

Gaming Amendment Act, 1920.—This Act, which came into operation on the 28th August, 1920, made the business of a bookmaker unlawful, and made it penal for any person to bet with a bookmaker. Certain provisions relating to evidence, and facilitating proof of offences, were also included. The Act undoubtedly made it more difficult for bookmakers to carry on the business, but in practice the police found it very difficult, as before, to convict the offenders. The police have been roundly censured for permitting the bookmaker to exist, with the power of the new Act to extinguish him; but those who believed it was possible to extinguish him with legislation backed up by drastic police action are as confiding and credulous as those who suppose that the thief and the burglar, the unlawful practitioner and murderer, may be extinguished by means of the Crimes Act (which declares their business to be unlawful) put into operation by a Police Force which is generally admitted to be reasonably efficient. Drastic legislation followed by vigorous police action can keep these evils in check, but the causes are deeper-rooted than legislation or police efforts can reach. The same applies with at least equal force to the evils the Gaming Acts were intended to combat. The police, I am confident, have done, and will continue to do, all that is possible to enforce these Acts.

Arms Act, 1920.—This Act came in force on the 1st January, 1921. It entailed an extraordinary amount of work upon the police; owing to the immense number of cases to be dealt with registration was slow, and could not be completed within the time fixed by statute. The obligations imposed by the Act have been very cheerfully complied with by all classes of the community. There is no reason to believe that evasion of the duty to register has taken place to any great extent; but all evasions will be discovered sooner or later, with varying consequences to the offenders according to the degree of delay or evasion. It is considered that the Act, when in full operation for some time, will have a beneficial effect in reducing the number of fatalities due to the use of firearms.

Serious Crime.—The criminal statistics for 1920 show an extraordinary number of cases of homicide, there being thirteen cases of murder and thirteen of manslaughter. There were also eight cases of attempted murder. It is impossible to assign any reason for such an extraordinary number—no common cause in the conditions of the people can be discovered which would account for it. The circumstances in which the crimes were committed indicate that they were not preventable by any police measures. As many of the crimes were committed with firearms, it is believed that the operation of the Arms Act will eventually, though not immediately, reduce the number of fatalities due to the criminal use of firearms.

The skill and ability displayed in detecting some of the murder cases, which were of an exceptionally difficult nature, show that we have in New Zealand a Police Force which may compare favourably with any similar body in the Empire.

Valedictory.—This is the last annual report which it will be my privilege to submit for the information of the Government and Parliament. I have voluntarily tendered my resignation, and it has been accepted, to take effect on 31st December proximo. I regret that circumstances do not permit me to spend the remaining period allowed by statute in the service of the country. It only remains for me now, when I may do so without impropriety as being “gratitude for favours to come,” to express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Ministers who have had charge of the police administration during my term of office as Commissioner, for their confidence, support, and assistance in all matters appertaining to my work. It is pleasing—indeed, it is due to them—to put on record that they have maintained in practice the fine ideal which all authorities on the subject contend for as regards the relations of the Minister to the chief executive police officer—viz., that the latter should be supported in the proper execution of his duties and held responsible for efficient administration, but otherwise without interference. At the same time, no blind trust was imposed in me—every act, every proposal was carefully scrutinized by the Minister, and his counsel was readily given in every difficulty. It is unnecessary to stress the effect this attitude had in maintaining the authority of the Commissioner and promoting the discipline of the Force. I have also to express my appreciation of the handsome manner in which members of Parliament dealt with all matters relating to the police during my term of office. That was a period of exceptional stress and difficulty, but the attitude of Ministers and members made comparatively easy a burden of duty which might otherwise be intolerable. It is unnecessary for me to bespeak similar consideration for my successor, Mr. A. H. Wright.

I leave with the satisfaction of knowing that the foundations of a very fine Police Force are laid, and that its full development and perfection as a highly efficient executive instrument of government, of the first importance in promoting the safety, comfort, and happiness of the community, are assured. These results are due to the outstanding interest which Ministers, under whom I have had the honour to serve as official head of the Department, evinced in the welfare of the Force. What they have done for the development and welfare of the service in recent years shows that they realized that these objects are worthy of the ambition of any Minister to achieve, and is a guarantee of similar support in the future.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF DISTRICTS.

Extracts from the annual reports of officers in charge of districts are hereto annexed.

J. O'DONOVAN,
Commissioner of Police.