

HOW BREACHES OF PROBATIONARY LICENSE ARE DEALT WITH.

Breaches of probationary license are of three classes—(a) Those who whilst on probation commit fresh crimes; (b) those who whilst under prohibition so far as alcohol is concerned frequent publichouses and drink intoxicants; (c) those who do not report their whereabouts to the Probation Officer, and thus prevent the Board and the Department of Justice having a supervision of their actions. It will be seen from the statistics that those under class (b) are the most numerous. The Board has found it necessary in very many cases to make it a condition of release on probation that a prisoner released shall take out a prohibition order under the Licensing Act against himself, and that he shall not visit any place where alcoholic liquors are sold. A great number of prisoners say that their lapses from the path of rectitude have been occasioned by indulging in intoxicating liquors, and in most cases such statements have been verified by the evidence given against them on their trial or in the depositions taken in the Court that committed them for trial or for sentence. It is not surprising that after their release from months or years of imprisonment they should succumb to temptation. The majority have a great burden of past bad habits to carry, and most criminals have not a strong will-power. The prisoners are beginning to understand that any breach of the conditions of their probationary license will make it harder for them to get another trial, and the fear of further imprisonment has in many cases a restraining influence, and helps them to resist temptation. In some cases the Board makes it a condition that towns shall not be visited, and that they shall remain in the country so that they may escape the heavy temptations of city life.

There are many who have been released who have up to the present led good lives, and though it is said that many have not the will-power to resist temptation, and thus again become criminals, the Board realizes that it cannot be expected that any term of imprisonment will redeem the average habitual criminal. He may be tainted with a past history derived from his ancestors, and his early years may have been spent in bad surroundings; and, if so, how can he be expected even after some years of seclusion from the social life of the community to have got rid of his taint? The Board, therefore, in carrying out its duties, does not expect all to be reclaimed. If some can be made good citizens even for a time, and if some are permanently changed, that will be a good result. The Board further recognizes that it must struggle to help all the prisoners and try them with liberty from time to time when there seems even the slightest chance of improvement. To imprison men who seem normal for ever and not allow one ray of hope to enter their souls would be inflicting the most grievous of punishment. Some may be abnormal, and improvement may be impossible, and the safety of the public may demand their permanent seclusion, but this class is, the Board believes, very small.

The Board would further add that if prisoners are to be redeemed the public must treat them with consideration on their release and help them to lead a better life. Prisoners' aid societies have done much in helping them, and it is a pity that these are not better supported, so that the released prisoners may be found work and aided to get work. As was said in last year's report of the Board, nothing can be expected of prisoners if they do not acquire industrious habits and the habit of thrift.

The Board is much impressed with the great value of post-prison treatment. Experience has definitely proved that as a general rule prisoners, including those even not of a pronounced criminal type, are unable to govern themselves properly without some helping and guiding hand to carry them over the dangerous period immediately following their release. Provision has been made for this need in the four centres by the appointment of Probation Officers, who are connected with philanthropic organizations, and whose services are highly valued and recognized by the Board. But with the increasing growth of the number of persons who are sentenced to reformatory treatment it is evident that the system must be considerably extended. The Board recommends that the Department should consider the question of appointing more Probation Officers, and it is believed that there are many suitable persons who would cheerfully undertake these duties.

Signed on behalf of the Board.

ROBERT STOUT, Chairman.

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