

Probation in New Zealand has been recognized by statute since 1886. The Dominion was thus one of the earliest countries to adopt the system. It has gradually been developed from originally being applicable only to first offenders until, since the passing of the Offenders Probation Act, 1920, it has applied to any offenders. The organization, both from the point of view of personnel and method, has been gradually extended and improved, and it can now be claimed that the Dominion is served by an efficient and sympathetic team of probation workers. The rationale of the system, in so far as the selection of cases and their supervision is concerned, is clearly and succinctly stated in the report of the Committee set up in England to deal with social services in the Courts. As this accords with the practice followed in the Dominion, the extract is quoted hereunder:—

“We have already referred to the need for care in the selection of cases for probation. To place persons on probation where the circumstances do not justify it imposes an unfair burden on the Probation Officer, and brings discredit on the system. Failure in unsuitable cases may even deter Courts from using probation in cases which are suitable. Probation may not always be in the best interest of the offender. Public interest also demands that it shall not be used indiscriminately without due regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the character of the offence.

“In fairness, then, to society, the offender, and the Probation Officer, no person should be placed on probation without full consideration of his previous history and present surroundings, as well as the immediate cause of his appearance before the Court. Without inquiry it is impossible adequately to take into account the conditions which the law prescribes as justifying the use of probation. Inquiry has both a positive as well as a negative value; it ensures the benefit of the system to those who are likely to profit by it, and discloses those cases where probation is not likely to have any chance of success. Moreover, the Probation Officers who gave evidence before us were unanimous in expressing the opinion that, where an offender is to be placed under supervision, it is important that the Probation Officer should make contact with him at the earliest possible stage. In this way the Probation Officer is better able to secure the confidence of the offender and to exercise his influence more effectively at a later stage.

“There should be a constructive effort by the Probation Officer, in co-operation with the probationer, to help him to fulfil his undertaking to the Court. With this object in view the environment of the probationer needs special study.

“The probationer is rarely an isolated unit in society; there are usually in the background friends or relations who may be an influence for good or ill. By obtaining the help of the family the Probation Officer may be able to strengthen his own efforts.

“Different probationers need different methods of treatment. This statement may appear obvious, but it is easily forgotten, especially if a uniform practice is adopted of requiring probationers to report at the Probation Officer's room. The high-spirited young man or woman requires widely different handling from the middle-aged father or mother of a family. It may be necessary to remit these visits or to vary the intervals at which they are required to suit the circumstances of the probationer or the progress made by him. Sometimes an older probationer may respond best by the knowledge that the Probation Officer is placing trust in him and giving him some degree of responsibility. To teach a probationer the way to help others as well as himself may be the best method of re-establishing self-respect.”

*Parole.*—The Crimes Amendment Act statistics show that 275 persons were released on probation during the year on the recommendation of the Prisons Board. None of these were recommitted to prison for breach of the conditions of their license; and twenty-three, including twenty-one habitual criminals, had their licenses cancelled for further offences. Considering the difficulties with which these dischargees are faced in rehabilitating themselves, the small percentage of failures can be regarded as satisfactory. The effectiveness of the present method of parole and after-care may be judged from the fact that during the five years ended 31st December last, 1,663 prisoners (excluding habitual criminals) were released on probation, and during this period only 120, or 7·2 per cent., were returned to prison for failing to comply with the conditions of their release or for other offences whilst on probation, and only 24·71 per cent. have again been convicted subsequent to discharge.

This latter form of probation, which deals with dischargees from prison and Borstal, though different in origin from the probation referred to in the earlier part of this report, calls for the same sympathetic understanding of human nature as with probationers under the Offenders Probation Act, but, if anything, it requires a more friendly shepherding to assist a parolee during the hazardous transition period between his first emergence from the more or less artificial life in an institution and his finding his feet again as a free citizen.