

Amendment Act, 1895," were exercised in their behalf it would relieve the witnesses of the consequences of their breach of the law.

In the Clutha district, from October, 1894, to November, 1897, the police prosecutions for sly-grog selling numbered sixty-eight, and resulted in twenty-three convictions, the fines amounting to £645. In the face of this, some witnesses examined at Balclutha charged the police with wilful neglect of duty, alleging that many more convictions could have been obtained if more persistent efforts had been made. On the evidence adduced we have formed the opinion that the action of the police in the Clutha district was earnest and effective, and the censure undeserved. Those who complain do not appear to realise that every conviction is followed by more caution and circumspection on the part of offenders, and consequently subsequent convictions are more difficult to secure. No prosecutions were initiated for these offences in Clutha by any one outside the Police Force. The complainants against the police took no steps themselves, but vigorously urged the police to action, and often by their public proceedings with this object must have put offenders on their guard and increased the difficulty of detecting breaches of the law.

Every reasonable inducement has been offered by the department to constables to use vigilance in discovering offenders, and liberal money rewards have been given to those on whose information convictions have been obtained. Money has not been spared, but it is evident it should not be too liberally spent for this purpose lest it induce crime of a more serious character.

In the district known as the King-country, in which the Maori population preponderates, and in which no licensed houses have existed (except one licensed brewery), the illicit sale of liquor has long been carried on. In May and June a few convictions for sly-grog selling were obtained by the police, but as breaches of the law became more numerous and undisguised the attention of the department was called to it by the local Justices of the Peace. The police thereupon took action by sending constables in plain clothes to the district under instructions to do their best to detect offenders, but as the residents suspected the men and the object of their visit offenders were on their guard, and the result was not satisfactory. It has been stated that the fact they were about to visit the district was known there before they reached it, and the officer in charge at Auckland, Inspector Hickson, has been blamed for neglecting to take proper precautions. In his evidence Inspector Hickson stated he had informed the local Justices by letter that the men were going there, and said he believed it had been made public by them. The Justices concerned wrote to us denying this, and stating that they had received no notification from Inspector Hickson of the intended visit, and the Inspector has since withdrawn his statement and apologized for his error in making it. Letters on this subject will be found in the Appendix.

Last year a more carefully organized effort was made, which resulted in eighty-three prosecutions, on which fifty-seven convictions were obtained, and fines and costs amounting to £631 were inflicted, and twelve sentenced to imprisonment without the option of a fine, but sly-grog selling undoubtedly continues to be carried on extensively. The quality of the liquor sold is very bad, and the effect mischievous. Although the Native population preponderates, there is a large scattered European population, and it is a matter for serious consideration whether it would not conduce to the welfare of the people and to their observance of the law if licensed houses existed in their neighbourhood at which reasonably good liquor could be obtained under proper regulation and control. We are not called upon to express an opinion on this as a social question, but we are satisfied—although no evidence has been given on the subject—that the present condition of things must have the effect of leading many persons, Natives especially, to regard the laws of the colony with but little respect, and that they feel justified in using dishonest means to evade detection when they find deception used to detect breaches of the law.

The alternative would be to make it a prohibited district, so that section 33 of "The Alcoholic Liquors Sale Control Act, 1895," should apply.

The party known as "Prohibitionists" have made the condition of things in respect of sly-grog selling in Clutha and the King-country the ground of special complaint against the police, and allege that the department is indifferent in enforcing the law, and in sympathy with the liquor traffic.

It must be remembered, however unsatisfactory it may be to those who desire absolutely to prevent the supply of liquor to any person, and who think they have obtained their object by the abolition of licenses, that there are those to whom from constitution or habit alcoholic stimulant is necessary, or who regard it as necessary, and who will have it if obtainable, and sly-grog selling is the result.