

INDETERMINATE SENTENCES AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE.

The releasing of prisoners on probation after having served a portion of their sentences continues to work satisfactorily. Wherever it has been tried, provided due care is taken with the object of ensuring that only those entitled to it by reason of the fact that they have made an earnest effort to make good are given their release, the results have been distinctly encouraging. In this connection I cannot do better than quote from the work entitled "Prison Reform at Home and Abroad": "We must have a free hand to hold out hope and make it plain to the prisoner that his day of liberation will come only when his hostile will is broken—when he can be discharged with safety to mix again with his fellow-creatures as an honest man and a good citizen. This day may come sooner or later. The destiny of the prisoner is in his own hands. The moral regeneration of the prisoner should be the primary aim of prison discipline, and for this purpose hope must always be a more powerful agent than fear, and anything that inflicts unnecessary pain or humiliation should be abolished. The indeterminate sentence has therefore much to recommend it provided it is properly administered."

PROBATION SYSTEM.

As this matter has been fully dealt with in the annual report regarding the adult probation system I do not intend going further into the matter, but simply to confine myself to referring all interested to that report, and to add that as a result of long experience I am satisfied that the probation system as applied in New Zealand has been the means of saving many young people from the stigma of imprisonment, and, if used judiciously and under proper guarantees and safeguards for the protection of society—especially in the case of casual offenders, but more particularly young persons in the early stages of crime—nothing but good can result. The practice of sending people to prison for short sentences should, as far as possible, be avoided. I again quote from Sir Ruggles-Brise's work on the treatment of crime: "I have been struck by the mischief wrought by short sentences of imprisonment. There is no time to instruct or reform such prisoners, but unhappily there is time to corrupt them; as their numbers are large they are costly to the State. Their families suffer, and they are driven to repeat their offences by want. Probation in the majority of such cases is invaluable." My experience leads me to endorse Sir Ruggles-Brise's opinion.

RESUMPTION OF TREE-PLANTING BY PRISONERS.

The advantages of again employing prisoners at tree-planting has been brought forward, and the necessary arrangement for the resumption of tree-planting on a large scale put in hand, and it is hoped before long to have operations in full swing once again. The advantages of employing prisoners at tree-planting from the prison-management point of view are very considerable. The camp system of housing prisoners is comparatively inexpensive. The portable huts—which the prisoners much prefer to the cell system—are easy to construct, and the Department has both the timber and labour available. There is also the fact that all prisoners who have no serious physical defects can efficiently plant trees although they may have had no former experience in outside work. The work performed by each man can be seen and checked at a glance, and the loafer is unable to rely on the steady worker to make up his own deficiency. The clerical work required in a tree-planting camp can be attended to by the officer in charge, with occasional assistance from a disciplinary officer. No elaborate system of accounting is required.

I may also point out that the camp system lends itself to the development of methods of classifying prisoners. For instance, a tree-planting camp set apart for first offenders would be an excellent adjunct to our present arrangements, and no time should be lost in again getting to work.

HEALTH OF PRISONERS.

The returns of sickness given in Table A show that the daily average number on the sick-list in all prisons and prison institutions of the Dominion in 1924 was 25.70. The slight increase when compared with the previous year's figures is accounted for by a mild influenza epidemic which occurred in November last, and which affected to a greater extent the inmates of the Auckland Prison. Old vagrants suffering from numerous infirmities are often received into prisons when they are found in the streets destitute and ill, and when they refuse to remain in the Homes to which they are committed. Such cases help to increase the returns of sickness, and add to the Department's expenditure when their maintenance in public hospitals, as frequently happens, has to be met. The health of those prisoners who are received in a physically fit condition invariably continues satisfactory.

PRISONERS DETENTION ACT, 1915.

There were no prisoners dealt with under the provisions of the Prisoners Detention Act during the past year. The total number who have been detained under the provisions of the Act since it was first passed is thirty-one.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to the irreparable loss sustained by the Prisons Department through the death of Mr. C. E. Matthews, late Controller-General of Prisons. In connection with the administration of prisons Mr. Matthews's work was of great value to the community. Having been closely associated with the late Controller-General for nearly twelve years I am in a position to say that he was eminently fitted for the dual position he occupied, and it will be difficult indeed to fill his place. He took great pleasure in his work, which always came foremost in his thoughts, and he ever tried to do his best for the unfortunates under his care, and never spared himself where their interests were