

Medical Supplies for Institutions.—The bulk of the Department's drugs and medical supplies are now being imported and a substantial annual saving is resulting. Fuller use is being made of the Auckland Prison dispensary than hitherto by instituting definite regulations for distribution therefrom, special "urgency" requirements being met by special provisions to minimize as far as possible the local purchase of medicines at chemists' retail prices. Steps have also been taken to ensure that at each visit of a Medical Officer a catalogue of drugs and medicines in stock in General Store is made available to him, it having been found that Medical Officers in ignorance of stocks held, have frequently prescribed mixtures necessitating special purchasing of drugs not in stock.

Miscellaneous Stocks in General Store.—During the year steps were taken to acquaint all institutions of all stores held in Auckland General Store in order that such would be drawn on before purchase of similar or alternative articles. Up to the time that this procedure was adopted institutions were never fully acquainted with what the Department already had in stock.

Uniforming System of Record of Earnings.—For some time it had been felt that there was insufficient uniformity at institutions in the recording of prisoners' wages and earnings. During the year complete regulations were issued prescribing detailed procedure of a uniform character for all institutions in respect of assessment of marks, records of marks, earnings, wages, and deductions, and payment of earnings before, upon, and after release. Inquiries from a number of institutions have indicated that the revision has effected a great improvement.

Care of Footwear and Leather.—A number of comprehensive tests of foot-wear leather under various working-conditions have been continued at the prisons on behalf of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in its endeavour to ascertain the effect of various climatic and underfoot conditions on leather, particularly for comparison of results of English and New Zealand tanning. The results have been of value to the Department, although their main object is to supply reliably recorded data to the Leather Research Chemist with the object of assisting him in his research into each and every point of difference between, and similarity of, English and New Zealand leathers.

Re-footing of Socks.—The annual cost of supplying socks for prison use has been a matter of special inquiry during the year, and as a preliminary step towards reducing the cost, instructions have been issued that socks which are past further darning should be sent to Auckland Prison for refooting if the uppers were in good condition, it having been found by experience that the "refoots" outwear the best machine-made article purchased. Investigations are at present in hand to further this matter, and it is very probable that before long the Department will be confining its purchase to tops of a relatively light quality, and fitting original "foots" in the prisons. From analysis up to the present there is reason to believe that our preliminary conclusions will prove correct, and that the existing costs can reasonably be expected to be halved by saving £200 per annum.

LEGISLATION.

It is hoped that legislation will be introduced during the present session which will remedy certain anomalies which experience has shown to exist at present.

It is hoped to amend the Prevention of Crime Act to make provision for the payment of wages to dependents of Borstal detainees who are in necessitous circumstances similarly to prisoners undergoing ordinary imprisonment. The Prevention of Crime Act was based on the English statute where the maximum age for commitment to Borstal is twenty-one years. In New Zealand the age is twenty-three years, and in case of transfer twenty-five years. Many such lads have wives or dependants in necessitous circumstances. Provision will also be asked for to enable Borstal escapees to be punished under the Prevention of Crime Act, by the extension of the term without requiring the inmate to be charged as "a rogue and vagabond" under the Police Offences Act, as at present.

An amendment of the Crimes Act will be sought, providing for a period of probationary supervision to prisoners undergoing ordinary imprisonment on similar lines to persons released from Borstal.

Now that voluntary probation committees are functioning effectively, it is considered that a period of supervision will assist in rehabilitation and lessen the chance of a subsequent lapse. As pointed out in my 1927 report, it is somewhat anomalous that the well-conducted prisoner who is granted a remission of his sentence is released on the recommendation of the Prisons Board under probationary supervision, whilst the bad prisoner who does not earn any remission is released unconditionally. It is those coming within the latter category who require probationary oversight during the difficult period when they first emerge from prison, and thereby minimize the likelihood of any early relapse.

An amendment of the Prisons Act is proposed which will define more specifically the Public Trustee's position as administrator of prisoners' estates under Part III of the Prisons Act, 1908.

Part III of the Prisons Act, 1908, provides for the Public Trustee to administer the estates of persons sentenced to imprisonment for terms of three years or more.

Section 24 of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, however, provides that "every person sentenced to reformatory detention for any period" shall be subject to Part III of the Act. A prisoner sentenced to reformatory detention in this respect should be similarly placed to one sentenced to ordinary imprisonment.

By section 24 of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, provision is also made to enable an habitual criminal or habitual offender who is released on probation to resume control of his property, but no similar provision exists to enable a prisoner sentenced to simple imprisonment or to reformatory detention to regain control of his affairs in similar circumstances.

Although Part III of the Prisons Act, 1908, provides for the administration of the affairs of all persons sentenced to three years' imprisonment or upward, no provision is made to meet the case of cumulative sentences on two or more charges on one indictment—e.g., the estate of a prisoner undergoing a sentence of two years' hard labour with two years' reformatory detention to follow, a total of four years—would not be provided for by Part III of the principal Act.