

The vacancy created by Mr. Riddell's resignation has been filled by the appointment of Ernest Edridge, Esq., of Christchurch.

The Prisons Board is required by statute to inquire into the cases of prisoners and Borstal inmates and to make to the Governor-General and the Minister of Justice such recommendation as it deems fit regarding their release on probation or discharge.

In making its recommendations the Board takes into consideration the full and ample particulars available regarding the various inmates. Such particulars include the history of each case before sentence, conduct, and industry and general character as observed while in custody, and, in many cases, the availability of suitable employment or care on release. In addition, in any case where there is a suggestion of mental impairment the Board arranges for a report from a psychiatrist.

Inmates with good institutional records are given opportunity to rehabilitate themselves in the community.

In some cases it is true that the conduct of inmates after release has proved that the Board, like other human institutions, is not infallible.

The definite policy of the Board, however, is to err, if it must err, on the score of leniency rather than on that of harshness, and statistics show that in the great majority of cases this leniency has been amply justified. Most of those recommended for discharge or for release on probation make good.

The total number of cases dealt with by the Board in 1938 was less by 33 than that recorded for 1937. This is further evidence of the greatly reduced numbers in our penal institutions during recent years, which is partly due to greater recourse to fines and the more liberal use of probation by the Courts. The number of female persons in our prisons and Borstal institutions is, in relation to the number of male inmates, pleasingly small. This is in a large measure due to the efficient after-care arrangements provided. In 1938 the number of female cases that came under the jurisdiction of the Board was 44, or only $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the total of 954 cases considered during the year.

Comparison of the statistics with those of previous reports shows that the former good results have been maintained. The percentage of lapses subsequent to release, with the exception of habitual criminals, has been small.

The statistics also show that of the total number released after undergoing sentences of Borstal detention and reformatory detention or imprisonment with hard labour approximately 22 per cent. only have been reconvicted or failed to comply with the conditions of their license. The results in regard to habitual criminals, while naturally not so good, should, in the light of the particularly difficult material dealt with, be considered satisfactory. Of those who had been declared habitual criminals and released in terms of the Crimes Amendment Act since the constitution of the Prisons Board in 1911, 56 per cent. have been returned to prison for non-compliance with the conditions of their probation or for further offences.

During the Board's usual visit to each of the prisons and Borstal institutions in the Dominion, the members were pleased to observe and learn of the continued steady advancement in the prison system generally, and to note the obvious physical fitness of the majority of those who appeared before them. Among the various improvements effected more recently are those in accommodation, diet, clothing, education, recreation, and occupation, including more mechanization of industries.

There is close co-operation between the Prisons Department, the Mental Hospitals Department, and the Board, with the result that the Board is furnished with regular reports concerning the inmates' progress under institutional regime, together with reports and advice by mental specialists.

The Board desires to again place on record its appreciation of the very valuable services rendered by the members of the various after-care organizations and other public-spirited citizens in the all-important matters of employment and after-care.

Since the Board commenced to function in 1911 no less than 26,818 cases have been considered by it. This includes prisoners undergoing sentences of reformatory detention, hard labour, habitual criminals, Borstal inmates, and probationers for discharge from probation or variation of terms thereof. Dealing with these cases under their particular headings the results have been as follow :—

Reformatory Detention.

During the period from January, 1911, to December 1938, 5,186 prisoners were sentenced to reformatory detention under the provisions of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910. The number of cases that have been recommended for release or discharge is 4,162. In 652 cases prisoners were required to serve the full sentence imposed by the Court. Of the total number released after undergoing reformatory detention 27.42 per cent. have been returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of the release or for committing further offences: 2.62 per cent. left the Dominion or absconded; 0.50 per cent. died or were transferred to mental hospitals; leaving 69.46 per cent. who have not further offended and who may therefore reasonably be assumed to have become useful and law-abiding members of the community.

Hard Labour.

Since the passing of the Statute Law Amendment Act, 1917, which extended the scope of the Prisons Board to the consideration of cases of prisoners sentenced to terms of imprisonment involving hard labour, 5,921 cases have been considered by the Board up to December, 1938. In 2,475 cases the prisoners were released on probation or discharged prior to expiry of the full time on the recommendation of the Board. Of this number, 1,489 completed probation satisfactorily, 135 were recommitted for other offences, and 79 were still reporting on probation at the 31st December, 1938.