

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRISON COMMISSIONERS.

THE Annual Report for the year ended March 31st, 1909, of His Majesty's Prison Commissioners,¹ shows that the total number in custody or out on bail at the beginning of the year was 20,794, and at the end of the year 21,172.

Statistics.

The number of persons received into local prisons under sentences of penal servitude or imprisonment by the ordinary courts was 184,901; by courts-martial, 465; as debtors or on civil process, 18,996; and in default of sureties, 1,319, giving a total of 205,681. During the previous year the numbers were: by the ordinary courts, 176,602; by courts-martial, 501; as debtors or on civil process, 17,918; and in default of sureties, 1,212, giving a total of 196,233. There was thus an increase of no less than 9,448 prisoners as compared with the previous year. The average daily population of local prisons in 1908-9 was 18,923, as compared with 17,719 for the previous year, and in convict prisons 3,195, as compared with 3,064 for the previous year.

As giving a better idea of the volume of crime than the average prison populations—which might be the result of longer and not a greater number of sentences—the Commissioners show by means of a table the proportion of annual receptions into prison from ordinary courts to the general population since 1881. From this it appears that the ratio of commitments has fluctuated widely between 621.6 and 460.7 per 100,000, the proportion for the year 1908-9 being 523.1, as compared with 505.4 per 100,000 for the previous year.

The Commissioners also supply a table showing the offences which led to imprisonment during the last six years. This shows that, comparing the year 1908-9 with the previous twelve months, the numbers of those committed for offences against the person rose from 1,374 to 1,410; against property, from 7,512 to 7,998; indictable offences tried summarily, from 20,886 to 21,710; and other offences tried summarily, from 146,625 to 153,578. The increase was general throughout the country, 37 out of 57 prisons showing an increased number on the previous year, and greatly straining the cellular accommodation at the prisons. The Commissioners say that if the numbers continue to remain high and to keep pace, as they seem to do, with the growth of the population, the question of providing more accommodation must arise in the near future. The reason for this striking increase, in the opinion of the local authorities consulted by the Commissioners, is to be found in what the recent Poor Law Commission called "the new problem of chronic under-employment," a social disease which is not only chronic, but is stated to be rapidly increasing. Doubtless related to this is the notable increase in commitments for begging and sleeping out, the total numbering 25,168, or about one-seventh of the total commitments from ordinary courts, and giving an increase of 4,178 on those of the previous year. Concerning these convictions the Commissioners agree with the Departmental Committee of 1905, whose conclusions have been endorsed to a large extent by the Poor Law Commission, that the habitual vagrant should be dealt with otherwise than under the Vagrant Act, and should be treated, as far as possible, not as a criminal but as a person requiring detention on account of his mode of life. Apart from vagrancy, the increase of offences over the preceding year has been most marked in larceny, breach of police regulations and the Highway Acts, to a large extent also due to trade depression and consequent unemployment. On the other hand, and possibly related to the same economic conditions, commitments for drunkenness diminished by 1,403 as compared with the previous year.

The Prevention of Crimes Act.

Turning from these somewhat dismal figures to the brighter side of the Commissioners' report, they discuss at considerable length the satisfactory results of the "Borstal system" and its more extensive application under the Prevention of Crime Act which has recently become law.

¹ Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and the Directors of Convict Prisons, with Appendices. (For the year ended March 31st, 1909.) Darling and Son, Baker Street, E. 1909. (Price 7d.)

This important measure is divided into two parts, Part I dealing with the reformation of young offenders, and Part II with the detention of habitual criminals. The young offender aimed at by the Act is the adolescent between the ages of 16 and 21, the class since 1900 experimentally dealt with under the Borstal rules in local prisons. Under the new Act the work and responsibilities of the Borstal Association will become greatly enlarged, but for the Commissioners' exceedingly interesting discussion of a measure which seems likely to be of immense benefit to the offenders treated, and consequently to the community at large, we must refer readers to the report itself. A quotation from the Borstal Association's annual report gives a general description of the results of its efforts so far: "For the most part they enter Borstal in an unpromising condition of mind and body—lumpy, slack, sometimes defiant, generally out of condition, and, as a whole, below the average of physique and intelligence of their class. They come out healthy, well set up, improved in manner, and, in the great majority of cases, anxious to show that they can work honestly and hard." Another consequence of the new Act will be the application of the Borstal system to young women between the ages of 16, and 21. The regulations made under the new Act, together with the instructions giving effect to them, are printed in the Commissioners' Report in Appendix 17.

