

The department has given special attention during the past year to the enforcement of the Licensing Act, more especially as regards Sunday trading, and closing licensed houses at stipulated hours. In many cases convictions have been obtained, but not without considerable difficulty. That Sunday trading and selling during prohibited hours are carried on to a great extent throughout the colony cannot be denied, but the department is severely handicapped by the difficulty of obtaining convictions, as the law is so complicated and defective, that, in many cases taken into Court, though the Police feel bound to prosecute, not the slightest hope of a conviction is entertained. When a case breaks down the result is two-fold: the Police of a district are damaged in the eyes of the public, and the law-breaker is encouraged to continue his illegal trade. It may be stated in illustration of what is meant, that, though as many as fifty persons may be seen or known to enter a public-house on a Sunday or during prohibited hours, no prosecution can be instituted with any hope of success, as no sufficient evidence may be obtained to prove the actual sale of liquor. It is almost hopeless to endeavour to successfully enforce the provisions of the Act, unless the Police are relieved of the necessity of proving an actual sale. This might be done by amendment of the Act to provide that admission of persons not being lodgers, or the fact that a bar is found open, during prohibited hours, shall be *prima facie* evidence that the house is being kept open for the sale of liquor. The department is, however, alive to the necessity of the stringent supervision of licensed houses and the suppression of sly-grog selling, and will spare no effort to carry out the law.

Perhaps the next most important question with which the Police have to contend is what is known as the street-larrikin nuisance; but the growth of this undoubted evil must be attributed rather to want of legislation and by-laws for its suppression than to the apathy of the Police. It is easy to detect and punish overt acts of larrikinism; but such objectionable conduct as collecting at street corners, obstructing footpaths, &c., is difficult to deal with, as in such cases proof must be forthcoming of actual obstruction before a conviction can be obtained. Again, a crowd of larrikins may collect and stand in a doorway as long as they please, provided the owner does not object and they are off the street-line; though the nuisance may be great, the police are powerless. In the performance of Constabulary duty strictness must always be tempered with tact and discretion, and were the Police to lay informations under the head of acts of larrikinism indiscriminately, much mischief and hardship would result. What is required is that constables should be legally entrusted with more discretionary powers than they at present possess in these matters. There could be no danger attendant upon giving these, for the department has a right to demand and receive the assistance of the Municipal authorities by absolutely necessary by-laws, clearly defined. Strict orders have been issued by the department for the suppression of this increasing nuisance, but orders are worse than useless when unsupported by properly constituted authority for carrying them out.

Another prevalent crime in the colony is sheep-stealing. Though there has been a decrease during the year, the present high price of sheep renders it probable that the decrease is not likely to last long. In dealing with this class of crime the Police find considerable difficulties. Firstly, the robberies are not discovered and reported till long after they have been committed, as in many cases the flock-owners have no means of ascertaining their losses, except at stated periods; and before the Police have information of the robbery or any chance of capturing the offenders, the stolen sheep are killed, and all traces obliterated. The imperfect and entirely unsatisfactory methods of branding also hold out great temptation to the sheep-stealers. There is an elaborate scheme of registration of brands, but it is its elaboration that makes it workable in theory and not in practice. The production of wool and frozen mutton is of such magnitude in New Zealand that the protection from losses by theft from those engaged in that industry becomes a matter of absolute necessity.

The dastardly offence of arson, is, I regret to say, on the increase, and in many cases the sagacity of the detectives is baffled and the crime has to go unpunished.

There have been practically no promotions in the Force during the past year, owing to the ranks of sergeants and first-class constables being over-crowded. As stated in last year's report, a new classification is required. This has been prepared, and shows that with the colony divided into seven districts, as at present, there would be: Auckland district divided into six sub-districts; Waikato and East Coast district divided into six sub-districts; New Plymouth and West Coast district divided into six sub-districts; Wellington and Marlborough district divided into five sub-districts; Nelson and Westland district divided into four sub-districts; Christchurch and North Otago district divided into ten sub-districts; and Dunedin, Southland, and Lakes district divided into fourteen sub-districts. This dividing and subdividing tends to put an end to centralisation. Each Inspector is intrusted with the entire control of his district as regards discipline and police duties, and each non-commissioned officer or constable in charge of a sub-district is responsible to the Inspector for the subdivision under his charge; he, again, holds the constables in charge of stations responsible for their stations, and thus each link in the chain of responsibility is complete. Directly some offence is committed and no arrest made, the public are eager to blame either the Ministerial or the executive head of the department; and they forget that the responsibility for the detection of crime must attach to the district or sub-district in which the offence is committed. The executive head of the department can merely give those responsible to him the best material at his disposal to work with, but the carrying out of the details of police work must then rest with the local authority. The required strength to work these districts and sub-districts effectually is: 7 Inspectors, 20 first-class sergeants, 21 second-class sergeants, 30 senior constables, 115 first-class constables, 282 second-class constables, 4 first-class detectives, 4 second-class detectives, 7 third-class detectives, 9 district constables, and 9 Native constables. To carry out this scheme would entail an additional expenditure in salaries of about £2,500 per annum on the present estimates, but it would hold out fair hopes of advancement to the men in the Force in the future, would give promotion to many at once