

During the year the Department experienced considerable difficulty in securing the services of suitable persons in certain small towns to undertake the duties of Probation Officer. This is a work of high public service value and should appeal to persons who are "community minded." In England the readiness of voluntary workers to assist in this class of activity is in marked contrast with the position in New Zealand. The Salvation Army is a magnificent exception, and that organization undertakes practically the whole of the women's probation work in New Zealand, the only exception being Wellington.

Probation work is work requiring rather more than simply the urge to help one's fellow-men. It requires a sympathetic touch, a depth of human understanding, and an experience of life. It is too much to expect that all Probation Officers shall be versed in the finer theories of psychology and sociology, but a broad understanding of the motivations of human conduct is essential, as well as an appreciation of the many anxiety-creating factors involved in the struggle of the socially ill-adapted to conform with an acceptable pattern of life. New Zealand, with its comparatively small population, would seem to be sparsely supplied with persons adequately equipped who are willing to offer for this service.

PAROLE SECTION

The provision of a scheme for the rehabilitation of prisoners as useful members of society after their release is as important as the provision of proper inside conditions. After penal treatment a prisoner is not successfully adjusted until he becomes an integral part of community life. Unless a prisoner has been taught to realize that he has a duty to work in harmony with his fellow-men he cannot be regarded as having stabilized or as being in real harmony with himself. A man may leave prison full of splendid resolutions, but unless he is given a helping hand at the crucial time when he first steps out from the ordered and unavoidably artificial atmosphere of a prison he is likely to fail to make the grade. For these reasons all but short-term prisoners are required to report to a Probation Officer, who supervises and shepherds the prisoner in a helpful way during the period of parole. To assist Probation Officers in this work, Voluntary Probation Committees have been set up in the cities which help in finding employment, &c. The institution of these Committees and the closer working liaison with Maori Welfare Officers has been of particular benefit in the re-establishment of Maori offenders.

The general results of the parole supervision work may be gauged from the following statistics, which show that during the year under review 556 persons were released on probation on the recommendation of the Prisons Board; 4 were recommitted for breaches of their licence; and 23, including 6 habitual criminals, had their licences cancelled for further offences. During the five-year period ended 31st December, 1948, 1,857 persons (excluding habitual criminals) were released on probation, and during that period 239, or 12·8 per cent., were returned to prison for failing to comply with the conditions of their licence or for further offences committed whilst on licence, and 28·4 per cent. only were again convicted subsequent to discharge, which, considering the refractory nature of much of the material dealt with, may be regarded as fairly satisfactory.

APPRECIATION

I desire to place on record the Department's appreciation of the helpful co-operation of the Magistrates who have undertaken the Chairmanship of Voluntary Probation Committees, and to the members of the various Committees and societies that have assisted in the care of discharged prisoners and probationers.