

1925.
NEW ZEALAND.

OFFENDERS PROBATION ACT, 1920

(REPORT ON OPERATIONS OF), FOR THE YEAR 1924-25.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF JUSTICE to His Excellency the GOVERNOR-GENERAL.

Wellington, 10th August, 1925.

I HAVE the honour to submit to Your Excellency the report of the Chief Probation Officer on the operations of the Offenders Probation Act for the year 1924-25.

I have, &c.,

C. J. PARR,

Minister of Justice.

The CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER to the Hon. the MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

SIR,—

Office of the Chief Probation Officer, Wellington, 6th August, 1925.

I have the honour to present my annual report, together with the report of the Deputy Chief Probation Officer, and the reports of the honorary Probation Officers, on the working of the adult probation system of the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1925.

The probation statistics appended to this report show that during the past year 586 offenders were admitted to probation, whilst 73 persons—who were convicted and ordered to come up for sentence when called upon—automatically came under the Probation Act, making a total of 659 offenders who received the benefits of the probation system. The steady increase in the number of persons admitted to probation indicates a growing confidence in the system as an effective means of disciplining and reforming certain classes of delinquents without commitment to reformatory institutions or prisons. The principle of probation has now a safe place in our system of criminal law, and our efforts are in the direction of gradually enlarging its scope and establishing an ideal and inexpensive method of dealing with offenders whom the Courts consider worthy of an opportunity to prove their desire to reform. Probation is not to be regarded as a panacea for crime, and it is not suggested that it should be applied in every case where first offenders come before the Courts. Careful discrimination based on a thorough investigation and knowledge of the previous record of every offender is absolutely necessary, and in carrying out their investigations the Probation Officers are confronted with difficult and delicate problems which require the most careful and intelligent handling. To achieve success the Probation Act must be sympathetically administered, but sentimental leniency or slackness in the treatment of delinquents are fraught with grave social consequences, and the successful Probation Officer must act firmly but kindly.

It will be observed from the statistics that of the 586 persons who were admitted to probation during the year 43 failed to respond to the leniency offered them—making the percentage of successes 92.66. The result is slightly less satisfactory than the figures for the previous year; but a system which saves from the stigma of prison over 92 per cent. of offenders and incidentally benefits the persons defrauded, as well as saving expense to the Treasury, is worthy of development. It must be remembered that offenders sometimes come before the Court before the Probation Officer can thoroughly investigate their cases, and in other instances antecedents of offenders cannot be ascertained—particularly when they are not long in the Dominion. A number of such cases are doomed to failure, but the opportunity to make good is offered. When these and other handicaps under which Probation Officers labour are considered the actual number of failures seems remarkably small.

The collection of Court costs and restitution-moneys is an important feature of the probation work. Court costs amounting to £745 9s. 9d., and restitution-moneys aggregating £3,547 3s. 2d. were collected during the past financial year. The total amount collected constitutes a record, being £1,337 higher than the total collection in any previous year.