

recognizance make exacting demands upon the probationer. It is, in effect, conditioned liberty, but the positive feature of it is that, although in some cases the restrictions on liberty may be irksome, they are imposed not so much as punishment as with the object of assisting the probationer in habituating himself to a more ordered and disciplined mode of living. Right living is largely a matter of acquiring good habits.

Although it would appear that probation might be more freely used, it cannot be granted indiscriminately. Regard must be had both to the offender and the nature of the offence, as well as to a consideration of the question as to whether or not the granting of probation in a particular case is in the best interests of society. Not only is it axiomatic that the more generous impulses of the law are not intended for offences involving deliberation and brutality, but if investigation of the circumstances of any case show that an offender, particularly a young offender, comes from bad home surroundings, the chances of successful probation are remote, and it is often preferable in such cases that the offender be removed from his old environment and placed in an institution in his own interests. One has observed instances of this in cases where Maori lads have been sent to Borstal. Had the Courts merely considered the intrinsic gravity of the particular offence probation would probably have been considered appropriate, but in an endeavour to arrest an outbreak of petty lawlessness in a district it has sometimes been found desirable to send a number of offenders away.

An extension of the policy of relieving the police from the duties of Probation Officer where they are too fully occupied with their police duties has been made, and the Department now has civilian Probation Officers at Hamilton, Hastings, Palmerston North, Nelson, and Timaru, in addition to the main centres. The Voluntary Probation Committees who are associated with Probation Offices in the main centres and principal secondary towns continue to render useful and helpful public service in assisting in placing probationers and maintaining oversight in selected cases.

The Department's Field Organizer has made periodical visits to each probation district for the purpose of maintaining personal contact with the various Probation Officers and Voluntary Committees, and through this means making more uniform the practice adopted throughout the Dominion. His reports indicate that the Probation Officers are doing effective work, and that the enthusiasm of the Committees in this important field of public service is well maintained.

In addition to these personal visits, the Department circulates to Probation Officers literature relating to probation activities overseas, which enables Probation Officers to keep abreast of modern thought on the technique of probation.

The Crimes Amendment Act statistics which deal with parole probationers—that is, persons who have been released on the recommendation of the Prisons Board after serving a term of imprisonment or detention—show that 342 persons were released on probation during the year. Four of these were readmitted to prison for breaches of the conditions of their license, and twenty-six, including eight habitual criminals, had their licenses cancelled for further offences. Considering the difficulties with which this class are faced in rehabilitating themselves, and the refractory material they are to deal with, the small percentage of failures must be regarded as satisfactory.

It has been suggested by ill-informed critics that the licenses of habitual criminals are cancelled without just and proper cause. It must be recognized that the very essence of probation is the strict observance of the conditions, and that looseness in this respect would render the system farcical, but, with regard to habitual criminals, Probation Officers realize the more serious consequences that ensue from the cancellation of their licenses, and in no case is the license cancelled without prior reference to the Chief Probation Officer and the concurrence of the Minister of Justice, who makes the appropriate recommendation to the Governor-General. An exceedingly liberal attitude is adopted if the breach of condition merely involves failure to report as required, although the reporting is an essential feature of the scheme, but it is exceedingly rare that a license of an habitual criminal is cancelled unless there has been a further criminal offence committed which has involved his reconviction by the Court.

The various prisoners' aid societies, Probation Committees, Women's Borstal Association, and Borstal Society have given valuable assistance in the after-care work of discharged prisoners. Practically the whole of this work is carried out on a voluntary basis, the Department making only comparatively small grants to the prisoners' aid societies and the Borstal Association.

The effectiveness of the after-care work may be gauged from the fact that during the five years ended 31st December last, 1,720 prisoners (excluding habitual criminals) were released on probation, and during this period only 148, or 8.6 per cent. were returned to prison for failing to comply with the conditions of their release or for further offences whilst on probation, and only 24.59 per cent. have again been convicted subsequent to discharge.

I desire to place on record the Department's appreciation of the valuable assistance given in this probation work by the large number of public-spirited citizens, referred to above, for their help to probationers and for their co-operation with Probation Officers.

I desire also to record my gratitude to my own staff for their loyal co-operation, and also to the Salvation Army officers, Police officers, and others who act as Probation Officers.

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