

OFFENDERS PROBATION ACT, 1920, AND GENERAL PROBATION.

REPORTS OF HONORARY PROBATION OFFICERS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1923.

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FOR the first three months of the period under review the work was continued by Rev. F. R. Jeffreys, the late Probation Officer, who relinquished the office at the 30th June, 1922. The work was continued in the office at His Majesty's Arcade until October, and then removed to the present office in the Magistrates' Court. This move has given better facilities for the work, and I find that, being on the spot, so to speak, is a great advantage in many ways. From a monetary point of view there is the considerable saving of over £100 per year formerly paid for rent of offices. The detail work of the office has been efficiently carried out by the Assistant Probation Officer.

Court Probationers.—I append a summary of figures showing the numbers dealt with during the period, also the amount of restitution and costs of prosecution. It will be seen from these figures that there has been a slight increase over the previous year's working. From the Auckland Courts I received a total of 122 probationers, for the following periods: One for six months, twenty-nine for twelve months, sixty-seven for two years, nineteen for three years, one for four years, and five for five years. Added to this number there were received on transfer from other districts forty-four, making a total receipt of 166 for the year. The following table shows the complete figures for the period under review:—

Probationers actually reporting at 1st April, 1922	..	..	..	125
Probationers received from Auckland Courts	..	..	..	122
Probationers received on transfer	..	..	..	44
			—	166
Total dealt with during year	..	..	..	291
of whom there were—				
Discharged by Prisons Board	..	..	..	8
Completed probation	..	..	..	54
Transferred to other districts	..	..	..	50
Sentenced for other lapses after being admitted to probation	..	..	..	17
			—	129
Total on register at 31st March, 1923	..	..	..	162

Of the 162 at present on the register seven have absconded. These, added to the seventeen who came before the Courts, making a total of twenty-four, show a failure to "make good" of less than 9 per cent.

The money ordered to be paid as restitution to complainants amounted to £1,148 3s. 6d., and the costs of prosecution to £180 3s. 8d. The amount collected and banked during the year for restitution was £726 12s. 7d., and for costs of prosecution £113 6s. 5d. The restitution was duly paid to claimants, and costs of prosecution paid into the Public Account to the credit of the Criminal Prosecutions vote.

Crimes Amendment Act Probationers.—The numbers of reports dealt with during the year are as follows: April, 69; May, 65; June, 66; July, 67; August, 66; September, 62; October, 49; November, 67; December, 63; January, 66; February, 64; March, 65. Of the persons released on license, thirty-three completed their terms of probation satisfactorily, and fourteen absconded or were returned to prison for other lapses committed while on probation.

The amounts paid in respect of money earned while in prison are as follows: April, £63 13s. 3d.; May, £67 3s. 8d.; June, £42 10s.; July, £56 5s. 2d.; August, £47 1s. 4d.; September, £53 19s.; October, £2; November, £161 11s. 2d.; December, £46 19s.; January, £75 10s.; February, £65 10s.; March, £69 8s. 6d.

From the foregoing report it will be seen that, despite the failures, the value of the Offenders Probation Act as a reformatory and deterrent agency is increasingly shown. A very satisfactory feature of the year's working is the amount of over £839 paid by probationers as restitution and costs of prosecution. The payment of this amount, the average conduct and attention to reporting by the probationers, and the small percentage of failures are gratifying and augur well for the still further successful prosecution of the work under this Act.

As an illustration of the beneficial effect of granting probation instead of imposing a term of imprisonment, both in regard to the offender and the victim of his offence, I desire to cite an actual case that occurred in Auckland during the past year. A certain offender was admitted to probation by the Auckland Supreme Court on the 12th August, 1922, and ordered to make restitution of the sum of £300 which he had misappropriated—£40 forthwith and the balance at the rate of £10 a month. Briefly, the circumstances of the theft were that the offender was the appointee of an individual who had to take extended leave for health reasons. While the offender was so employed he took for his own use the sum of £300 belonging to his principal, being moneys used by the principal in his business. The nature of the offence and the amount involved were considerable factors against probation being granted to the offender. Probation was recommended, and, that course being taken, I then had considerable doubt as to whether the large sum stolen could be recovered for the complainant, whose health continued bad, thus making him practically dependent on the repayments. I have pleasure in stating that to the present juncture the offender has paid the amounts as ordered, the amounts paid to date totalling £116 15s. The complainant has gone to Australia to winter for health reasons, having appointed an agent to receive and forward the monthly instalments, on which he is practically dependent. Unforeseen circumstances excepted, I am of the opinion that full restitution will be made.