

The Waikeria institution has been gazetted a reformatory during the year, and is now reserved as far as possible for prisoners sentenced to reformatory detention, for hopeful hard-labour cases, and for military court-martialled prisoners. Within the past month a camp has been established on the Waikeria property, about a mile from the main institution, for the accommodation of a special class, who will thus be completely separated from all other prisoners. A scheme of interclassification has also been established, special care being taken that the various classes are not allowed to associate either at work or at exercise.

The Kaingaroa Afforestation Camp has been utilized largely for military court-martialled prisoners. To this camp we also send first-offender civil prisoners and hopeful cases. So soon as military prisoners cease to be committed, and more accommodation is thus rendered available, we will institute a more rigid system of classification.

The Wellington Prison is now used chiefly as a drafting prison, where prisoners are received and kept until they can be sent elsewhere. Short-sentence prisoners are, of course, retained during the whole period of their sentences, as the cost of transferring them elsewhere would not be justified by results. A certain number of long-sentence prisoners still require to be kept at the Wellington Prison, however, to carry on our clothing-factory and our brickworks at Mount Cook.

Napier Prison is now utilized principally for local short-sentence prisoners.

Paparua Prison (Templeton) is being organized as a general prison for the South Island. We have lately completed a temporary cell block on this property, which has been constructed entirely by military court-martialled prisoners, and has been set apart for their accommodation. When these men cease to be committed the new block of buildings will be used in conjunction with the permanent structure, and the older temporary cell block to provide a complete system of classification.

The Lyttelton Prison is now in the last stages of dissolution, and is only being retained until accommodation can be found elsewhere for the few remaining prisoners.

Dunedin Prison is now little more than a police-gaol, all prisoners sentenced at Dunedin to more than three months being transferred elsewhere.

In November last Invercargill was gazetted a "Borstal Institution." It is still retained as a special institution for youthful prisoners of not more than twenty-five years of age. A number of the younger military prisoners have also been drafted there. As at Waikeria, a system of interclassification has recently been established, the different classes being separated both while at work and at exercise. Steps are now being taken to have this institution conducted more on the lines of the Borstal Institutions of England. Educational classes and instruction in physical culture have been carried on at Invercargill for some years past, but with the additional rooms, grounds, and other conveniences that have now been provided we hope to be able to liberalize the system so that the recreative and instructional sides of our reformatory work can be given greater attention.

From the foregoing paragraphs it will be seen that, in spite of the adverse conditions arising out of the war, we have made some progress in classification during the year. We have, of course, been hampered in our efforts by limited finance and by the influx of a large number of non-criminal prisoners for whom special provision had to be made, but when these obstacles have been removed there should be little difficulty in placing the prison system of New Zealand on a more satisfactory footing than has hitherto been possible.

OPERATIONS OF THE CRIMES AMENDMENT ACT, 1910, AND OF SPECIAL PROVISIONS OF THE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 1917.

The report of the Prisons Board for the year deals fully with the operation of the clauses of the Crimes Amendment Act bearing upon the release on probation of habitual criminals and of prisoners sentenced to terms of reformatory detention.

During the session of 1917 a much-needed enlargement of the provisions of the Crimes Amendment Act was made by the inclusion in the Statute Law Amendment Act of clauses providing for the placing of persons sentenced to hard labour for terms exceeding two years under the jurisdiction of the Prisons Board in regard to conditional release. Under the amending Act the Minister of Justice was empowered to request the Board to consider the cases of all such prisoners when half the full term of their sentences had expired, or, in the case of men sentenced to imprisonment for life, when they had served eight years.

At each meeting held since the passing of the Act the Board has considered all the hard-labour cases submitted to it, and when the circumstances warranted a recommendation to His Excellency the Governor-General for release upon probation such a recommendation has been made.

As pointed out in previous reports, there was little justification for the distinction hitherto maintained between prisoners sentenced to definite terms of hard labour and those sentenced to reformatory detention or declared habitual criminals, so far as the opportunity of being granted probation was concerned. The Act of 1917 has therefore removed an anomaly that was long held to be a source of legitimate grievance by the hard-labour prisoners. At the same time it has been found upon careful investigation of the cases brought before the Board, under the provisions of the new Act, that in only a very limited number of instances could the clemency of the Crown in regard to probation be justifiably recommended. In the majority of the cases the sentences imposed by the Courts were found to have "fitted the crime," and even in the course of years there were few extenuating circumstances that warranted interference with the original sentence. Still, the power to release upon probation is a useful adjunct to the fair and impartial administration of justice, and when exercised with discrimination will assist the Prisons Department in giving reasonable relief in cases where such relief is warranted.