

Probation has been found in other countries to be a most effective means for dealing with defaulting or deserting husbands. In these cases imprisonment of the husband usually leaves the family in dire poverty and at the mercy of charity, whereas if the husband were placed under the firm but friendly direction of a Probation Officer, who would see that he works regularly and contributes towards his family's support, the cost of his maintenance in prison and the expense to the Charitable Aid Boards would be obviated.

There is a widespread impression that the granting of probation by the Court is tantamount to letting the offender off; but this is obviously not so, for the granting of liberty subject to the strict observance of certain conditions imposed to meet the particular requirements of the case has a valuable disciplining effect. A further common objection is that the granting of probation exercises very little, if any, deterrent effect upon others. This criticism is natural, but it assumes that there can be no deterrence unless there is some direct penalty imposed. The conviction alone, particularly in the case of first offenders, is a severe blow to prestige, while the imposition of conditions requiring payment of restitution and costs of prosecution, coupled with conditional liberty, impart a definite deterrent influence. On the other hand, many subscribe to the view that publicity in regard to first offenders should be prohibited. To do this would be to emasculate the system, for the fear of publicity is one of the main deterrents, and the present practice of leaving the suppression of offenders' names to the discretion of the Court is the preferable course.

The obligation on the offender to make reparation has a distinctly beneficial and educative effect. During the year under review, £3,479 19s. 11d. restitution-moneys, and £671 19s. 1d. Court costs, were collected from offenders; and it is interesting to note that since the inception of the scheme, up to the 31st March, £29,955 has been collected under the above heads. It will thus be seen that, quite apart from the social aspect, the economic advantages are undeniable, for in addition to this large amount collected the State has been saved the cost of institutional maintenance for the 6,890 offenders who have been placed on probation.

During the year 132 persons on probation committed what were regarded as more serious breaches of the conditions of their release: 33 of these were charged for failure to report, 72 committed further offences while serving probation, and 27 absconded and have not been traced. Owing to the absence of permanent case records, it is impossible to accurately state the percentage of successful cases, but it is certain that a high percentage of offenders do not appear before the Courts again. More statistics have been kept concerning cases of prisoners released on probation under the Crimes Act, and it is possible to quote the percentage. It is reasonable to assume that the results under the Offenders Probation Act would be slightly better. The Department has no record of subsequent convictions of less than one month, but, apart from this, the average number recommitted for breach of the conditions of release was 12 per cent., and the average number of failures—*i.e.*, those who have been either recommitted during probation or reconvicted for a fresh offence after discharge—was 28 per cent.

Despite the apparent success of the foregoing figures—and in considering this it must not be overlooked that the discriminating care exercised by the Courts in according probation contributes largely to the percentage of successes—there is still room for improvement in the organization of the system in New Zealand.

At present there are 181 probation districts and 187 district Probation Officers. Of these, 171 are members of the Police Force, 6 are permanent officers of the Prisons Department, 4 are part-time officers who receive an annual honorarium, and 6 are voluntary officers of the Salvation Army, 4 being women who do duty in each of the four main centres. The Probation Officer at Auckland is also Bailiff and Maintenance Officer, while in Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin the work is done by gentlemen who are linked up with other social-service organizations.

The view is widely held in Britain and America that police and prison officers are not the most suited by training and outlook for probation work; but, quite apart from this, it will be noticed that the whole of the probation staffs may be said to be part-time officers—not one gives his undivided attention to the organization of the work—and these officers are too overburdened to devote the requisite individual personal attention to probationers that is an essential feature of the system, with the result that the work is less effective. Home visitation is rarely practised, and in many instances the probationers report by letter. Perfunctory probation has as baneful an influence as the condonation of wrongdoing. It brings the system into disrepute with the Courts, it negatives the deterrent effect on others, and it has a bad moral influence on the offender. It is thus imperative that an effort be made to place the system on a more constructive basis, as there is no doubt that an effectively administered system offers great possibilities for the treatment of delinquency. A merely negative attitude, such as requiring the probationer to report at specified times and to place certain restrictions on conduct, will accomplish little. A positive and constructive attitude, by assisting and befriending the probationer, is essential to the achievement of the best results.

Failure to observe the conditions of release—which usually include an undertaking by the probationer to conduct himself properly, to abstain from evil associations and habits, to report regularly—should naturally violate the conditions of release and render the offender liable to be brought before the Court, as slackness makes the system merely a “mask for impunity.” The Probation Officer should keep closely in touch with the probationer's mode of living, and he should be his guide, counsellor, and friend. He should act with sympathy and firmness, and endeavour to restore the offender to a proper sense of social responsibility.

The duties of the Probation Officer may be summarized briefly as follows:—

- (a.) To make reports as required by the Courts concerning offenders, prior to conviction.
- (b.) To visit or receive reports from persons under supervision at such times as may be stipulated.
- (c.) To see that the probationer observes the conditions of his license.
- (d.) To report to the Chief Probation Officer on the conduct of the probationer.
- (e.) To advise, assist, and befriend the probationer, and, when necessary, to find suitable employment for him.