in these respects even in senile cases. And it has received practical demonstration at Lincoln. Petty aversions, unreasoning animosities, personal grievances, were all to be found, and these appeared to be clearly due to the reactions of the individuals one upon another. I consequently failed to see any use in continuing the policy of segregation, and adopted the principle of treating the border-lines much in the same way as ordinary prisoners so far as occupation is concerned. The good effect was immediately apparent—good in every way. Their self-esteem was flattered, discipline improved, and irritability came near to vanishing point.”

Consideration of the question of the mentality of offenders, their degree of responsibility, and the most suitable means of dealing with them brings up the question of the need for mental examination of offenders before commitment by the Courts. The suggestion that a psychiatrist should be appointed to advise the Courts has been made from time to time. That there is a definite need for more information respecting the mentality of offenders where there is a suggestion of feeble-mindedness or impaired responsibility is apparent. The difficulty has been met in numerous cases by calling in the services of an alienist. Experience has shown that specialists are diffident about expressing opinions without having had an opportunity of reasonably lengthy observation on the personality and behaviour of an offender. The appointment of psychiatrists to be available at all the Courts from Whangarei to the Bluff is a large order, and one which at present is not within the realms of practical politics.

The special committee set up in England last year by Sir William Joynson-Hicks in dealing with this matter stated, *inter alia*,—

“ We are satisfied that a better system of examination and observation is required for offenders on remand. How is this to be done? For the younger persons it would be impossible to provide the expert staff at most of the places of detention. Even in London the average numbers are too small to make it anything but an extravagant proposition.”

In New Zealand this difficulty is even more accentuated, but in order to overcome it as far as practicable with the limited facilities available there has been a close co-operation with the specialist officers of the Mental Hospitals Department, and whenever there is a doubt as to the mentality of a prisoner the Courts readily grant a remand for purposes of observation. Although there are isolated cases where the matter of an offender’s responsibility should have influenced the decision of the Court, in the majority of cases the Courts do make due allowance for enfeebled inhibitory powers due to impaired mentality. It is seldom that a sentence of a punitive nature is imposed in such cases, and where a term of detention is ordered it is usually imposed in the interests of the offender and for the protection of society.