

Comparison of Tables A and B with those of former reports shows that the percentage of those who make good after release remains much the same from year to year. Approximately three out of four of those released after serving sentences of reformatory detention give no further trouble, whilst the proportion is much less satisfactory in the case of habitual criminals. As the statutory term indicates, this class of offender has become fixed in its habits, and after a lifetime of crime it is not to be expected that any change in mental outlook can be effected by further imprisonment. The Board has endeavoured to give individual habituals a chance to continue in outside life the records they have made for industry, good conduct, intelligent and valuable work while in prison; but, while this policy has been fully justified by a reasonable percentage of successes—that is, of cases of definite and well-established rehabilitation—there remain a number of men who, although released more than once, have shown their utter inability to keep the laws of the country. No man has been released unless it is known by his record in prison that he is capable of sustained and arduous work. In face of such records the Board has felt that these men were deserving of consideration, and has accordingly tested them by recommending their release on probation. Some of them have made good, but experience has shown that others are definitely anti-social and are quite unfit to be at large. All those comprised in the latter category will now have to remain in prison indefinitely. They have had their chances, and have abused them all.

An analysis of the number of habitual criminals released during the year shows that only eighteen were New-Zealand-born, whilst twenty-two were over the age of thirty-five years. From these figures it may be assumed that the number of habituals will diminish as the native-born population of the Dominion increases and the importation of criminals from overseas becomes less.

The uplifting of humanity is difficult. Past history (going back for more generations than one) and mental deficiency are factors that should not be overlooked where the reform of evil-doers is concerned. The members of the Board, after long years of experience, can, however, say that their dealings with those of our citizens who have fallen give them hope for the future.

The Board, after completing its circuit of the various prison institutions has to express its satisfaction at the marked progress achieved during the year in the various occupations and industries conducted by the Department. Beyond doubt the wise policy of work and education that is being followed is doing much to rehabilitate the unfortunates who come within the ban of the law. Whilst much is being done to improve the mentality, the morality, and the physical condition of delinquents, the work should not be allowed to cease when the individual offenders again enter the outside world. At this stage a helping hand would do much to prevent the return to evil ways of many of the men liberated. Were they assured on release of suitable employment under sympathetic and kindly supervision, possibly their greatest obstacle to final rehabilitation would be removed. That some organized system is necessary for the after-care of prisoners is very apparent. Efforts in this direction have been made by individual social workers with satisfactory results, but the want of voluntary "after-care" organizations on the lines of those established in connection with the prisons of Great Britain is badly felt. Until such organizations are in evidence we shall continue to have an undue number of "failures" among those who are discharged or who are released on probation from our penal institutions.

In preceding reports the Board has referred to the increase of sexual crime, and the necessity that exists for the imposition of some check upon its further growth. It is gratifying to know that its representations on this subject have received recognition, and that a Committee of Inquiry has been set up to investigate the matter and to make recommendations thereon. Pending further and more definite action, the Board suggests that the Crimes Act be amended in such manner that Judges and Magistrates may be vested with discretionary power to pass indeterminate sentences upon sexual offenders who have repeated or are likely to repeat offences of this character. Provision should also be made for the Board to be advised by a skilled psychiatrist with special training in modern psychology, or by some general medical practitioner qualified to examine the offenders scientifically, and to recommend treatment in suitable cases. Release on probation or discharge would not be granted unless the expert authority advised that confinement was no longer necessary in the public interest, or that a term away from the institution "on trial" was likely to result in the offender's complete recovery.

Wellington, 31st July, 1924.

ROBERT STOUT, President.

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