

INSPECTOR T. O'BRIEN, DUNEDIN DISTRICT.

286 The total number of offences reported during the year was 1,917, showing a decrease of 6 as compared with the preceding year, and the total number of arrests, including those proceeded against by summons, for the year was 1,833, being an increase of 41 as compared with the preceding year.

The most serious crime committed in the district during the year was one of violent assault, accompanied by robbery of nearly £300, which took place at Dunedin on the 16th February, 1903. Two notorious criminals named Ramsay and Cairns were apprehended for the offence, and after two trials they were both found guilty and each sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment with hard labour.

It will be observed that there are a few of the more serious offences committed during the year still undetected; but, on the whole, the detective branch has been fairly successful, while the preventive branch has also to be congratulated on its vigilance in the prevention of crime.

Owing to the very large area in this district in which the sale of liquor is now prohibited by law, and the large number of persons to whom such law is distasteful, it is naturally to be expected that sly-grog selling to some extent goes on. However, the heavy fines and long terms of imprisonment inflicted upon those who have been detected has had a salutary effect, and hence the number of illicit sales are comparatively few. While on this subject I would again suggest that all boardinghouses in prohibited districts be licensed, and that the police be empowered to enter such places at all reasonable hours. This would enable the police to see whether or not liquor was being sold, exposed, or kept for sale.

I cordially welcome the amendment to the law relating to the conduct of private billiard-rooms. It has already been productive of good results.

The Second-hand Dealers Act of 1902 continues to give satisfaction.

The Infant Life Protection Act also continues to give general satisfaction. It is satisfactory to note that only two deaths took place amongst the large number of infants in such homes in this district during the year.

Dissatisfaction still exists respecting the Dunedin railway refreshment-rooms keeping open for an hour and a half after the city hotels close at night, also on Christmas Day, Good Friday, the day of the general election, and the day for the election of the Licensing Committee, on which days hotels are directed to be closed. On those days drinking to a great extent takes place at the railway-station, and disorderly scenes are often enacted there.

The gaming laws in their present shape are not by any means conducive to success in prosecutions for breaches thereof. Whenever the term of imprisonment to which an offender is liable exceeds three months, the accused party may elect to have his case tried by a jury; and juries, for some reason best known to themselves, are very loth to convict in such cases, no matter how conclusive the evidence for the prosecution may be.

The only casualty during the year was the death of Constable C. O'Sullivan on the 29th April, 1903.

Owing to the number of constables who go on the sick-list here during the winter months, and avail themselves of annual leave of absence during the summer months, and also to the great amount of escorting of prisoners to be done between this city and Christchurch and Invercargill, I would suggest that the Force here be augmented by at least two constables.

On the whole, the conduct of sergeants, constables, and detectives during the year has been good, more especially those stationed in country towns.

INSPECTOR A. J. MITCHELL, SOUTHLAND DISTRICT.

I have the honour to report that "no license" obtained in the Mataura electorate in June last, since which eight convictions for sly-grog selling, one for assisting in the commission of an offence, and five for illegally dealing in liquor have resulted.

Eleven prosecutions have been initiated for serious breaches of the Licensing Act, followed by ten convictions. In three cases fatal accidents, and in two serious accidents, were attributable to excessive drinking.

The percentage of undetected crime remains satisfactorily small.

Seeing that Invercargill has a population of over twelve thousand persons, and that it is adjacent to the Bluff, the first port of call for boats from Melbourne and Hobart, I would again urge the necessity for strengthening the local staff by two additional constables, so that property may be securely guarded, especially at night-time.

I beg to ask favourable consideration to the amending of "The Indictable Offences Summary Jurisdiction Amendment Act, 1900," in the direction of giving to two Justices equal jurisdiction with a Magistrate in the matter of committing for sentence accused persons whom the Court proposes committing for trial, and who elect to plead "Guilty" in the lower Court.