

event easily accessible. But it may be convenient to state quite shortly certain propositions which seem to be reasonably clear, with reference to the actual working of the system of probation :—

(1) It is a system which has by no means been uniformly employed. In some districts apparently it is employed but little, and in some districts not at all.

(2) There is evidently in some quarters an impression that probation has nothing to say to cases which are not in themselves insignificant. But this view ignores the plain terms of the statute. The “trivial nature of the offence” is only one among many of the alternative grounds to which the Court is empowered to have regard.

(3) In 1923 rather more than 603,000 persons were tried in the Courts to which the statute applies. Of this number some 12,600 persons were placed on probation—that is to say, about 2 per cent.

(4) There are many petty sessional divisions in which, although the Probation Act of 1907 is now eighteen years old, no Probation Officer has yet been appointed. There seems to be no good reason why any petty sessional division should be denied the advantage of a Probation Officer's services.

(5) A dangerous enemy of the probation system, as of all good things, is the temptation to be perfunctory. What is wanted is extreme care and patience in the drawing-up of the order, in the making of the conditions, and not least in working them out.

(6) Justices of the Peace are now as numerous as they are public-spirited. It might be a most useful service if Justices, when they release an offender on probation, were to “follow the case” and see for themselves that the probationer is behaving himself and abiding by the conditions. Happily there are now many women who are Justices. It is to be thought that, in dealing with women and girls who are probationers, the good will and the good sense of women Justices might be most usefully employed.

(7) It is not merely of some but of great importance that the Court, when it releases an offender on probation, should be most careful not to convey any impression that probation means “letting off” for a first offence. It ought to be made clear to the offender that the offence is proved; that discipline, recognizances, and conditions are necessary in his case; and that if he is not sent to prison it is only because it is believed that to make him a probationer is the best way of enabling him to live down his offence, and to reinstate his character by his own efforts, aided by the experience and the sympathy of the Probation Officer.

Time, and time alone, prevents for the moment any further examination of this fruitful, attractive, and not easily exhausted topic, and time would fail to tell of the great and wonderful work of Juvenile Courts, of the Children's Charter (the Children Act, 1908), of the industrial school, and of the reformatory school. Each of these topics well deserves separate examination. Each one of the efforts with which they have severally to do has been, and is being abundantly justified by its results. But it would be wrong to omit special reference to the admirable work of the four Borstal institutions, those State training-schools to which young offenders, of either sex, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one years, are sent to develop character and to receive definite industrial training. That period is most excellently followed up by the Borstal Association, which, in the words of its latest report, has accepted the duty of caring for all lads and girls discharged from Borstal institutions, and of doing what it can to tide them over the difficulties of the early days of freedom and to edge them unobtrusively into the ranks of ordinary honest folk.

These are good works. May they increase, and succeed more and more. They make it plain that this country, at any rate, is rich in means, if they are faithfully employed, for helping those who have made a lapse and for forming or retrieving a character able to resist temptation and to avoid crime. Let us beware of any voices of indolence or of cynicism that might belittle these efforts or hamper their further development. Above all, let us put aside the heresy that in some cases it may be right to consult the interests of the offender while in other cases it is necessary to consult the interests of the public. Upon any fair analysis, those interests are found to coincide. The State may sometimes be compelled to be stern: it must not be cruel: it cannot afford to be indifferent. By all means let us keep alive the feeling of terror in the contemplation of serious crime and its punishment. But let us at the same time endeavour to resist the beginnings; let us not forget that more than half of the uncharitable judgments in the world are due to lack of imagination; and let us remain unalterably convinced that Magnanimity owes to Prudence no account of her motives.

REPORT OF FIELD ORGANIZER.

I have the honour to submit my second annual report on the organization of the probation system, more particularly as to the working of the system of voluntary committees recently instituted. During the year I have visited each of the probation districts, have renewed personal contact with the members of the various committees, and have had an opportunity of looking into the work being done. I am satisfied that the system is sound and working efficiently. With a number of probationers, in some districts, it would be impossible for the Probation Officer single-handed to devote the requisite care to every probationer, and even in cases where the Probation Officer is able to attend personally to the details it is found that the backing of an unofficial committee is of inestimable help in placing probationers in employment.

The undoubted success of the system is attributable to the self-sacrificing efforts of the Probation Officers and the splendid co-operation of the committeemen associated with them.

Realizing the heartening effect that honest work, even of a temporary nature, has, these gentlemen have made every effort, despite the difficulties of general unemployment, to secure opportunities for their probationers to make a fresh start.

The low percentage of failures (*i.e.*, those who have failed to fulfil the terms of their probationary licenses and have had to be again brought before the Courts), and the still lower percentage of