

refuse to give evidence on the ground that no witness can be compelled to incriminate himself.

The class of prostitutes found in the streets, so long as they conduct themselves with decency and do not “solicit,” do not come within the power of the police, however offensive their presence may be to the public.

In the course of the evidence given at Dunedin, to show neglect on the part of the police in respect to the existence of brothels, reference was made to a house in Asher’s Lane occupied by Mrs. Desarthe, an old infirm woman, with whom two young girls (her daughters) were residing. We are satisfied the witnesses were mistaken in attributing disgraceful conduct to these Desarthe girls, and that neither the girls nor Mrs. Desarthe were the persons the witnesses had in their minds and intended to refer to.

We feel that an injustice may be done them by their names appearing in the evidence, and desire to express the opinion that no misconduct on their part was proved. It is a matter for great regret that respectable citizens can be found so ready to asperse the character of others without first making themselves acquainted with facts easily ascertainable.

Neglected Children.

The duty of the police with respect to neglected and indigent children and those in vicious surroundings is to bring them before a Court with a view to an order being made committing them to an Industrial School, and it has been alleged that the police are negligent in the discharge of this duty.

The expense of maintenance of indigent children committed to industrial schools falls upon the local Charitable Aid Boards, and there is a tendency on the part of these bodies to jealously watch what they consider any unnecessary charge upon them; and they have, in some cases, remonstrated with police officers for what, from their point of view, appeared an excess of zeal in this matter. In consequence of this special instructions were given by circular of the 21st December, 1891, as follows :—

(Circular No. 16/91.)

Police Department, Commissioner’s Office, Wellington,
16th December, 1891.

THERE is reason to think that a notice which appeared in the *Police Gazette* of 9th May, 1888, pages 92 and 93, and the Circulars No. 19 of 2nd November, 1889, and 16 of the 29th September, 1890, have had the effect of unduly discouraging the committal of children to industrial schools.

The design of the notice and of the circulars was to prevent the committal of children where the Charitable Aid Boards were willing to make more suitable provision in some other way. The Charitable Aid Boards, however, have no special interest in children committed for any reason except indigence. The Government did not desire to put any obstacle in the way of the committal of children living in disorderly houses or given to vagrant habits. When children of this class are sent to an industrial school the cost of their maintenance does not affect the Charitable Aid Boards, and there is no reason to consult the Boards before bringing such children before a Magistrate.

The Government is quite prepared to take the consequences of a vigorous administration of “The Industrial Schools Act, 1882.”

A. HUME,
Commissioner of Police.

In view of all the facts we are satisfied there has been no wilful neglect of duty on the part of the police. It can hardly be considered the duty of police officers to investigate the case of every apparently neglected child which comes under their observation; this appears to be more the function of persons connected with charitable bodies. It would, however, be well if the police, when they have reason for so doing, called the attention of some person specially appointed to deal with such cases to the matter, with a view to their being privately investigated, the interference of the police with domestic affairs being always undesirable; and if the result of such investigation, on being reported to the police authorities, justified it, action should be taken, supported by the evidence of those who investigated the case.

In respect to one case at Auckland, which was specially referred to as a neglected case, the evidence showed that the children referred to were on three occasions taken before the Court, but the order was on each occasion refused on the ground that their mother, with whom they were living, was not a prostitute; and, unless the police were negligent in putting their case before the Court, which has not been shown, no blame can be attached to them. We consider Inspector Hickson showed commendable earnestness in regard to this and other cases of neglected children which came under his notice.

There is another class of neglected children who are brought under the notice of the police by their criminal conduct. As to these the duty of the police is clear, and, so far as our inquiries go, they have performed it.