

3. The amount of costs, &c., ordered to be paid by the various Courts before which the 82 offenders were brought during the past year amounted to £315 2s. 1d., of which sum £208 17s. 1d. has been already actually paid into the Probation Officers' hands, and those from whom sums are still due continue, as a rule, to carry out the conditions of their licenses as far as their means will permit. The system of leaving it to the discretion of Probation Officers to occasionally give additional time for these payments in cases of persons with families, or when sickness, &c., interferes with their chances of earning a living, or for other sufficient reasons, has been continued, has proved efficacious and worked well.

4. The approximate cost of keeping these offenders in prison had not the Probation Act been brought into force would have been about £2,600. Thus an actual saving for the year of £2,808 17s. 1d. has been effected; and when it is taken into account that the administration of the Act is carried out absolutely free of all cost to the Government, it must be admitted that the result has also proved financially successful.

5. A word of commendation is, I think, due to the Probation Officers for the careful and judicious manner in which they have carried out the additional duties thrust upon them by this Act—and in the larger centres of population these duties are decidedly onerous. It will be recollected that when Gaolers were first selected for Probation Officers there were considerable misgivings as to whether it was a wise proceeding; but results have, I think, long since proved the selection to have been a good one, and dispelled all doubts on this score, and the statistics already quoted how that without remuneration they have, under my supervision, made the Act a very valuable addition to the colonial statutes.

6. The Judges and Magistrates appeared for some time after the promulgation of the Act to be sorely perplexed as to the ages of persons to whom it was intended the Act should apply, and many argued that it should apply solely to young people; but this was not the intention of the introducer of the Act. The Hon. Mr. Tole, then Minister of Justice, thought, and I believe still thinks, that the man of fifty years of age is frequently as sorely tempted as the boy of fifteen, and, although it might not be quite so probable that a person fifty years of age would so easily become a recruit of the permanently criminal class as would a boy or girl, yet, if the offence for which that person be apprehended is really a first offence, and has not been deliberately planned for some time before its committal, the colony is all the better if that person be allowed to again engage in an honest and useful occupation, under certain restrictions, rather than that he or she should be immured in prison. That the Act was intended to apply with equal force in the lower as well as higher Courts does not always seem to be realised, but, like all reforms, it was regarded by many with grave doubts of its practicability or utility.

7. From Table L it will be seen that this Act during the past year has been the means of preventing no less than 11 young persons between ten and fifteen years of age becoming inmates of our prisons, and hindering no less than 42 persons under the ages of twenty years being stamped as gaol-birds for the rest of their natural lives. Surely this must be looked upon as more than satisfactory, and I have no hesitation in prophesying that the longer this Act continues in force the more popular and useful it must become in rescuing many from a career of crime.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME, Inspector of Prisons.