

MR. T. P. MILLS, PROBATION OFFICER, WELLINGTON.

There were 78 offenders on the register at the beginning of the year; 66 were placed on probation, 48 were transferred from other districts, 192 in all passing through my hands during the year. Forty-five completed the period of probation satisfactorily, 45 were transferred to other districts, 3 left the Dominion permanently, 1 was discharged by the Prisons Board, 6 were imprisoned, and 5 were re-admitted to probation for subsequent criminal offences, and 6 were punished for minor breaches of probation. Ninety-nine probationers were on the register at the end of the year. Of those who lapsed only one received a lengthy term of imprisonment—viz., two years' reformatory detention—and has therefore been written off the register; not one of the remainder received a longer sentence than three months, and all these will continue to report on their release from prison. It is noteworthy that in most of these cases probation was not recommended at their original offence, the Court having extended this leniency with a good deal of hesitation. Practically all the rest were confined to transfers from other districts. There are several defaulting probationers, however, that the police have failed to locate. They are not included in the above-mentioned defaulters.

The percentage of actual failures show an increase on last year's favourable returns. It would be of interest to trace the after-career of those who have conducted themselves satisfactorily during the term of probation. Probably the majority do not transgress again, but to my knowledge there are quite a number who have not stood the further test of time.

It is obvious that the observation of these offenders only during the limited period of probation does not correctly represent the value of probation as a reformatory agency. In any case the whole system in my opinion is capable of improved methods. Probation has come to stay—it is essential, therefore, that we should progress towards perfection.

The number of lapses would be reduced by the elimination of very doubtful cases, especially those not recommended by the Probation Officer; severer penalties for breaches of the conditions of probation; reports to be furnished on all cases where there are no previous convictions; a limited number of probationers to each Probation Officer; the appointment of honorary assistant Probation Officers; and a judicious increase in the amount of money allocated for the support of the system. In view of the great saving effected by keeping these men out of prison, running as it does well into five figures, the important influence also on the well-being of the community, which latter should probably have the first place, the present expenditure can hardly be considered adequate.

Of those who completed the term of probation satisfactorily, some have made very praiseworthy efforts to win through. It is far from an easy battle—the difficulty in obtaining suitable situations, the co-existent trouble to rehabilitate oneself in reputable circles inflicts a heavy penalty for wrongdoing. Farm-work perhaps affords more openings than any other avenue of labour, but that is more skilled than the average man generally allows. It is comparatively easy to place an experienced youth on a farm, but the unskilled man is a problem. There are large numbers of our young men badly equipped for these emergencies, and it contributes largely to their downfall. It is an exception to find a good tradesman before the Court for any offence. Of the 190-odd men who passed through my hands only 12 had any real knowledge of skilled work. In this connection I would welcome any step to extend school age to make that possible. The recruiting-ground of the criminal is from the mentally dull and stupid, and it is pleasing to see that special tuition is being given to help these. Skill with the hands is of infinitely more importance to the community and to this class of individual than ability to colour a map or work out a fraction sum. It is along these lines that a great advance will be made in coping with the criminal problem. Probation is good, the Borstal Institution is good; under existing circumstances both are invaluable, and both doubtless will continue for all time; but to be properly equipped to meet the pitfalls of life is the most urgent obligation of the State to the youth of to-day. Apart from the higher ideals of the Christian faith, salvation is through work, and skilled work.

REPORTS OF WOMEN PROBATION OFFICERS.

MRS. R. GLOVER, WELLINGTON.

In submitting my annual report for the Wellington District for female offenders, I desire to say that the work for the past year has been most successful.

I cannot speak too highly of the assistance of our Judges, Magistrates, Court officials, and police officers, who are ever ready to grant the benefits of the Probation Act to deserving cases, which means that the stain of being sent to prison is avoided. The offenders under the Probation Act are allowed to go to their homes, and under the influence of their parents, whose counsel they no longer disregard: this in many instances gives the probationers greater respect for them. Reporting is no hardship, but, on the contrary, the young woman looks forward to coming to see her Probation Officer, and in the quiet of the little room many weaknesses are confessed, and one has abundant opportunity of giving loving counsel and advice, which has helped to tide many feet over the slippery places. It is quite cheering to receive letters of appreciation from those who have been helped. Only recently I received one, saying how much my little talks were appreciated, and that they had been the means of making the writer a more thoughtful girl instead of a thoughtless one, and how much stronger she felt in herself to resist temptation, and she was constantly thinking what she could do to improve herself for the future.

I wish to further state that since my appointment as Woman Probation Officer (I was the first appointed in New Zealand), with the exception of three probationers, not one has been before the Court for a second offence. This speaks admirably for the system.

The Crimes Amendment Act deals with quite a different type: many have offended often, serving several sentences for different offences. Numbers of these are excellent workers and get good wages; several have been in the same situations for two or three years, and are banking their money.

It is very creditable to the Prisons Department, the manner in which it is endeavouring to help lift the underworld of society. Much of the present system is due to the increasing labours and strong humane sympathy for the "down-and-outs" of the late Controller-General of Prisons, Mr. C. E. Matthews, who was suddenly called home to his reward. He will be remembered by numbers for many years to come for his timely and kindly acts.