

(7) A young woman, an ex-industrial-school girl who for years was without the advantages of a mother's care and guidance. An instinctive thief, and altogether lacking in a sense of moral responsibility.

During this period under review a number of probationers have been transferred to Auckland from other districts, and a number have been transferred from Auckland to other districts. A number have completed their terms and to-day are honest and law-abiding citizens.

At the end of March, 1917, there were sixty-three first offenders remaining under my charge.

Informal Probation.

Apart from the regular First Offenders' Probation Act we have been working in Auckland Courts on a special system. This system simply is that the Magistrate or Judge orders a convicted person to come up for sentence at a stated time on the condition that during the interval he (or she) is under the supervision of the Probation Officer. This method has proved to be most useful in many cases, and has sometimes been adopted when the accused's antecedents and circumstances did not permit the application of the First Offenders' Probation Act. Your Department in recently printing a number of semi-license forms from my draft form for these offenders has greatly assisted in this branch of work. During the period of this report fifty-three of these cases were placed under my care by the Auckland Courts. Four have enlisted. Four have been called up for sentence, and of these a male and a female have been sent to the inebriates islands; one male under the influence of drink committed theft and was sentenced to reformatory detention, while the fourth, a mere youth, was sent to Invercargill Gaol for theft. Three of these four failures were, at the best that could be said for them, but forlorn hopes, as they were all victims of excessive drinking habits.

Comments in General.

One great difficulty of a First Offenders' Probation Officer is arriving at a true estimate of the past history of an offender; but if the School Visitor system were in vogue an official statement of the history of the case could readily be obtained. All that would be required would be the name of the school or schools attended, and then the home life of the accused could readily be obtained. The value of this knowledge would be inestimable to Judges and Magistrates in passing sentences.

My experience has unfortunately been that often parents' and relatives' opinions concerning accused persons are not shared by neighbours and disinterested persons. There is much said to-day about saving child-life—we have our Plunket Nurses, our St. Helens Homes, &c.—but what is going to be the ultimate use of all this if we have not some more effective methods of preventing these lives from drifting into weak and law-breaking citizens?

It has been a privilege to serve your Department as a Probation Officer, for I am convinced that this method is based on sound principles, and any information I have gained through this work is always and willingly at the disposal of the Department.

CHRISTCHURCH.

During the whole period I have had the honour to act as Probation Officer under the First Offenders' Probation Act the war has been raging, and the custom has grown up in the local Courts of allowing first offenders to come up for sentence when called upon on the condition that they enlist. This has made the numbers dealt with by me small. When I took over the work from Senior-Sergeant Mathieson there were on the book seven who had been reporting, among them a young woman about twenty years of age. If the First Offenders' Probation Act has done no other good in this Dominion than prevent this easily led young woman from being made to live with the class that are usually found in gaols, then it has justified its presence on the statute-book. When she completed her probation early last year she was married to a decent young fellow, and she declared to me the last time I saw her that she would never again be found living with her former associates.

Again, among those taken over was a married man who had a family of four. To prevent these four children becoming dependent on the Charitable Aid Board and having the thought lodged permanently at the back of their minds that when they were young their father was a criminal is in my judgment a most excellent work.

Of the five that have been given me during my first year was a young fellow who in a moment of romantic emotion married a girl not much different from himself, and to maintain the new position interfered with his master's money, hoping to be able to return it before it was found out. This foolish lad, not much over eighteen years old, would have been ruined for life if the Magistrate had not listened to my suggestion and granted him probation. Every month I see him officially, and sometimes during the month unofficially, and I declare that this is another case that vindicates the humane provisions made for first offenders in the Act.

If I might venture a little criticism, I think that the provisions of this Act are not often enough taken advantage of either in our local Magistrates' or Supreme Courts. Young fellows are let go on their undertaking to enlist, and I often want to know what will happen if they are found medically unfit, or for any other cause discharged. I think that in all these cases some hold should be kept upon these young men, so that in any eventuality like the foregoing they will be under some *kind* control. The First Offenders' Probation Act supplies the machinery for doing this, and in my humble opinion should be used more frequently.

By reason of my limited experience and the small number I have dealt with I hesitate to express any pronounced opinion, but I think a more simple method of transferring these probationers from one district to another might be devised to suit cases where such transfers are deemed necessary.