

The provisions of the Gaming Act as regards betting-houses, street betting, restrictions on betting telegrams, betting advertisements, and use of totalisator are eminently satisfactory; but, having regard to the licensing of bookmakers and the indiscriminate action of racing authorities in issuing betting licenses to all applicants in a position to pay the necessary fee, irrespective altogether of character or fitness to hold a license, the result has been quite contrary to that intended.

Bookmakers and their followers have seriously increased, the majority of them being totally unfit both pecuniarily and otherwise to hold licenses.

If bookmakers are to be licensed to bet at race meetings (a provision which from a long and varied experience of racing I could not support) the law should provide that none but those holding a certificate of fitness from a Magistrate (on the report of police) or Chief of Police of the district concerned should be licensed. Nor should any one be permitted to act as a bookmaker at any race meeting whatsoever unless he holds such certificate.

A full report on the working of the Gaming Act, with suggestions for amendments thereto, has already been submitted for consideration.

CONDUCT OF MEMBERS OF THE FORCE, ETC.

With the exception of a number of young constables, who have, as usual, had to be stringently dealt with for misconduct in order to maintain discipline, several having been discharged, the conduct of members of the service, especially the senior members, has been highly satisfactory. Serious breaches of Police Regulations have been of rare occurrence, and only a very few members have had to be dealt with for overindulgence in drink. On the whole, the efficiency of the Force has been well maintained.

Both branches of the service have worked harmoniously together, with good results. Many meritorious arrests have been effected during the year, and only a very few serious crimes remain undetected. The clerical staff at headquarters and in district offices have also given entire satisfaction in carrying out the executive work of the Force.

It has been suggested that important changes and reforms would be expected, with increased efficiency and reduced expenditure, if the Force were properly organized. I am afraid that, if the efficiency of the Force is to be considered, those expecting great reforms will be disappointed.

At the present time, and for some years past, the Department has been worked on most economical lines. A reference to Appendix C (on last page of this report), showing the proportion of police to the population and the cost of police per inhabitant as compared with the Australian States, should satisfy any inquirer on this point. The numerous appointments held by police, and consequent saving to other Government Departments, is also a matter which should not be overlooked when considering the cost of the Police Force.

Retrenchment can undoubtedly be effected at any time, but certainly not without minimised efficiency. I cannot, therefore, recommend it. On the contrary, continued demands are being made for additional police protection, and if order is to be maintained and crime kept in check, the Force must necessarily grow with the population. The backbone of efficiency is proper training, facilities for obtaining a thorough knowledge of police work and the law pertaining thereto, vigilance in selecting the best-qualified men for advancement to the higher grades, firmness in dealing with defaulters, and, above all, the maintenance of a proper system of supervision, without which no force can be efficient.

It cannot be said that egotism is my forte, but I do claim that the Police Force of the Dominion compares most favourably with any other Police Force, and that our system is superior to many; and I say so with a varied knowledge of Police Forces generally which few possess.

Anonymous Press correspondents have occasionally commented disparagingly in respect to the organization, &c., of the Force; but, as the source from which such comments emanated was apparent, and the motive a personal and vindictive one, intended to mislead the public, their attempts to decry the Department were treated as merited—with silent contempt. A satisfactory explanation of any representation made detrimental to the Force is always available when required by the proper authority.

FINGER-PRINT BRANCH.

On the 31st March last, the finger-print collection consisted of the impressions of 8,718 offenders, being an increase of 1,096 on the previous year.

During the year 138 offenders, whose antecedents were unknown to the police of the district in which they were in custody, were, by means of their finger-impressions, identified as previously convicted persons, showing an increase of 15 over last year.

It has been the custom since the introduction of the finger-print system in the Dominion, when a person whose antecedents are unknown to the local police is in custody charged with an indictable offence, to apply for a week's remand, and cause his finger-impressions to be taken and forwarded to the branch for inquiry; should the prisoner's impressions be untraced, they are at once photographed and sent to all the Australian States or to any other place from which there is reason to believe the offender may have come. In this manner impressions of persons in custody here have been identified in each of the Australian States, in Johannesburg, and in Denmark as those of persons previously convicted in those places.

During the year 43 articles bearing finger-marks (chiefly in housebreaking cases) have been submitted to the branch by the Inspectors of the various districts for identification. In several of these cases the finger-marks were too indistinct to be of any value, and in many other cases the impressions were found to be those of the occupants of the houses entered; but in four cases the prints on the articles were found to be identical with those of criminals whose prints were already recorded in the office of the branch. Prosecutions and convictions followed in each of these four cases.

Since the end of the year two very important cases have occurred, which clearly demonstrate how important a factor in the detection of crime this branch of the service has become.