Juvenile Offenders.

In our previous digests of the Prison Commissioners' reports the fall in numbers of juvenile offenders has been noted. The Commissioners have published year by year a table setting forth the yearly commitments to prison of offenders under 12 years and between 12 and 16 years of age. This table has now made its last appearance. Offenders under the age of 16 are now divided into two classes—children under 14 and young persons between 14 and 16. In future no child can be sentenced to imprisonment, and a "young person" only when so unruly or so depraved that the detention provided by the Act is unsuitable.

Habitual Criminals.

As to Part II, dealing with habitual criminals, the Commissioners point out that, as a minimum period of three years' penal servitude is a necessary antecedent of the system, it will be some time before "prevention detention" comes into operation.

Medical Report.

Turning to more strictly medical matters, Dr. Smalley, Medical Inspector, in his report prefacing the usual statistical tables, alludes to the important bearings the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Feeble-minded, if put into effect, will have upon prisons. Speaking of feeble-minded prisoners, he says that the number of such prisoners received by local prisons averages about 400 each year. For the last four or five years a record has been kept of their convictions, etc., and there are now nearly 1,000 individuals on this register. The removal of such cases to more suitable care would be advantageous both to the people themselves and to the prisons.

The clearing out from prisons of the tramp and the drunkard by legislative action on the lines recommended by the Poor Law Commission and the Departmental Committee on Inebriety will in still greater degree permit of prisons being employed exclusively for treatment of the criminal, and will thus, Dr. Smalley says, facilitate the extension of methods of individualization of which the success of the Borstal system is likely to be so conspicuous a proof. Lastly, it may be mentioned that the death-rate in local prisons from natural causes was 0.41 per 1,000 prisoners received, the average for the previous twenty-five years being 0.54 per 1,000. The death-rate from natural causes in convict prisons was 5.9 per 1,000 of the daily average population, as compared with 6.5 in the preceding year. During the year 135 persons in local prisons were found to be insane and certified after reception, and in convict prisons 23. Of the 135 certified insane in local prisons 73 were found to be insane on reception, and 25 exhibited symptoms of insanity within a month of reception. At the end of the year there were 142 convicts at Parkhurst Prison who had been classed as of weak mind, and 13 at Aylesbury. The general health was good throughout the year in both local

and convict prisons and the few cases of infectious diseases recorded were sporadic in character and in most cases due to infection prior to imprisonment.

There were 16 suicides in prison during the year, 14 in local and 2 in convict prisons.

ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFYING FACTORY SURGEONS.

THE annual meeting and dinner took place at the Grand Hotel, Manchester, on November 12th, both functions being very well attended.

MEETING.

Dr. S. KING-ALCOCK (Burslem), the retiring president, took the chair, and congratulated the members on the large and valuable amount of work which had been got through during the year, paying a special tribute to those members of the council who had displayed so much energy in the work of compiling standards of physical fitness for all trades, and in producing the scheme for incorporation of the society.

The proposed memorandum and articles of association were then considered. The HONORARY SECRETARY (Dr. W. F. Dearden) explained that the objects of the new association could be summarized under the double heading of the advancement and defence of the interests of certifying surgeons and the spread of knowledge of industrial hygiene. The liability of members would be limited to the amount of their subscription, and to a guarantee of £1 in case of not being able to meet any outstanding liabilities should it be decided at any time to wind up the association. It was proposed to elect honorary fellows from amongst medical men who had interested themselves in the subject of industrial hygiene, both in England and abroad. Members of the association would be divided into fellows and ordinary members, the choice of class being left to members themselves, the subscription being graduated accordingly.

With the exception of the articles relating to appeal from the decision of a general meeting to a poll of members, which were deleted, the scheme was passed as presented by the Council.

