

15. In conclusion, I beg to reiterate what I said last year—viz., that by the police regulations made under the authority of "The Police Force Act, 1886," the Commissioner is held responsible for peace and good order, and for the security of life and property throughout the colony, and in general for the discipline, obedience, and organization of the police. I have no desire to lay it down as an axiom that the Force must be controlled entirely by the sole will of one individual; I do say, however, that interference with the administration of the Force without due cause must result in a breaking of the bonds of discipline and a consequent loss of efficiency. New Zealand has at the present moment a smart Force, and one that keeps crime in check throughout the colony, and a body of men who, with very few exceptions, if any, are thoroughly loyal and faithful, and discharge their duties to the best of their ability.

The Hon. the Minister of Justice.

I have, &c.,

A. HUME, Commissioner.

EXTRACTS FROM ANNUAL REPORTS OF OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF DISTRICTS.

INSPECTOR J. HICKSON, AUCKLAND, WAIKATO, AND BAY OF ISLANDS.

In response to your Circular No. 18, of the 2nd April, I have the honour to report that for the twelve months ended on the 31st ultimo this district has been fairly prosperous, and population has increased considerably, the arrivals from other places having been numerous. This is to be attributed in a great measure to the activity in mining and timber business which has prevailed for some time past.

On reference to the Annual Offences Return for 1896, which was forwarded to you on the 18th February, it will be seen that the number of offences reported shows an increase of 254 over the previous year.

Although there has been a numerical increase in offences, this cannot be looked upon as showing a corresponding increase in what may be termed crimes, or offences of a serious nature. The offences showing the greatest increase are: Drunkenness, 145; disorderly conduct, 47; common assaults and breaches of the peace, 30; brothel-keeping, 22. In all these cases proceedings were taken.

Thefts of all kinds show a net increase of 16, whilst there has been a decrease of 43 in burglary and housebreaking. Thus it will be seen that the increase is chiefly in what may be termed minor offences.

The number of offences reported varies considerably, without any apparent reason; but there can be little doubt that the free circulation of money in prosperous times has a tendency to increase many offences, as, apart from there being more temptation to those who are inclined to err, the fact of money being in circulation more freely than usual acts as an attraction to the idle and vicious from other localities, who live by preying on the hard-earned profits of those who have benefited by a term of prosperity. The increase of population also accounts in a measure for the increase of offences.

There has been a marked increase in drunkenness, but this cannot be taken to infer that the offence is unusually prevalent. The community as a whole is sober and well-conducted. Many of the cases of drunkenness which arose during the year were old offenders, who were found drunk repeatedly on different dates, and no doubt a large proportion of the increase arose from the increase of population previously alluded to.

Sly-grog selling has existed to some extent in parts of the district where there are no public-houses. Several convictions for this offence have been recorded during the year, but there is considerable difficulty in obtaining evidence, owing to the fact that sly-grog sellers are strongly shielded by those who purchase liquor from them, and the greatest caution is observed by those engaged in the traffic, who, as a rule, will not sell to strangers.

In addition to enforcing the law generally, special attention has been given to the Infant Life Protection Act and the Children's Protection Act, with beneficial results.

During the year I have visited the various distant parts of my district as frequently as other duties would permit, and found the police in the country to be attentive, and discharging their duties in a satisfactory manner.

Some of the stations will require repairs and painting, which will be duly brought under your notice in detail. New buildings are required at several places where rent is now being paid, as well as at Coromandel, where the police building is too old and decayed to be worth repairing. I would recommend that new buildings be erected as soon as possible at Coromandel, also on the site lately purchased at Hikurangi, with the view of opening a station at that place at an early date.

The station at Kamo was closed in July. A new station was opened at Waitekauri, and no doubt further stations will be required very soon in the mining district of Upper Thames. A second constable has been added to Paeroa Station, and also one to Coromandel. These additions were much needed at those places.

On the 31st March the Police Force in this district consisted of 107 of all ranks, made up as follows: One inspector, six sergeants, one detective, eighty-nine constables, seven district constables, and three Native constables. These are distributed amongst fifty-one stations.

The casualties during the year have been one death, six dismissed, and six resigned.