

1903.
NEW ZEALAND.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS:

STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1903.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly pursuant to Section 62 of "The Old-age Pensions Act, 1898."

The REGISTRAR of OLD-AGE PENSIONS to the Right Hon. the COLONIAL TREASURER.

SIR,— Old-age Pensions Department, Wellington, 13th July, 1903.

I have the honour to furnish the following report for the financial year ended 31st March, 1903, containing particulars required for presentation to Parliament in terms of section 62 of "The Old-age Pensions Act, 1898."

On the 31st March, 1902, the number of pensions on the books was 12,776, representing a liability of £217,192—an average per pension of £17. Of this number, 1,055 were Maoris.

The number of pensions in force on the 31st March, 1903, was 12,481, representing a liability of £211,594—an average per pension of £16 19s. Of this number, 892 were Maoris.

During the financial year just ended the number of new pensions granted was 1,386, including 62 Maoris. Five pensions, cancelled in the previous year, were reinstated.

The total number of pensions voided during the year was 1,686, made up as follows: Deaths, 1,064; renewals not applied for, 278; renewals refused, 198; cancellations, 146. Maoris are represented in these figures by 103 deaths, 79 renewals not applied for, 38 renewals refused, and 11 cancellations.

The total payments on account of pensions during the year amounted to £210,140 16s. 6d. Refunds direct to the Public Account of pension overpaid totalled £984 11s. 1d., leaving the net charge against the Act as £209,156 5s. 5d. A further refund of pension overpaid, totalling £55, was also obtained in stamps.

The total amount of instalments for the year unpaid on the 31st March was £1,667 10s. 2d. Of this amount, £1,577 16s. 10d. represents absolutely forfeited instalments, the balance of £89 13s. 4d. being instalments the payment of which is in abeyance.

During the year just ended numerous Court cases have revealed the fact that pensions have been obtained by fraud and misrepresentation in the past. No matter how careful the investigating Magistrate may have been, it is clear that some persons did not truthfully state their financial position, the result being that pensions were granted to some who were not entitled to receive them, and others have been drawing a larger amount of pension than the law allowed. To prevent this practice, it became absolutely necessary to adopt a new system of examination, and to make new regulations, which latter became law in February last. All applicants for a pension have now to fill in the answers to a set of questions on a new claim form, and to come before the Deputy-Registrar if physically fit to do so. The Deputy-Registrar then verifies the answers given by a set of inquiry forms provided for the purpose, and when this has been done to the satisfaction of that officer the applicant appears, as required by the Act, before the Stipendiary Magistrate, who may grant or reject the claim according to the evidence. All pensioners already on the books are being given the opportunity, when they come up for renewal this year, to answer a similar set of questions, the answers to which are verified as in the case of a new claim. Under this system no extra hardship is suffered if the applicant is justly entitled to a pension. It should be always borne in mind that where there is a large sum of public money to be had by application, the greatest care must be given to all claims. If due attention were not paid to this searching examination, the amount payable under the Act would quickly assume large proportions.