

The figures in parentheses are the corresponding sections of the Police Offences Act, 1927.

There is nothing more feared by offenders against the law than imprisonment for an indeterminate period. That fear may well operate as an effective deterrent in such cases as those now under discussion. But, apart from that consideration, there is much good to be derived from the opportunity that a declaration as an habitual offender affords the Board of holding the offender after his release upon probation. The knowledge that his continued liberty is dependent upon his continued good conduct induces a degree of industry and honesty that would not otherwise be achieved. In addition, he has the help of the Probation Officer in his efforts to reform.

Another matter which has caused concern to the Board is the undue proportion of members of the Maori race in our penal institutions, particularly young Maoris. This is confirmed by the returns published by the Government Statistician. According to his figures as at December last, Maoris constituted 20.88 per cent. of the total of persons in penal institutions—that is, in prisons or in Borstal establishments. This percentage is approximately 3 per cent. lower than in the previous year. Notwithstanding this, the percentage is still excessive, as is made clear by contrasting this percentage of 20.88 with the percentage of the Maoris to the general population of the Dominion. The latter percentage is 6 per cent. The offences of which Maoris under detention have been guilty are, generally speaking, offences against property. They range from burglary and housebreaking through theft to the unlawful conversion of motor-cars. In some instances, however, Maoris have been guilty of robbery with violence and assaults of a sexual character.

The function of the Board is to recommend a mitigation of punishment where mitigation is merited and not likely to operate prejudicially to the public interest. This function imposes upon the Board the necessity, in its study of each offender, to search for the causes of his offending. The correction of such causes, and particularly of social causes, is the function of other agencies and organizations, but it may be helpful if the impressions and conclusions of the Board are made available to them.

The causes are not economic. There has been an abundance of well-paid work which any Maori of ordinary physical capacity could do. Indeed, many offend whilst gainfully employed or immediately after voluntarily abandoning well-remunerated employment. The chief causes have a deeper and more psychological origin. A pointer to their predominant characteristics is afforded by the fact that few Maoris living a community life in rural areas and employed there, offend. They are there in familiar and congenial surroundings, have sufficient kindred associates to create a social atmosphere and social pleasures of their own, are under some measure of chiefly and tribal restraint, and are segregated from the temptations which populous centres create and bad associations generate.

This comparative freedom from crime in rural areas and the concurrence of the outbreak of crime with the migration of Maori youth to seek employment in the cities suggests that it is in their fitness for city life or in the circumstances attendant upon their life in the cities that the root causes of their offending must be sought. Generally speaking, it would seem that those who have offended were not fitted to adjust themselves to urban life in a proper way. In the main, they have not achieved an educational or cultural standard which fits them to associate with any other than the cruder and rougher elements in populous