

That her visits to the different institutions had been most satisfactory, and she was pleased to find I had adopted the police-matron system, which insures womanly care for all women arrested. She had been much interested in reading my prison report for last year, and in the suggestions made concerning lunatic paupers, young children, &c. She was sure we were working towards the reforms so much desired in all countries, and that it is only a question of time for us to secure the improvements needed; and suggests that while we have a number of prisons building we could determine upon a section devoted to reformatory work or influence; the way would be open for the more scientific and economical care of classes which need care, protection, or reform. She concludes by saying, "It would be a great thing for this young colony, which has made such strides in reform, to step to the front or lead the way in the treatment of the dependent, defective, or delinquent classes." These remarks, coming from an expert of the experience the writer has in such matters, cannot be looked upon otherwise than as eminently satisfactory.

25. It is with deep regret I have to record the sudden death, on the 23rd February last, of Mr. Edward Rickerby, Gaoler, of New Plymouth Prison, who died in his office at 7.30 o'clock a.m. He had served continuously in the department since the 23rd July, 1869, and had risen from the bottom of the ladder to a gaolership, and had had charge of the New Plymouth Prison since the 31st March, 1885. He was a thorough upright and conscientious officer, and from his kindly manner when carrying out his official duties had won the respect and esteem of those with whom he was brought in contact, and his loss is much felt by myself and the department generally.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT.

1. A reference to Table L shows that 72 persons were placed on probation last year, as against 118 in 1895. Of these, 31 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 1 committed suicide, 4 were rearrested, 1 absconded, and 35 still remain under the supervision of the Probation Officers.

2. The amount of costs ordered to be paid by the various Courts before whom these offenders were brought was £519 13s. 6d., of which £289 19s. 1d. had been actually paid at the end of the year, and the greater portion of the remainder will, it is believed, be paid as it becomes due. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders in prison amounts to £2,250, which sum, added to the amount of costs, &c., actually paid, gives a saving of £2,769 13s. 6d. to the colony.

3. Of the 823 persons who have been placed on probation since the introduction of the Act in October, 1886, 708 have been discharged after satisfactorily carrying out the conditions of their licenses, 49 have been rearrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 1 committed suicide, 2 have died, 19 have absconded, and 44 still remain on probation.

4. The foregoing paragraph is the result of a ten years' working of what sceptical persons were pleased ten years ago to denounce as a dangerous, unwarrantable action of the Legislature in passing the First Offenders' Probation Act in 1886, it having been introduced into and shepherded through the House of Representatives by the Hon. J. A. Tole, the then Minister of Justice; but it is only due to those who were most prominent in denouncing it at that time to say that they are now amongst those loudest in its praise, and I am proud to see similar measures being brought forward in the majority of countries. A more reformatory Act has never been, to my mind, adopted, and the longer it works the more popular it will become with those who may still be dubious of its usefulness.

5. Before concluding this report there is one more matter to which I should like to invite attention, as it is intimately connected with those placed on probation, which is the necessity that exists for some organization to take in hand and look after discharged prisoners. There is such a society in Dunedin, which does good work under its agent, Mr. J. A. Torrence, who is gaol chaplain in Dunedin. The First Offenders' Probation Act has done much to keep people out of gaol, but the want is felt of some organization which will take in hand prisoners on discharge from gaol. A man comes out of prison and gets into employment. The police naturally have to keep a watch on him, at least for a time. If they inform the employer that his workman has been in gaol, in many instances the man loses his situation; if the police say nothing to the employer, and the man commits a crime, the employer turns round on the police and complains that they did not let him know he was employing a gaol-bird. If the man cannot get work, or hangs about the towns, the probabilities are he meets others in similar circumstances, and he gradually but surely drifts lower and becomes an habitual criminal. Again, a man is discharged from prison after completing his sentence with the firm intention of what he would term "going straight." He gets employment, and presently one who has been in gaol with him comes along. The former, wishing to keep clear of old associations, will have nothing to do with the latter, who promptly spreads the information about that he (the former) has been in gaol. The other men with whom he works, not unnaturally perhaps, object to his staying and working longer with them, and so he is again thrust down. It may be said he must take the consequences of his former crime, but the fact remains that he is not allowed to become honest. If some society could be found which would take a rational and intelligent, not a morbid or sentimental, interest in men when they are discharged, and would find them reasonable employment until they could, so to speak, feel their legs, and lose the prison taint, many a man who now is driven into the criminal class would, I feel sure, become a respectable member of the community.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME, Inspector of Prisons.