

OFFENDERS PROBATION ACT, 1920, AND GENERAL PROBATION.

REPORTS OF HONORARY PROBATION OFFICERS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1922.

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I HAVE pleasure in submitting the annual report of the probation work I have carried on during the year ended 31st March, 1922.

The operation of the Probation Act, 1920, and the various amendments to the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910, have greatly increased the scope of probation generally, and, while this increase has made heavy demands upon your officers, there is no doubt whatever that the results obtained have been of incalculable value to the community.

I submit a summary of figures which are proof of the wisdom of our Legislature in widening the operations of probation. As I act as Probation Officer in Auckland to probationers under the Offenders Probation Act and also to those released on probation from prisons I shall report on the two branches of work separately, and for the purpose of clearness and simplicity shall hereafter refer to those admitted to probation under the Offenders Probation Act on conviction at Courts as "Court probationers" and prisoners released on probation from prisons and institutions under the Crimes Amendment Act as "prison probationers."

Court Probationers (granted probation under the terms of the Offenders Probation Act, 1920).—At the close of the year ended 31st March, 1921, I had 113 probationers still remaining under my care; this easily constituted a record. During the past year I received from the Auckland Courts a total of 125 probationers, for the following periods: two for six months, twenty-six for twelve months, forty-two for two years, forty-two for three years, four for four years, nine for five years; and added to this number I received forty-six probationers on transfer from other districts, making a total of 144 for the year. Of this number ten failed to "make good," and were punished in various ways. A failure of less than 7 per cent. is surely remarkable when one considers the complex circumstances and variety of human frailty of this large body of youthful delinquents. During the year forty-six were transferred to other districts, a large number completed their terms, and at the close of March, 1922, 135 remained under my care.

Court orders made for the collection of moneys from probationers placed under my care by the Auckland Courts during the year amounted to £1,352 19s. 9d.; restitution of money stolen, £1,036 17s. 10d.; costs of prosecution, £316 1s. 11d. I collected and banked £427 4s. 2d. for restitution, and duly paid that sum to claimants; and £189 10s. 9d. for costs of prosecutions. It must be remembered that it sometimes takes many months for probationers' payments by instalments to clear their responsibility.

As in past years, I desire to emphasize the discipline and reform that is accomplished by making delinquents repay from their own earnings what they have wrongfully obtained. This purely material aspect of the whole question has been greatly influenced by the prevailing financial stress; and when it is remembered that securing work for convicted offenders is most difficult, and that many are out of work for a long time, the results secured are all the more creditable for the probationers.

I would like to stress the fact that far too little is being done to help on this great work of assisting the weaker and erring members of society. There should be a permanent appropriation to provide funds for assisting Probation Officers to carry on this work. At present no financial assistance is provided by the State. I constantly take probationers from the Courts who have no home to go to, no friends to keep them, generally regarded with suspicion and distrust, and the problem is how to put them on their feet and give them a start. The only fund I can draw upon to help these cases is the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. This society, while fulfilling a most important function in the community, and working quietly and strongly, is, however, heavily handicapped for want of funds. At the present time I am nearly £50 overdrawn on this fund. If Probation Officers were provided with a small sum of money to give probationers a start, many could be given a helping hand. The money would be recoverable, and the country would be more than repaid.

Even more than in previous years I have felt the great responsibility attached to the preparation of the antecedent reports of accused persons. For a long time past there was not any definite sentencing-day at the Auckland Supreme Court. The resident Judge was so overworked that opportunities had to be seized when prisoners could be dealt with. No one could ever tell a prisoner or his relatives just when sentence would be passed. Very often a visiting Judge would deal with a large batch of prisoners on a Saturday morning, the congested state of Court work making any other time impossible. In the case of prisoners who were admitted to probation this proved a most unsatisfactory arrangement. For example, one Saturday morning about thirteen men were sentenced, and seven were admitted to probation. After 1 o'clock I found myself with these seven men on my hands. It was rather an interesting contrast to notice the prison van with its complement of warders returning with its small batch of handcuffed prisoners, while the Probation Officer had to deal with the larger number. All business had stopped in the city for the week-end. Several of these men were from country districts in the province and had no homes, and no friends to help them. Board and lodging had to be found and provided for them (the Government has never given any assistance in this direction), but of course it was impossible to secure them work late on Saturday afternoon. The work involved in securing the necessary accommodation, however, was not my real trouble; but the thought of the temptations increased