

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

REPORTS OF THE HONORARY PROBATION OFFICERS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH, 1919.

REV. F. R. JEFFREYS, AUCKLAND.

The year's work has been much the same as in previous years, and the results have in my opinion more than ever emphasized previous statements made by me in annual reports concerning the inestimable value to the community of the benefits of the general principles of probation. Nine months ago I told some of our Judges that I could without exaggeration state that, through the medium of the Probation Act, I had been enabled since assuming office in July, 1915, to save at least one hundred young people from having to face life with the prison brand upon them. From an economic point of view alone it is impossible to realize what this means to the community. From a moral point of view the value is still greater. Regarded from the mere pounds-shillings-and-pence question, one has only to think that imprisonment means a considerable cost to the State for the prisoner alone. Food, clothing, light, and supervision must proportionately increase, even in a large prison, for every additional prisoner; prison gratuities to the prisoner have to be paid, and even in the case of an average good workman the earning-power of his work in gaol cannot recompense the State for the outlay involved. It stands to reason that much prison work is of an unproductive nature for the State. Also, if the prisoner be a married man with a young family it almost always means that the wife and children must be supported by the local Charitable Aid Board, and thus become a burden on the taxpayer. Further, another important factor is that restitution to aggrieved persons becomes practically impossible. On the contrary, probation saves the State from the maintenance, care, and supervision of the delinquent, the Charitable Aid Board is saved from maintaining the man's family, the aggrieved person has his loss made good, and the community has the man's services in some necessary work that makes for its efficiency. From the moral viewpoint I know of nothing better that can humanely be done that will check a young man from a life of crime than to make him work and maintain his family, discharge his social obligations, and out of his own hard-earned money recompense the person he has wronged. Enforced restitution from a young man's own earnings has an infinitely greater moral effect for good than gaoling, feeding, and lodging him without causing him any individual responsibility for his maintenance. It is because of the scores of concrete illustrations of the benefits of probation that I have now before me that I long to see the general principles of probation more widely applied in the administration of Justice in our Dominion.

It has again been a most encouraging year to your officer in that the constant co-operation of Judges, Magistrates, gaol officials, and police has been given to him in every possible way, and his recommendations have almost invariably been acted on. Without this co-operation the work could not be done. One of the most pleasing features of the year has been the behaviour of the probationers themselves, especially during the time of stress and strain of the influenza epidemic, when all regular work was completely disorganized. The probationers generally, with few exceptions, regard the officer in charge of them as their friend and guide, and only occasionally has it been necessary to resort to arrest and similar harsh methods. When arrest has to be resorted to the advice, warning, or imprisonment given by the Court has had the desired effect. During the year many of my probationers have returned from active service, after having made good to the full in service for the Empire. Imprisonment in their cases would have deprived the nation of the most valuable services that they have rendered to the nation in her hour of need.

I commenced the year with 103 probationers, and ended it with ninety-eight still under my care. During the year I received from our Courts seventy-two cases for various periods as follows: Two for three months, five for six months, twenty-three for twelve months, four for eighteen months, twenty-five for two years, thirteen for three years. Of these two defaulted and were gazetted for arrest, a failure of 2·7 per cent. Several cases were received on transfer from other districts. The orders issued by the Courts for payments to be made by the probationers committed to my care were, for costs of prosecution, £219 6s. 4d., and for restitution £172 4s. 11d.; the bulk of this has been duly collected. Owing to the large amount being paid to me in restitution the Department opened a deposit account for me in the Bank of New Zealand in April, 1918, and by the 31st March, 1919, I had paid into this account the sum of £531 8s. 7d., the major portion of which belonged to orders made in previous years. I have given these figures to prove my statement made earlier in this report that by the advantages of probation the aggrieved persons benefit as well as the probationers.

It often happens in taking a probationer from the Court that it is necessary to find him in clothes and lodging or to assist the family in various ways. In this connection much important work can be done by the Probation Officer because of his social service organization behind him; but it sometimes means giving assistance that is really too heavy a burden thus to be borne, and the State might well set aside an allowance to its Probation Officers for the purpose of putting young delinquents on their feet again.

Throughout the year the women and girls who have been placed on probation have been supervised by my co-worker, Sister Constance, whose tactful, kindly, and firm methods have been a great factor in helping many delinquents to redeem the past. The Door of Hope, an unsectarian institution for preventive work among girls, has been of great assistance, and time after time I