

oversight of probationers and to assist in finding employment. The ready response of citizens with a high sense of public duty who were willing to come forward and assist with this work was most encouraging, and the success with which the scheme has been launched has surpassed all expectations. In each of the centres, as well as in the main secondary towns, strong committees, representative of all sections of the community, and comprising leading business men, who are in a position of vantage so far as the finding of employment is concerned, are now available at call when required by the Probation Officer. The response of the Churches and other religious and social organizations was also most gratifying, and, following the English practice, the Department has linked up with these organizations, so that whenever a probationer is taken in hand not only is an effort made to arrange for oversight and to secure employment, but an attempt is made to link him up with a permanent organization that will continue to take an interest in him after the probationary period has expired. In each place where a committee has been formed the local Magistrate has kindly consented to act as chairman. This also follows the English practice. The interest taken by Magistrates is not only encouraging to the Probation Officer, but the acceptance of the office as chairman imparts a judicial sanction to the scheme that is in accord with the relationship of the committee as an organization of the Court.

A special committee set up by the Home Secretary in England when the scheme was first inaugurated brought forward the following suggestion :—

“ The Magistrates very often encourage a local interest in probation, and even, when opportunity offers, assist the formation of local committees and co-operate in the work. They can further help the Probation Officer by assisting him to get in touch with persons in different parts of his district who will aid in finding employment for probationers and who will inform him of social agencies qualified to exercise a useful influence on the offenders placed upon probation. . . . There could be no greater encouragement to a Probation Officer and no more potent means of contributing to the success of the probation system than for Magistrates themselves to show the interests of which we have spoken.”

Lord Hewart, the Lord Chief Justice for England, more recently went a step further, and said :—

“ Justices of the Peace would render a useful service if, when they released an offender on probation, they followed up the case and saw for themselves that the probationer was behaving himself and abiding by the conditions.”

At the end of the year under review there were 140 voluntary workers attached to committees in various parts of the Dominion dealing with male probationers, and in addition there were thirty ladies giving voluntary service in finding employment and maintaining oversight of women offenders and girls released on parole from the Borstal institutions. The reports from the Probation Officers show that this assistance is greatly appreciated both by the probationers themselves and by the Probation Officers. A perusal of the reports attached hereto will disclose several interesting examples of practical help being rendered at a crucial time, when the absence of such assistance would probably have resulted in the abandoning of good resolutions and a further lapse into crime.

Shortly after the appointment of the full-time Probation Officers, in order to ensure uniformity of methods and ideas, a conference of Probation Officers was arranged at Wellington, over which I had the honour of presiding, and a number of matters incidental to the system were discussed. Opportunity was taken by those who attended the conference to raise points connected with the various problems and difficulties that they had met with from time to time in connection with the administration of the scheme. The unanimous opinion of those attending was that the conference had been both helpful and stimulating.

Dealing with the Crimes Amendment Act statistics for the past year, it is to be noted that during the year 140 cases were admitted to probation on the recommendation of the Prisons Board, and only thirty-three of these, which includes eighteen habitual criminals, were recommitted to prison for breaches of their license. The success of the cases paroled may be judged from the fact that during the quinquennium ended the 31st December last 957 prisoners who had been sentenced to terms of reformatory detention or hard labour were released on parole, and during the five years only 120, or 12·5 per cent., were recommitted for breaches of conditions of their probation or for other offences, while 4 per cent. only were convicted for lapses subsequent to discharge. These figures not only reflect creditably on the reformatory influence of our present penal methods, but they also to some degree bear evidence of the effectiveness of our system of parole and after-care.

In conclusion, I desire to place on record the Department's appreciation of the helpful co-operation of the Magistrates who have taken up the chairmanship of the Voluntary Probation Committees. I also desire to thank all those voluntary helpers who have given both time and money in the furtherance of this important public service.

I have again pleasure in recording my grateful thanks to the members of the staff of this Department, and to the police officers who act as Probation Officers, for the zealous manner in which they have co-operated with me, as well as for the sympathetic way in which they have dealt with probationers coming under their care.

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