

pushed forward with all possible speed. At Timaru, Invercargill, and Wanganui the prisoners have been working for the corporations, and have made good progress. At Lyttelton good work has been done for the Government Printing Office, while the officers' uniforms and the prisoners' outer clothing have also been made there. The females at Addington, Auckland, and Dunedin have been working at the underclothing. A great difficulty exists in finding employment inside for prisoners in wet weather, it being difficult to obtain "junk" for picking into oakum, and the oakum itself is now almost unsaleable. The most urgent works which should, in my opinion, be at once put in hand, in addition to the new buildings in the course of erection, are a new boundary-wall at Addington, new prisons at Wanganui and Greymouth, and a new hulk at Otago Heads, the one now in use being unserviceable and too small.

25. You were pleased a short time since to suggest the introduction here of the probation system, as carried out in the City of Boston and elsewhere in America, and to request my opinion thereon. I have no hesitation in stating that I believe such a system, judiciously applied to certain cases in New Zealand, would be attended with a saving of no inconsiderable sum of money to the Government, and would lead to the reclaiming of many, and be the means of their redeeming their characters. Probation, as provided for by statute and practised by the Courts in many parts of America, is not generally well understood, many seeming to think it to be virtually a pardon, when in fact it is only a suspension of sentence for a limited time, to give opportunity for reform, and does not relieve the party from any responsibility for the offence committed without further action by the Court at the expiration of the term of probation. When sentence is suspended, the conditions generally imposed by the Court are "to be of good behaviour and keep the peace towards all persons." If these conditions are faithfully complied with the Court may order a discharge at the expiration of the term of probation, or, if the person has been sent to the country or to sea, the case may be dismissed or placed on file. It would appear that, in considering the matter of suspending the sentence of a person convicted of a crime, two important questions arise: first, what are the demands of public justice; second, what are the probabilities of reformation. Both are entirely at the discretion of the Court; but in the latter case the statutes provide for a Probation Officer, whose duty it is to "investigate such cases with a view to ascertaining the probabilities of reformation without punishment," and if found favourable to so report to the Court. The following extract from the report of the Probation Officer for the City of Boston for the year 1882, giving the result of the working of the probation system for that year, will be read with interest: "In reviewing the record of the past year the unpleasant fact is presented that 51 persons who have been convicted of crime, and were placed on probation to give them an opportunity to reform without punishment, have not profited by the leniency shown them, but have again returned to their vicious ways and have been rearrested and surrendered back to Court for sentence; and that 9 others of the same class have been able to escape rearrest and punishment: add to this 18 who behaved well while on probation, and were discharged, but subsequently were in Court again for offences against the laws, and we have a total of 78 persons who may be counted as lost. But when we examine further, and find that this loss amounts to only about 15 per cent. of the whole number disposed of, and that 462, or about 85 per cent., have so conducted themselves as to merit the approbation of the Court before whom they were convicted, and have been honourably discharged, or had their cases dismissed or placed on file, and have since behaved well, the result of the work is indeed more encouraging. Even if the 15 per cent. had been the only portion saved, it would have well paid all labour and expense."

Persons placed on probation are required to report themselves periodically (at the discretion of the Court) to the Probation Officer, and, when honourably discharged at the expiration of their probation, or when their cases have been dismissed or laid on file, they are required to pay the cost of their prosecution.

The probation system is carried further, and reaches persons who are actually serving sentences, who may, upon sentence of not more than six months remaining unexpired, with a view to ascertaining the probabilities of their reformation, by the recommendation of the Probation Officer, and with the concurrence of the Court which imposed the sentence, be released on probation; but, as there is such a liberal scale of remission in force in New Zealand, I do not think the probation system need be made applicable to such cases. It appears to me, however (though it is not done in America), that there are cases of prisoners committed for trial, such as an attempt to commit suicide, &c., for which persons are often kept in prison here awaiting trial for a long period, to which probation might be made to apply; and I hope you will be enabled to recommend the system to the favourable consideration of the Legislature.

I have, &c.,

ARTHUR HUME,

Inspector of Prisons.

The Hon. the Minister of Justice, Wellington.