

If the present system is adhered to, owing to the want of a separate ward in the hospitals and male attendants, it will not be long before public feeling is again shocked by deaths in prisons of persons who ought to be in hospital, and sooner or later public opinion will compel the authorities to provide the necessary accommodation in the latter places, therefore I recommend some arrangement be at once made with the hospital authorities in the four principal centres for the provision of accommodation for the reception of these cases.

#### SLY-GROG SELLING.

During the year there were eighty-two prosecutions for this offence, resulting in forty convictions, and fines amounting in the aggregate to £432 were imposed, as against eighty-eight prosecutions, with fifty-eight convictions, and fines amounting to £1,526 10s., during the preceding year. From the foregoing it will be seen that while the prosecutions decreased by only 6·81 per cent., and the convictions by 31·03 per cent., on the preceding year, the amount of fines inflicted decreased by 353·35 per cent., or, in other words, while the fines in 1898 averaged £17 6s. 11d. per prosecution, and £26 6s. 4½d. per conviction, in 1899 the figures were £5 5s. 4½d. and £10 16s. respectively. This very striking diminution in the amount of the fines imposed during the past year clearly indicates that sly-grog selling is not now regarded by many of those who have to administer the law as so serious an offence as it was during the year 1898, and the inevitable result must necessarily be a very considerable increase in this lucrative traffic.

Every year it becomes more difficult to obtain the necessary evidence to justify proceedings, or obtain a conviction after proceedings have been taken, as the dealers become more wary after each prosecution. Although the sale of excisable liquors by unlicensed persons is made illegal by statute, it is not regarded by the community (except perhaps those in favour of prohibition) as a crime or even a moral offence; in fact, a large percentage of the population look upon the attempt of the Legislature to deprive them of intoxicants as an unwarrantable encroachment upon their liberties, and consequently take a delight in defeating the object of the law. This feeling is most noticeable in Clutha, where every one not in favour of prohibition appears to have considered it his duty to aid the sly-grog sellers to his utmost, not only in detecting and warning them against police emissaries, but also, if necessary, in breaking down police evidence, and deterring persons from offering themselves as witnesses on behalf of the police.

In Clutha at the present time the sly-grog dealers will not sell to or in the presence of any stranger, unless such stranger is first vouched for by some person upon whose word they can rely. No resident of the district will assist the police unless first promised employment in the Force, it being impossible for an informant to obtain employment in the district after he has once assisted the police. Evidence of persons acting under a promise of this kind is taken exception to, not only by Magistrates but by legislators and the community generally; therefore, unless those in favour of prohibition will come to our aid and assist in procuring evidence, instead of contenting themselves with charging the police with neglect of duty in not enforcing the law, I see no hope of ever successfully dealing with the traffic so long as the law remains as at present. If the law could be amended so as to exclude liquor from the district absolutely, then the traffic could be reduced to a minimum.

It is futile to attempt to enforce a law that has not the respect of a large percentage of the population, unless (1) the penalties are made drastic enough to deter the people from breaking it, or (2) the police are given powers so Draconic as to practically enable them to dragoon the people into observing it. I am convinced that a democratic community like this in New Zealand would never tolerate either of the two alternatives I have named.

#### GAMING OFFENCES.

During the year there were 220 prosecutions under the gaming laws, resulting in 179 convictions, against 171 prosecutions and 140 convictions in 1898, and fifty-five prosecutions and thirty-eight convictions in 1897. This increase, however, must not be taken as an indication that the police have been able to rid the streets of professional betting-men, or in any way check the gambling evil; nor will they be able to do either to any appreciable extent so long as the law remains as it is. I can only reiterate the recommendations made in my last two reports—namely, that the gaming laws may be amended by passing into law the Bill that has been before Parliament during the last two sessions.

#### SECOND-HAND SHOPS.

I repeat all I stated in my last report under this heading, and trust that during the ensuing session the Bill that was introduced into Parliament in 1896, and dropped after the first reading, may be reintroduced, and an attempt made to pass it into law.

I notice that at the Trades Council Conference, sitting in Wellington on the 18th April last, a motion that the Government be urged to provide for the licensing of second-hand dealers was passed.

#### “INFANT LIFE PROTECTION ACT, 1896.”

During the year there were 565 registered homes throughout the colony, representing 883 infants, against 553 homes and 829 infants during the preceding year.

Fifty-four deaths occurred in the homes during the year against twenty-seven in 1898, but the inquests held exonerated the keepers in every case from neglect, misconduct, or blame of any kind. The large increase in the number of deaths appears somewhat alarming, but I understand infant mortality generally throughout the colony was much higher in 1899 than in 1898. The deaths