

The following comparative table shows that there has been a diminution in the number of persons admitted to probation during the past years as compared with previous years :—

Year.				Direct Admissions.	Sentence deferred.	Total.
1925	..	..	..	658	102	760
1926	..	..	..	656	108	764
1927	..	..	..	586	134	720
1928	..	..	..	615	154	769
1929	..	..	..	557	151	708

The above reduction in the number admitted to probation can be attributed to the exercise of a slightly greater reserve on the part of Courts in granting probation in cases where it has been considered that the deterrent element should be given more weight in imposing sentence. Early last year, in order to break down several youthful criminal gangs, the Courts had recourse to the imposition of Borstal detention. It is noticed in the criminal statistics that, while there has been a slight falling-off in the number of offences against property, there has been a small increase in the number of offences against the person. Probation is regarded as not always appropriate to offences in the latter class.

It is an accepted axiom that the more generous impulses of the law are not intended for cases involving deliberation or brutality. In considering the deterrent aspect of the treatment of criminals probation should not be regarded as tantamount to letting an offender off. It is not merely a gesture of clemency on the part of the Court, neither is it a form of procedure whereby undue consideration is given to the welfare of the offender to the entire disregard of the rights of those injured or of society generally.

Probation is a tried and proved method of treatment on common-sense lines. The high percentage of successes recorded above strongly support the adoption of probation wherever it can be suitably applied. Experience shows that more can be accomplished in the development of character and the provision of socializing influences, through the careful supervision of an offender in the community, where he is participating in the everyday economic struggle, than in the artificial atmosphere of an institution, no matter how well it may be conducted.

In view of this important fact grave responsibility rests upon Courts in considering this possible alternative to imprisonment. In England the Secretary of State, in a recent Home Office Circular to Justices, stated, *inter alia*, "He wishes to express an earnest hope that every Court, before committing a young offender to prison, will satisfy itself that this course is inevitable, and that no other method of treatment can properly be employed. . . . The impression that probation can only be applied to first offenders still seems to exist, probably owing to the fact that the first Act, which dealt with probation, was limited to first offenders. . . . Under the present law probation can be applied to subsequent offenders as well as to the first. Again, in some places the services of Probation Officers are seldom or never used for older offenders. The Courts concerned would appear to think that the probation system is intended only for young persons, and is not appropriate for older offenders. This is a misconception. . . . It is equally valuable in proper cases for lads and girls who have been at work for some years, and for adult offenders."

In considering the arguments in favour of probation, mention has already been made of the large sums collected from probationers for fines and restitution. This enforced saving for the purpose of making reparation to those injured is an important reformatory factor. Probation Officers state that in many cases they find that not only has it been the beginning of the habit of thrift, but also it brings home to the offender in a most salutary manner a fuller realization of the consequence of his lapse; but apart from all this, and apart from the obvious advantage of the saving of expense to the taxpayer which would be involved were the offender kept in an institution, there is another important human consideration—that is, probation obviates the necessity of severing domestic ties, which, besides making the problem of rehabilitation less difficult, saves considerable hardship and suffering to the innocent members of the offender's family. The granting of probation should thus be considered in every case where the offence is contingent more on circumstances than upon character.

Dealing with the Crimes Amendment Act statistics for the year under review, it is to be noted that during the year 246 cases, an increase of eighty-six over the previous year, were admitted to probation on the recommendation of the Prisons Board, and only twenty-four of these, which includes six habitual criminals, were recommitted to prison for breaches of their license. These institutional discharges are under the care of the Probation Officers and voluntary probation committees similarly to those admitted to probation by the Courts. The success of the cases paroled may be judged from the fact that during the quinquennium ended 31st December last, 853 prisoners, who had been sentenced to reformatory detention or hard labour, were released on probation, and during the five years only eighty-four, or 9·8 per cent., were recommitted for breaches of the conditions of their probation or for other offences; 26·4 per cent. only were reconvicted for lapses subsequent to discharge. These small percentages of failures, which are even smaller than for the previous year, not only reflect creditably on the reformatory influences of our present penal methods, but they bear witness to the effective working of our system of parole and after-care. This branch of the probation work is undoubtedly an exacting challenge to the social worker, for the man who welcomes an ex-prisoner to the world outside, who introduces him to his new life, needs a sympathetic understanding of the prisoner, and yet must have a practical knowledge of the world; but, more than this, he must be big enough to be the friend and not the patron.