

1927.
NEW ZEALAND.

OFFENDERS PROBATION

UNDER OFFENDERS PROBATION ACT, 1920, AND CRIMES AMENDMENT ACT, 1910,
(REPORT ON OPERATIONS OF), FOR THE YEAR 1926-27.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF JUSTICE to His Excellency the GOVERNOR-GENERAL.
SIR,— Wellington, 12th August, 1927.

I have the honour to submit to Your Excellency the report of the Chief Probation Officer on the operations of the Offenders Probation Act for the year 1926-27.

I have, &c.,
F. J. ROLLESTON,
Minister of Justice.

The CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER to the Hon. the MINISTER OF JUSTICE.
SIR,— Office of the Chief Probation Officer, Wellington, 15th July, 1927.

I have the honour to present my annual report on the work of the probation system under the Offenders Probation Act, 1920, and the Crimes Amendment Act, together with the reports of the principal district Probation Officers, for the year ended 31st March, 1927.

It is satisfactory to note that each of the district Probation Officers comments favourably on the manner in which the majority of those admitted to probation have responded to this method of treatment. They report that the conduct of probationers has in most cases been satisfactory, the number of lapses being small. The district officers also point out that the prevailing financial stringency has made itself felt in their work, and has rendered more difficult the problem of securing compliance with orders of the Court in respect of restitution. It has been necessary in several cases to extend the time conditions, and to adjust the instalments to the earning-capacity and responsibility of offenders. The ready response to the suggestion made last year for assistance from voluntary helpers, particularly in regard to finding employment for probationers, has been of material assistance to the Department's field workers, and in no small measure has contributed to the successes achieved during the year.

The report covers the forty-first year that the system of probation has been in operation in New Zealand. The statistics appended hereto show that during the past year 764 persons were granted the benefits of the Offenders Probation Act; 656 (658) being admitted to probation by the Courts direct, and 108 (102) coming under the provisions of the Act on account of having sentence deferred. The figures for the previous year are shown in brackets. These show that the Courts in New Zealand now display considerable reserve in admitting offenders to probation.

Immediately following the passing of the Offenders Probation Act, 1920, which widened the scope of the original Act, making it applicable to other than first offenders, the numbers admitted yearly to probation showed a marked increase. They more than doubled in the first year after the coming into operation of the new Act. This extended use of the system gave rise to a certain amount of criticism, which was based largely on the widespread but erroneous idea that probation is almost equivalent to letting an offender off. There was also a fear, which exists even to-day, that probation lacked the requisite deterrent influence. The result has been that the number of offenders placed on probation annually during the past few years has remained fairly constant, this year actually showing a slight decline on the figures for the previous year. There is thus no justification at the present time for fearing any tendency on the part of the Courts in New Zealand towards indiscriminate leniency in granting the benefits of probation.

Touching on the criticism of the probation system, almost invariably underlying this is the demand for retributive justice, which evidences an ignorance of the trend of modern opinion in regard