

“formal,” and six transfers have raised the number to ninety-three. During the year twenty-six “informal” and five “formal” have completed their terms, nine have been transferred, two were sent to inebriates’ institutions, one disappeared, and only four were sent to gaol, leaving the number on our books at the close of the year forty-six.

MR. F. G. CUMMING, GENERAL PROBATION OFFICER, DUNEDIN.

In submitting a brief report of the probation work in the Dunedin district for the past year I desire to say that the period has been, on the whole, a very satisfactory though fairly heavy one. I have not had any serious difficulty with the men and women placed under my control; indeed, I find them willing to carry out the conditions of their probation freely, realizing that the Act affords them a real chance of making good.

During the year I have entered thirty men and women upon my register under the First Offenders’ Probation Act. Some of these have been transferred from other districts, but the majority are from our local Supreme and Magistrate’s Courts. This is a fairly large number—indeed, it is a record one for this district. They have all been placed in situations, and with rare exceptions are giving every satisfaction to their employers and to myself as Probation Officer.

During the period covered by this report seven probationers have been discharged, and each of these is doing well for himself or herself. They never fail when in town to call at my office and express themselves as grateful for the chance given by the Department and for the assistance and advice rendered by this office. Two have had their license cancelled, and are now in the Borstal Institution at Invercargill. One of these was a local man, the other came to me on transfer. One regrets to have to cancel a license, but in the interests of the men themselves as well as of other probationers this is sometimes necessary, otherwise the Act would become a farce.

I have transferred five probationers to other districts, and am given to understand that they are doing well. At the end of the year I had on my register twenty-seven first offenders and four under the Crimes Act, making in all thirty-one.

Then there are quite a number of men, women, and young people placed on their honour by being ordered to come up for sentence when called upon. These are placed under the Probation Officer’s control, and entail a good deal of work on my part; still, one is always pleased to have a chance to do something for these unfortunates, and, on the whole, good is seen as a result of the chance given. I am, however, strongly of the opinion that probation is the better course to adopt.

I repeat what I have stated on a previous occasion, that the Probation Act prevents an offender from becoming a criminal—first, by showing him definitely what his duty to society is; and, second, by providing such a one with a Probation Officer—or, in other words, a friend—who will advise him, and endeavour to develop within him a spirit of self-reliance and respect, by kindly and practical sympathy. I am strongly of the opinion that there is great possibility for genuine reform among the unfortunates of this country under the humane system of the Probation Act.

It is interesting and encouraging to see the attitude now taken by Judge and Magistrate *re* giving those who come before them a chance to make good. The confidence and respect they place in the Probation Officer, too, is often very pronounced. Personally I am fortunate in this matter, and am very grateful to Judges, Magistrates, and police for the opportunities they give me to carry out the duties of my office.

I attend the Courts almost daily, and if females are charged, my assistant, Sister Alice, is present, and quite a few young women have been placed under her care with unique success. These people are not only taken from the Court, but are visited in their homes and placed in suitable situations. The Magistrates of this centre have expressed their pleasure at the work done among this class of offender.

MR. A. McLEAN, GENERAL PROBATION OFFICER, INVERCARGILL.

In submitting the annual report of my work as First Offenders’ Probation Officer it is gratifying to record that the year has been a successful one. In no instance had probation to be cancelled. There were occasions when probationers were disposed to regard the conditions of release with the laxity and indifference characteristic of their easy view of life. The expenditure of time and personal effort in interpreting and in the explanation of the intention of the conditions of release invariably secured the desired results.

The value of the Act is evident in cases where youths, many of whom having little or no power of resistance, have become slaves to their primitive impulses. In this connection it is interesting to note that the whole of the conditions of release with the exception of two clauses are positive in their requirements. I take it, therefore, they are intended to be constructive agencies in the work of reformation. If this interpretation of the conditions of release is a correct one it is very necessary that this should be constantly kept in view in the administration of the Act. A merely negative system of ethics cannot build up a strong character. Evil habits must be eradicated, but it should be recognized that in doing so a blank is made in the life of a person with limited mentality. The system I have endeavoured to work upon is to substitute industry, thrift, honest endeavour, and thought for others in place of idleness, extravagance, slackness, and selfish indulgence. This method has worked well, and though the progress was often slow, and the results not always all that could be desired, some measure of reform was accomplished in nearly every instance.

My experience is that the value of the Act is enhanced by frank discussions with probationers upon the circumstances, position, or particular problem in the life of the individual concerned. This requires that the Probation Officer be regarded as a friend rather than as an official, and the discussion conducted with judgment rather than under the impulse of enthusiasm. The first essential step in the direction of reformation is to secure the confidence of the probationer. The