The HONORARY SECRETARY then reported that during the year certain important work had been undertaken by the Council. In the first place, and mainly as a result of a discussion on certificates of fitness, which took place at the Sheffield meeting of the British Medical Association, it had been thought advisable to ask Dr. Newman, of the Board of Education, to receive a deputation from the association. This deputation, which consisted of Dr. S. King-Alcock, President; Dr. G. Paddock Bate, of London; Dr. T. F. Young, of Liverpool; and the Honorary Secretary, was received by Dr. Newman at the offices of the Board of Education, on January 28th. The powers and scope of the work of certifying surgeons in connexion with the examination for certificates of fitness were explained, as were also the actual methods of examination and the keeping of records. The desirability of co-ordinating the work of the certifying surgeon with that of school medical officers, to enable the former to be placed in possession of the earlier records of children and young persons presented to him for certificates, was particularly emphasized. The theory as to whether the ultimate result of school medical examinations would not result in a diminished demand for the services of the factory surgeon was referred to, the general opinion of the deputation being that, whilst the natural tendency to perfection in that direction might tend towards a diminution in the demand for the certifying surgeon, counteracting influences would prevent any practical outcome. Disease would never cease to exist, and the abolition of examinations would mean that the unfit would again gravitate into factories and workshops, as in times gone by, while further, manufacturing progress and alteration in processes produced a steadily increasing list of particular dangers. Information was also provided upon the half-time question. Though Dr. Newman diplomatically abstained from making any comments on the general questions raised, he pointed out that it was the endeavour of his department to avoid as much as possible undue interference with other branches of the

medical profession, and that careful consideration would be given to the various points discussed. The Public Health Congress at Leeds was next referred to, and the satisfaction of the Council at the acceptance by Dr. A. Whitelegge of the presidency of the Section of Industrial Hygiene duly emphasized. Three members of the association had contributed papers to this section, and a number of others took part in discussions. A large number of certifying surgeons attended the first day's proceedings, when an important discussion on lead poisoning took place, and Dr. GLEN-PARK read a paper on conditional certificates of fitness. A paper contributed by Dr. T. HEYWOOD, of Darwen, on the half-time question, had rather unexpected results. Some days after the meeting a prominent member of the "Half-time Council" wrote very strong letters commenting on Dr. Heywood and his arguments to at least eight newspapers. These comments were so personal and so unjustifiable that Dr. Heywood felt compelled to place the matter in the hands of his solicitor, with the result that a writ for libel was duly served. Though an appearance was entered against the writ better counsels eventually prevailed, with the result that a complete withdrawal and apology with an undertaking to pay all costs was subsequently forwarded. The Council of the Association regarded this matter as of so much concern to the honour of certifying surgeons generally, that it had been determined to support Dr. Heywood's action, and to establish a guarantee fund. The committee formed for the purpose of drawing up a universal scheme for examinations for certificates of fitness had met on many occasions during the year, and satisfactory progress had been made. The statistical tables of examinations, rejections, and conditional certificates during the year 1908 were then presented, it being pointed out that the educational work of the Association could not be better exemplified than by the results there set forth. Although the total examinations throughout the country were considerably less than during the previous year, the rejections for medical reasons increased from 4,407 to 6,213; whilst those members of the Association who had sent in their returns to the secretary accounted for somewhat over half the examinations, they were responsible for two-thirds of the rejections. The record of conditional certificates had increased from 800 in 1906 to 2,500 in 1908.

The officers for the year were elected as follows: President, Dr. T. Fort, Oldham; Honorary Treasurer, Dr. T. Watts, Hyde; Honorary Secretary, Dr. W. F. Dearden, Manchester; Honorary Corresponding Secretaries for Ireland, Scotland, and London, Dr. H. C. Manley, Dr. A. Scott, and Dr. W. H. F. Oxley respectively.

DINNER.

The newly-elected PRESIDENT (Dr. T. Fort) presided, and among the guests present were Mr. H. S. Knyvett, H.M. Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories; Dr. T. M. Legge, Chief Medical Inspector of Factories; Miss R. Squire, Principal Lady Inspector of Factories for Manchester District; Professor Sheridan Delépine; Mr. W. Mullins, Secretary of the Card and Belting Room Cotton Operatives' Society; and Mr. J. Ashworth, Principal Inspector for the Manchester District.

The PRESIDENT, in proposing the health of the Factory Department of the Home Office, alluded to the difference in the standing and quality of work done by the certifying surgeon of to-day as compared with that of thirty years ago, when he was appointed. During that period sanitation in factories had advanced enormously, the health of the operatives was now undoubtedly better, and certainly the certifying surgeon was thought more of by both operatives and employers. As certifying surgeon for the important cotton district of Oldham, he thought that, without being controversial, he might be allowed to mention a few facts which had some bearing on the half-time question. He was of opinion that the danger to children working in the factory had been very much exaggerated, and this was borne out by the returns of the Chief Inspector of Factories on accidents, as well as by his own figures. In the last return of the Chief Inspector the total number of accidents investigated by certifying surgeons was stated to be 41,901, and of these 9,061 of the injured were "young persons" and only 189 half-timers. He thought it was more fair, however, to give the particular figures for the