

Another important factor is that a certain amount of cultivation of the mind tends to counteract undesirable reactions to the monotony of prison routine. A reformatory training-system on the principle of a full and active day of employment and training, both physical and mental, must in itself also act as a powerful deterrent in most cases.

For these reasons an extension has been made in what may be called the socializing programmes at the various institutions. Educational classes have been supplemented by lectures provided by the W.E.A. and other voluntary helpers, and extra facilities have been provided for mental development. At the prison camps where there are no resident teachers arrangements have been completed, through the courtesy of the Education Department, for correspondence tuition to be available to any prisoner whose education has been neglected and who desires to take up a course of primary study.

The Department is indebted to many donors of gifts of books for the prison libraries, which are now established at every institution. The Y.M.C.A. has rendered material help in the social work of the prisons, and the Department is particularly indebted to Mr. R. W. Brasted, the National Secretary of the Y.M.C.A., for his splendid work in connection with the Invercargill Borstal Institution.

The provision, by voluntary subscription, of wireless sets has been greatly appreciated, and has proved a great boon at Waikeria, Invercargill, New Plymouth, Addington, and Point Halswell; while at several of the institutions gifts of a piano or an organ have proved of great assistance in connection with religious services and the occasional entertainments provided for the inmates. These instruments are splendid aids towards a more balanced development, but, in addition, the knowledge that these privileges are donated by outsiders sympathetically disposed towards the well-being of the prisoners goes a long way to counteract any tendencies to resentment against society.

Visits and letter-writing are encouraged to a greater extent than hitherto, as it is realized that the maintenance of contact with relatives and friends is important in dispelling a feeling of despondency, abandonment, and isolation.

The Department is deeply indebted and grateful to the various ministers of religion and other Christian workers for their attention and kindly interest in the spiritual welfare of prisoners.

Opportunity is again taken to express appreciation to the Justices' Association for their continued interest in the welfare of the prisoners and the liberal assistance given in necessitous cases to dependants of prisoners. The Visiting Justices undertake an important and helpful duty in assisting in the maintenance of good order and discipline at the prisons.

It is occasionally stated that prison makes criminals rather than reforms them; but this assertion is based on the erroneous assumption that prisons to-day are conducted on similar lines to those obtaining many years ago, when all classes of offenders were grouped together irrespective of age, character, or criminal experience. To associate together the first offender, of previous good character, with individuals of criminal habits, tendencies, or associates, or the young occasional offender with the older professional criminal, is likely to result in contamination, and is recognized to be contrary to the interests of the community and the individual. For this reason different classes of offenders are now drafted to different institutions appropriate to their character, age, and criminal propensities. For example, it is found that a regime which is appropriate to adolescent offenders detained at the Borstal is not suited to the older offenders in the prisons. As far as existing facilities and financial conditions will permit, separate regimes are provided for the different categories of prisoners.

A perusal of the institutional reports attached hereto will convey an idea of the progress that has been made in recent years in the socializing aims of the Department.

INDETERMINATE SENTENCES.

Under section 29 of the Crimes Act it is provided that where a person is convicted on indictment of an offence of a sexual nature or one relating to abortion, and such person has been previously convicted on at least two occasions of any similar class of offence, the Court may in its discretion declare as part of the sentence that such person is an habitual criminal; or where a person is convicted on indictment and such conviction is in respect of an offence of either wounding, robbery, burglary, housebreaking, theft, false pretences, extortion, forgery, or mischief, and such person has been previously convicted on at least four occasions of any similar class of offence, whether of the same description or not, the Court may in its discretion declare that such person is an habitual criminal.

Section 12 of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, provides that it shall be the duty of the Prisons Board to make inquiry from time to time whether there is reasonable cause for belief that any habitual criminal is sufficiently reformed to be released on probation or discharged, or to make inquiry from time to time whether there is sufficient grounds for granting a discharge of any habitual criminal who has been released on probation, and after making such inquiry to make recommendation to the Governor-General as to the release on probation or discharge of such habitual criminal.

It will be seen from the foregoing statutory provision that where a person has been declared an habitual criminal his release from prison is contingent on his satisfying the Prisons Board as to his fitness therefor and that he is likely to abstain from crime in the future. The Board is required to have regard to the safety of the public as well as for the welfare of the person it recommends for release. The release from prison in the first instance is conditional only, the prisoner being required to report to a Probation Officer. If after a period on probation he can satisfy the Board that he is faithfully observing the conditions of his probationary license, and is considered not likely to offend again, he can be absolutely discharged.

The foregoing is the only form of indeterminate sentence in operation in New Zealand. It is fairly frequently used where an offender is persistently appearing before the Courts, or where it is clear from the offender's record that there is a definite tendency towards crime. Twenty persons were declared habitual criminals last year, and ninety-seven persons have been so declared during the past five years.