

As regards reformation, what seems most required in that direction is some society or organization that will not only look after first offenders but assist by finding employment for, and advise prisoners on their being discharged from gaols on completion of their sentences, as is done in Otago by the Dunedin Patients and Prisoners' Aid Society. If this department is successful in making imprisonment deterrent, then it behoves others to undertake the work of reformation.

26. The proposed revision and amendment of the prison regulations referred to in last year's report has not yet, owing to several causes, been completed; but the matter has not been lost sight of, and at an early date it is hoped a scheme will be submitted for your favourable consideration modifying the present scale of remissions of sentences, as well as giving greater facilities to well-conducted prisoners to communicate with their friends by both letters and visits.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

A reference to Table L shows that ninety-one persons were placed on probation last year, as against the same number in 1897. Of these thirty-one were discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, three were rearrested, one was transferred to a lunatic asylum, and fifty-six still remain under the supervision of the Probation Officers completing their respective terms of probation.

The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £406 3s. 4d., of which £170 10s. 4d. has been actually paid, the greater portion of the remainder being paid by instalments as it becomes due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders, had they been sent to prison, would have been £3,287, which sum, added to the amount of costs, &c., actually paid, gives a saving of £3,457 10s. 4d. to the colony.

Of the 1,005 persons who have been put on probation since the introduction of the Act in October, 1886, 830 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses; sixty-one have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment; one committed suicide; two have died; twenty-three have absconded; one was sent to a lunatic asylum; and eighty-seven still remain fulfilling the terms of their probation.

The above-quoted results prove beyond doubt that the First Offenders' Probation Act, which was placed on the statute-book of the colony to put first offenders under a term of surveillance that is calculated to give them an extra incentive to good behaviour, and to check predilections that might end in a career of crime, is satisfactorily attaining that end. A probationer has ever before his mind the inevitable consequence which will ensue should he deviate from strictest rectitude of conduct during his probation, while he is not in a position to be contaminated by the evil associations which are almost inseparable from a prison life. The State is relieved of the expense of his support, and there is much more inducement to return to the paths of honesty and industry than there would be were he under bars and bolts inside the walls of a felons' cell; and, lastly, he is not branded as a "gaol-bird."

I have, &c.,

A. HUME,

Inspector of Prisons.