

stock of Hokonui, properly bottled and labelled and all. There's quite an organisation. And why not? A man must have his whisky," he added spiritedly.

"But why is it illegal to make whisky in New Zealand? Why don't the authorities start a whisky distilling industry?"

"Well, there's a lot to be considered," said the old-timer. "We've got the grain and we've got the climate, and the water should be all right. But it's not as easy as it sounds. It's like licensing bookmakers in a way. The Government is concerned about the revenue it might lose."

He paused and lit his old cherry pipe.

"Your question is not new, you know," he went on. "It was asked over and over again as far back as the 'sixties. In those days there were repeated complaints that there were illicit stills throughout the country, and the Government was asked to license distillation under the supervision of excise officers. At long last, in 1868, the Government acted. In that year a Distillation Act was passed, and the Government tried to encourage distilleries by fixing the excise duty on local spirits at half the rate of the Customs duty—6/- instead of 12/- a gallon.

"Two companies took out licences to distil," the old man said, shifting the grass stalk adroitly from one side of his mouth to the other. "And I'll give you two guesses where the companies were situated."

"Invercargill and Dunedin," was the prompt reply.

"Half marks," said the narrator with a smile. "Auckland and Dunedin. By 1873, the Dunedin Distilleries Company had five stills in operation, and up to March of the following year no fewer than 294,000 gallons of whisky had been distilled by the two companies."

"And what was the whisky like?" asked the stranger, again running his tongue longingly over his lips. It was thirsty listening.

"Now then," chided the narrator. "I'm getting on in years, but I wasn't drinking whisky seventy years ago, worse luck. But like any other whisky it needed keeping, and it needed blending. And neither was done, I believe.

"Anyway," he continued, "the industry didn't appeal to the Government. They were losing too much in taxes, about 175,000 annually they reckoned. So up went the excise duty and loud squealed the companies. They didn't feel like paying 9/- a gallon, and the Government didn't like losing the taxes. So in the end the companies closed down, accepting compensation from the State.



*Under a load of hay*

"But it did not stop the making of whisky," he added fiercely. "I'm damned if they'll ever stop it."

"The Government is talking about encouraging commercial distilling at the present time," the stranger remarked.

"Yes, of course. Have you ever noticed when there's a drought on how farmers talk enthusiastically about