

attitude of the criminal towards any—even well-intentioned—advance is often one of suspicion and fear. First offenders are usually free from these emotions, and therefore do more readily respond to any attempt to give direction to their energies by advice and suggestion.

The endeavour throughout the year has been to obtain from probationers something more than prompt obedience and the strict fulfilment of the conditions of release. Personal interest, and the knowledge that any failure to comply with the conditions entails the liability to suffer penalty, will generally secure the observance of the conditions imposed. If the probationer is to become a good citizen his conduct must be the expression of an earnest desire to establish, or to regain, social status, with a belief in its possibility.

Instances are on record where the result of judicious encouragement, and the display of belief in the probationer's possibility to make good, fully justified the confidence. In one instance the probationer was so discouraged by his repeated failure to observe all the conditions of his release that he came to see me and suggested that I should get him "sent up" for a term. I had carefully studied this youth's characteristics and concluded he had some good qualities. After discussing the matter together for an hour or two, he went home inspired with the resolve to "make good" and justify my faith in him. Eventually he "made good," and completed his period of probation satisfactorily. Latest advice is that he is still doing well, though it remains to be seen whether or not this reformation is permanent. In some cases it was necessary to reconstruct from the very foundation the viewpoint and life of the probationer. Patient endeavour allied to experience were necessary to secure the desired results, and the methods adopted were as varied as the individuals concerned.

I have always strongly advocated the First Offenders' Probation Act, even before it was placed on the statute-book, and my more extensive official acquaintance with the Act strengthens the conviction that it fully justifies its existence. In my opinion its possibilities as a corrective, restrictive, and constructive, as well as a preventive and reformatory agent, have not yet been fully realized. I believe its provisions could be extended to other than first offenders with advantage to the offender and to the State.

My duties throughout the year included attendance at the quarterly sessions of the Supreme Court, and daily attendance at the Police Court, and to furnish reports when required by the Courts. In this connection I desire to acknowledge the courtesy extended to me by Court and Police authorities and officials. The reception accorded me by parents and relatives of offenders when making inquiries and when visiting probationers was always friendly. The sympathetic co-operation of relatives is a valuable factor in the work of reformation.

My duties also bring me into contact with family and home conditions of many who come under my charge, and I desire to emphasize that any scheme having for its object the welfare of the youth of the Dominion must, to be effective, include provision for dealing with juveniles, eighteen of whom are under my supervision at the present time.

During the year a total of nineteen persons—sixteen males and three females—were dealt with. At the beginning of the year there were seven on the register. Eleven were received on probation—two from the Supreme Court and nine from the Magistrate's Court—and one was received on transfer from another district. The periods of probation in the various cases were—two for three years, six for one year, two for six months, and one while waiting sentence. Eight completed their periods of probation satisfactorily, five were transferred to other districts, and there were six remaining on the register on the 31st March.

Of those released on probation during the year from the Invercargill Courts there were seven whose ages ranged from sixteen years to twenty-four years, and four above the age of thirty years.

The system of restitution continues to work well in the interest of probationers, teaching them that part of their reformation consists in making good the loss their crimes had incurred upon others. During the year orders were made for the repayment of £6 14s. 10d., restitution-money, and £6 13s. 9d., costs of prosecution; and £19 9s. 10d., restitution-money, and £6 11s. 9d., costs of prosecution, was collected, including balances remaining unpaid at the close of last year.

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There were thirty-five offenders on the register at the beginning of the year; forty-nine were placed on probation and nineteen were transferred from other districts, 103 in all passing through my hands during the year. Sixteen completed the period of their probation satisfactorily, twenty-eight were transferred to other districts, three left the Dominion permanently, four received sentences of reformatory detention, leaving fifty-two on the register at the 31st March, 1920.

On the whole these results must be considered very satisfactory, the percentage of failures being exceedingly low. Out of the 103 persons dealt with four only have been brought before the Court for sentence. This only adds weight to what has been stressed in previous reports—the excellent advantages of the First Offenders Act.

Outside those who are undergoing imprisonment, three or four have given some trouble, the principal breach being failure to report regularly. In each of these cases I have not considered the breach serious enough to ask the Court to deal with the offender on the original charge.

In addition to those on the probation register, several have been convicted and ordered to come up for sentence when called upon, and placed under my charge. These generally have been satisfactory, only one of the twenty who were thus treated being called up for sentence.

These results certainly justify the operations of the First Offenders Act in this district; but there is another aspect that is worth considering which has raised a doubt in my mind as to the wisdom of the general application of the Act—that is, the serious increase in petty thieving in our midst. In a very large number of instances, too, especially on the railways and tramways, the detection of the offender is a very difficult problem, and it would be a very unfortunate matter if the lenient treatment provided by the Act at the present time were to make the first offence easy.