

As I have pointed out in previous reports, the State over a long period of years has only expended a few hundred pounds on definite preventive work, while the upkeep of the prisons, reformatories, institutions for juvenile delinquents, &c., costs many thousands per annum. From this it would appear that the State prefers to let the criminal increase and multiply, to incur all the expense of housing and feeding him, and of providing the required staffs to guard him, rather than to take the necessary steps to check the trouble at its source. All those who have studied the question will agree with me in saying that a reasonable outlay on intelligent preventive work would soon be recouped by a reduction in the expenditure on the unprofitable task of housing and guarding the sentenced prisoner.

With the means at hand we are carrying on the work of probation and prevention of crime as satisfactorily as is possible, but were it not for the self-sacrificing efforts of our honorary Probation Officers, of the private organization I have already referred to, and of the police Probation Officers, all of whom are working practically without fee or reward, I am afraid this class of social-reform work in New Zealand would be largely a dead-letter.

FIRST OFFENDERS' PROBATION ACT, 1908.

In accordance with the practice followed in the past few years, the five honorary Probation Officers have forwarded reports on the working of the First Offenders' Probation Act in their respective districts for the year ended 31st March last. All the reports are interesting and informative, and illustrate clearly the beneficial effects of the Act when administered capably and sympathetically by men who understand the work. Reference is made by the Probation Officers to the number of cases of informal probation now placed under their charge. This constitutes a further argument for the widening of the scope of the existing Act to enable all cases deemed suitable for probation by the Courts to be dealt with under the statute.

A compilation of the monthly reports received from First Offender Probation Officers throughout the Dominion, the detail of which is given in Table J, shows that 192 persons were placed on probation in 1918, compared with 127 in 1917.

The increase of sixty-five in the number of probationers indicates that the Judges and Magistrates are taking fuller advantage of this method of dealing with offenders than has been the case heretofore.

The total sum ordered by the Courts to be paid by probationers towards the cost of prosecution, and collected by the Probation Officers, amounted to £342 7s. 6d., compared with £323 18s. 6d. in 1917. If the probationers had been sentenced to imprisonment the amount thus recovered would have been lost to the State.

In addition to the costs of prosecution the Courts in some instances ordered offenders granted probation to restore to injured parties moneys, or the value of goods, of which they had been deprived. Payments under this head amounting to £198 6s. were collected by the different Probation Officers. This represents a further sum that would not have been made good if the provisions of the First Offenders' Probation Act had not enabled restitution to be enforced.

I am, &c.,

C. E. MATTHEWS,

Permanent Head of the Prisons Department.

The ACTING INSPECTOR OF PRISONS to the PERMANENT HEAD OF THE PRISONS DEPARTMENT.

SIR, —

Wellington, 31st July, 1919.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ended 31st December, 1918, dealing with the work of inspection of the prisons and institutions under the control of the Department, and the supervision of the various works and industries carried on by prison labour.

During the year the whole of the prisons have been frequently visited and carefully inspected. The result of such inspection, although on the whole fairly satisfactory, yet leaves something to be desired. In common with all large Government Departments, the Prisons Department has felt the effects of the recent war, more particularly in the matter of maintaining an efficient staff. As you are aware, during the earlier stages of the struggle many of our younger officers answered the call for volunteers, and with the consent of the Department offered their services and went to the front. Owing to the shortage of eligible applicants those officers could only be replaced by casuals who were unsuitable for prison work. This condition of affairs has naturally reacted on the discipline and control of the majority of the prisons, and somewhat reduced our general efficiency. Latterly, however, owing to the return from overseas of quite a number of our permanent officers and their resumption of duty, matters have considerably improved. There is also the fact that from amongst the returned soldiers a few suitable men are applying for employment in the Prison service. Taken altogether I have every reason to hope that our troubles in this respect are nearly at an end, and that during the coming year it will be possible to so improve matters as to permit of the establishing of a higher degree of discipline and efficiency amongst both officers and prisoners alike.

The cleanliness of all the buildings has been well maintained, and in this respect I found no ground for complaint.