

GENERAL.

Arms Act.—The importance of regulating the possession of arms is receiving the attention of the authorities in many parts of the world. At a recent International Police Conference held at New York, at which representatives from England, Ireland, Canada, South America, and nearly all the European States attended, the matter was fully discussed. The carriage of firearms was referred to by those representing the United States as “our national menace and our national weapon.” The practice of carrying weapons was unanimously condemned, and the ownership of such weapons shown to be foolish and unnecessary. Heavy license fees up to 100 dollars were advocated for the right to possess or transfer a pistol.

This confirms the opinion I have previously expressed that the possession of pistols is quite unnecessary in this country, and should be discouraged in every possible way. There can be no doubt that they only lead to the loss of life, both intentionally and accidentally; they serve no useful purpose, and in the hands of inexperienced persons, as most respectable citizens are, they become a source of danger to the owner and his family.

The Act of 1920 has already proved useful, and will continue to do so. Some people resent not being allowed to land or purchase revolvers, but it is only in very exceptional cases that permits are granted, and, as revolvers are constantly being surrendered to the police by persons who no longer desire to be bothered with the necessary registration on change of address, it is only a matter of time when the number held will be materially reduced.

Buildings.—Extensive repairs to stations have been effected during the year, and it will be necessary to continue spending far more than the average amount for some years to come to bring the buildings up to date. Only very urgent work has been put in hand for some years past, and single men have been sent to places where stations should be provided and married men stationed.

Candidates.—The number of candidates for the Force during the year was 215; of these 102 were rejected, 85 placed on list, and 28 are still under inquiry. As about 70 are required each year to fill vacancies, it will be seen that a sufficient number of suitable men is offering; but the margin is not great enough to allow of only the best men being selected. On the whole a good class is offering, and I have no fault to find with them. The fact that not more are seeking to join the police is very good evidence of the prosperity of the Dominion and the abundance of private employment.

Detective Branch.—This branch is in a very satisfactory state and doing good work. During the year the detective allowances were revised by the Government, and the increase granted has made the detective staff a much more contented body of men than formerly.

Discipline.—Discipline has been maintained during the year, and all ranks have been energetic and well conducted. As may be expected, a number have been punished for breaches of regulations, but I am pleased to say that serious offences have been conspicuous by their absence.

Drunkenness.—There has been a slight increase in the number of persons arrested for drunkenness during the year—viz., 626—but, as the previous year's returns showed a phenomenal decrease, the present year's figures call for no comment.

Gaming Act.—The police are frequently criticized for not suppressing bookmakers; they might with equal reason be blamed for not suppressing all crime. They do their best with the means at their disposal, and will continue to do so, but while the general public support bookmakers and sympathize with them, as indicated by acquittals by juries of persons charged with bookmaking on clear evidence, it is not so easy to suppress them as at first sight appears. The police have been active in this direction during the year, and large fines have been inflicted by Magistrates.

Promotions.—The following officers have been promoted during the year: Inspectors W. Fouhy, W. H. Mackinnon, W. B. McIlveney, and C. R. Broberg to be Superintendents; Sub-Inspectors J. K. Simpson, S. Till, and W. Eccles to be Inspectors; Senior Detective J. McIlveney and Senior Sergeants A. S. Bird and D. C. Fraser to be Sub-Inspectors. Three sergeants were promoted to the rank of Senior Sergeant, and ten constables to the rank of sergeant. In the Detective Branch one detective-sergeant was promoted to the rank of Senior Detective, one detective to the rank of detective-sergeant, and six acting-detectives were appointed detectives.

Serious Crimes.—Under this heading there has been a decrease of 85 offences reported; there were 129 less burglaries and breaking and entering cases, but there was an increase of 86 forgeries. There were 7 murders, as compared with 5 the previous year, and in 6 cases the offender was arrested. The only case in which no arrest was made was that of the murder of Mrs. Oates at Wanganui, referred to in extract from Superintendent Fouhy's report annexed. Inquiries are still being continued.

Strength of Force.—The actual strength on the 31st March last was 1,009 permanent members and 18 temporary constables, as compared with 980 permanent and 23 temporary in March, 1923, a net increase of 24 men. Officers in charge of districts ask for 83 more men to meet the requirements of the service, and as the population increases there can be no doubt that the strength of the police must be increased at the same ratio to carry on the work in an efficient manner. In 1915 the proportion of police to population was 1 to 1,257; at the present time it is 1 to 1,312. To bring up the Force to its proper standard at least 45 more men are required.

Training-depot.—The training-depot continues to do good work, and the instruction afforded is of the greatest value to the recruits, who start their actual police duties with a very fair knowledge of their powers and responsibilities. During the year 83 recruits were trained and added to the strength.

I append extracts from reports of officers in charge of districts.

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Commissioner of Police.