

The number admitted to probation in the twelve months under review showed an increase over the previous year, as indicated by the following comparative table:—

Year.				Direct Admissions.	Sentence deferred.	Total.
1926	..	..	..	.. 656	108	764
1927	..	..	..	.. 586	134	720
1928	..	..	..	.. 615	154	769
1929	..	..	..	.. 557	151	708
1930	..	..	..	.. 650	162	812

The increase is in conformity with the general increase in crime, and does not mean that a much greater proportion of offenders were admitted to probation. Statistics show that the Courts in New Zealand are inclined to show a greater reserve in admitting offenders to probation than in England, where in recent years it is now much more freely used than in the past.

Probation at one time was generally regarded as being equivalent to letting the offender off—a gesture of clemency by a Court to a first offender—but in recent years there has been a greater realization of the deeper significance of probation, and this system of treatment of offenders as an alternative to imprisonment has been used with success to a greater extent than in past years in nearly all countries. The underlying idea is that if, judged by the character of the offender and the nature of the offence, the deterrent effect is not seriously abated, and the safety of society not jeopardized, it is both cheaper and more satisfactory to give an offender conditional liberty on probation than to place him in an institution, where he will be a burden upon the State.

The main object of probation is the reinstating of the offender as a good member of society, and experience shows that, in appropriate cases, this can be accomplished more effectively under careful supervision in the community than in the artificial atmosphere of an institution. Apart from the unavoidable risks of contamination, the severance of economic and social ties makes rehabilitation more difficult. To heal without scarring is the perfection of moral economy.

The Crimes Amendment Act statistics show that 781 cases were dealt with; 201 of those were admitted to probation during the year on the recommendation of the Prisons Board. Only twenty-six, including ten habitual criminals, were recommitted to prison for breach of their license. The placing of these dischargees in employment and in other ways assisting in their rehabilitation has proved a particularly difficult task during the past year, and the small number of recommitments is eloquent as to the efficacy of the after-care work done by the Prisoners' Aid Societies, voluntary probation committees, and other social workers. The success of the present system of parole may be judged from the fact that during the quinquennium ended the 31st December last 847 prisoners who had been sentenced to reformatory detention or hard labour were released on probation and during the same period only seventy-five, or 8·9 per cent., were returned for failing to comply with the conditions of their release or for other offences whilst on probation. As an indication of the efficacy of the deterrent and reformatory influences of our present penal methods, it should be noted that 26·7 per cent. only were reconvicted for lapses subsequent to discharge.

During the year, for the purpose of bringing about uniformity of practice, a revised pamphlet of instructions to Probation Officers was issued. This, besides covering all matters relating to procedure, records, and accounts, also laid down certain general principles for the guidance of Probation Officers as to the type of case for which probation might appropriately be recommended.

I desire again to place on record the Department's appreciation of the sympathetic co-operation of the Magistrates who have taken up the chairmanship of the voluntary probation committees, and also to give expression to the indebtedness of the Department to the members of various Voluntary Probation Committees, the Prisoners' Aid Societies, the Salvation Army, and the numerous social workers who have so materially contributed to the success of the work by their assistance to Probation Officers and probationers during a specially difficult period.

I again have pleasure in recording my deep sense of gratitude to the members of my staff, and to the police officers and others who act as Probation Officers, for the helpful manner in which they have co-operated with me, as well as for the sympathetic way in which they have dealt with probationers coming under their care.

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