

The direct cost to the colony in detecting and prosecuting sly-grog sellers during the year was £1,365 19s. 7d., this being £218 0s. 5d. less than the amount of fines imposed.

GAMING OFFENCES.

There were 115 prosecutions, resulting in 91 convictions, during the year under the gaming laws, against 229 prosecutions and 124 convictions in 1903.

"The Gaming and Lotteries Act, 1881," seems to require amendment in the direction of dealing with persons gambling on private paddocks or grounds, as the game of "two-up" is now carried on extensively in such places and the police are powerless in the matter.

"THE INFANT LIFE PROTECTION ACT, 1896."

During the year there were 528 registered homes throughout the colony, representing 728 infants, against 544 homes and 854 infants in 1903.

Twenty-one deaths occurred in the homes during the year, against 28 in the preceding year. Five licensees were prosecuted for breaches of the Act, and convicted, against 6 prosecutions and 4 convictions in 1903. Three licenses were cancelled, and no neglect of licensees was disclosed at inquests.

CONDUCT OF MEMBERS OF THE FORCE.

During the year, excluding those members of the Force concerned in the recent Dunedin robberies, the conduct of the men improved slightly as compared with the preceding year, and the number of punishments it was found necessary to inflict for misconduct was fewer.

One man was permitted to resign, and four others were punished for offences in connection with drink during the year.

I regret having to report the recent prosecutions of four constables at Dunedin for shopbreaking and receiving, and the conviction of three of them for the latter offence, sentences of three, four, and five years' imprisonment being imposed.

Misleading comments have been ventilated in the Press and otherwise, and erroneous conclusions formed by persons apparently ignorant of facts with respect to these prosecutions.

It has been alleged that ex-constable Moses was admitted into the Police service through influence, hence proper inquiry was not made into his character; that he was not only the instigator of the thefts by Dunedin police, but the demoraliser of those concerned therein; and, further, that influence still predominates in the Police Department and secures the advancement and promotion of the members thereof.

It is incumbent, therefore, upon me to briefly explain the circumstances surrounding ex-constable Moses' appointment, the subsequent police prosecutions, and the position as regards influence. Ex-constable Moses applied for admittance into the Police service on the 8th January, 1903, and all inquiries into his character were made, and his name placed on the approved candidates list previous to my arrival in the colony. The result of inquiries showed that the ex-constable had served over a year in the Sixth New Zealand Contingent in South Africa, and subsequently nine months in the Permanent Militia, during which periods his character was good. His file appears to have been forwarded to local police, South Canterbury, for further inquiry, Moses having previously been engaged in agricultural pursuits in various parts of that district, his relatives also residing there. A favourable report was received from the inquiring constable, who was apparently ignorant of two previous convictions having been recorded against Moses, five and ten years previously, when he was twelve and seventeen years of age. On this report, combined with Moses' good record in the services referred to, he was considered an eligible candidate, and his name was placed on candidates list for selection. The applicant remained in the Permanent Militia with good conduct until his appointment in the Police service on the 1st May, 1904, and was posted to Dunedin two months later.

From the fact that Moses' name remained one year and nearly four months on candidates list previous to his appointment, it is apparent that influence cannot be associated with his admission into the service.

It is to be regretted that more discreet inquiries were not conducted by the local constable, and records searched, so that Moses' convictions could have been traced and his admission into the service debarred. I, however, call attention to the fact that ex-constable Moses had nine years' good character previous to joining the Police service and five years' good character when the constable (who has now left the service) conducted his inquiry, the usual qualification for admission into police forces being five years' good character which can be verified.

The system adopted at present in ascertaining the previous character of candidates for employment in the Police service is practically as stringent as it can be, and much more so than is generally adopted by other police forces; but, although it would prevent such as ex-constable Moses entering the service, I do not suggest the impossibility of a mistake occurring. In addition to the previous system, all records of convictions are searched, and the finger-print system of identification has been introduced, each selected candidate being finger-printed, so that with my personal supervision of all inquiries made into their whole histories I fail to see what further can be done.

As regards ex-constable Moses being the instigator of the crimes in question and also the demoraliser of his colleagues, there is no foundation whatsoever for such suggestions. From careful personal investigation and admissions of the convicted constables I am satisfied beyond doubt that a system of pilfering by several constables has been carried on during the last four or five years, and that it has increased in magnitude until the arrests were effected; but, as the thefts were infrequent, and the property stolen small in quantity and of little value, the losses were not discovered until more constables joined in the conspiracy, when larger quantities were stolen, which led to the exposure.