

thicker wall around our prisoners than those of brick and stone, within which the law has placed them! Those of us who have become familiar with the inside of these walls have found a veritable gold-mine of real possibility. This in a much fuller meaning surely applies to the opportunities of a Probation Officer, who must go forward with a heart strong to endure, brave to suffer disappointment, and warm to sympathize and advise. Unless the offender is brought into sympathetic contact with some one in the community who will enable him to resist temptation and encourage him in well-doing he will never reform, and it is hard for him to forsake his former condition and his accustomed pursuits. It is what the probationer learns by example and experience more than by precept that moves him, so the responsibility of the Probation Officer is decidedly great when he honestly seeks to do his duty in the way of true reform.

Quite a large number of probationers have successfully finished their probationary career with very great satisfaction, and are now doing well. It is scarcely necessary for me to add that the more I see of the Probation Act in actual work the more I am convinced that it is a magnificent thing in the way of true help and reform, and I further think that the results bear ample testimony to that fact.

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It is a little more than twelve months since I took over the duties of Probation Officer for this district, and even in that short period I have come to realize that few positions afford greater scope for service to one's fellows whose needs are greatest than is given to the person privileged to serve in the capacity of Probation Officer. Under the limitations of an official report the account to be given of the year's efforts must leave a good deal unsaid. The more vital part of a Probation Officer's work, being of an intimate, personal kind, cannot be set down in specific detail; only in general terms can its main features be indicated. In dealing with the frail human nature of those committed to his care no officer can have stereotyped rules laid down for his guidance. Each case demands continued observation and sympathetic study if its special needs are to be met. In itself the work is of absorbing interest; it yields at least a measure of encouraging results, and it opens up good prospects yet to be explored. In one respect its experiences are decisive; it is not mere official supervision that tells, but personal contact imbued with friendly interest. Each person endeavouring fitfully after a better mode of life is most effectively helped if his mentors show an attitude appreciative alike of his striving and of his difficulties.

The records of the year go towards justifying the leniency extended under the Probation Acts. The honest efforts made by probationers to pay punctually the stipulated instalments of moneys due by them furnish some evidence of their desire to make amends. Further, under the Offenders Act there are forty-five names on the year's roll, but in only one instance was it necessary to bring a probationer before the Court for failing to comply with the conditions of release. Such a step is adopted only as a last resort; but, in his own best interests, as well as in fairness to those who carry out their obligations, it would be remiss to let any probationer follow a go-as-you-please course.

It sometimes happens that cases are dealt with by the Court in a way which entails on the officer, if he is to make the best of the situation, incidental services not contemplated in the accepted schedule of his duties. Thus in one instance the offender, a total stranger in the district, was virtually stranded, and had to be cared for by the officer until restoration to anxious parents had been effected. In another case it was necessary to obtain financial assistance to put matters right, upon which, owing to the very special circumstances, the offender was convicted and discharged.

There is no question that suitable employment is a specially important factor in the outlook of the class of individuals coming under our notice. Unemployment is the cause of many going astray; especially is this so as regards the first lapse—mischievous is proverbially alluring to idle hands. Every effort has therefore been made to place probationers in congenial and suitable work at the earliest possible moment.

*Crimes Amendment Act Probationers.*—It is pleasing to record that, with one exception, those released by the Prisons Board have given a very satisfactory account of themselves. The results are the more gratifying when we bear in mind the severe handicaps under which these persons essay to make a fresh start as free citizens. They often have to put up a fight, both with themselves and with adverse circumstances, of which few people have an adequate idea. In many cases those serving a term of imprisonment dimly realize that they are liable to be "up against it" when they try to resume normal social contact, but the ordeal is apt to prove worse than was bargained for. In one of his letters a released inmate writes, "A man's sentence really does not commence until he is discharged by the Prisons Board." Here the question of employment looms more largely, and one is often constrained to think that, if a chance to rise in the ranks of honest labour could only be guaranteed, the Prisons Board probationers would mostly retrieve themselves. One example will serve to show that the will and ability to work are often there if only the opportunity is forthcoming. A probationer who was determined to win out gladly accepted the chance afforded by a position secured for him with a sympathetic employer in the country. Although this young man lacked previous experience, his employer was able in a few months to report that he had never had a more willing worker or one who so readily adapted himself to the work. So satisfied was he that when he had occasion to be away from home he was content to leave the youth in sole charge.

There is no doubt that the good prospects of probation as applied by the Board are greatly enhanced by the excellent vocational training provided by the Prisons Department. Many of the learners become competent craftsmen; but those released by the Board, having their term of detention shortened by their good-conduct record, may not have completed the course of training provided. If the labour-market is oversupplied these men, not being first-class tradesmen, fall back on "blind alley" occupations, or drift. To overcome this difficulty it might be possible to arrange with firms to employ these young people as improvers, thus ensuring an opportunity of their becoming fully qualified tradesmen.