

1904.
NEW ZEALAND.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS DEPARTMENT

(SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE), FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1904.

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, 18th July, 1904.

I have the honour to furnish the following report for the financial year ended the 31st March, 1904, containing particulars required for presentation to Parliament in terms of section 62 of "The Old-age Pensions Act, 1898."

In my report of the previous year's work of the Department, reference was made to the fact that a new form of claim had been brought into use, and that a more complete system of investigation had been instituted, whereby the statements of a claimant for pension were verified before the claim was submitted to the Stipendiary Magistrate. I may say at once that the results achieved during the past two years have amply justified the steps taken in this direction. The number of new pensions granted during the past year has dropped to 27 per cent. of the population becoming eligible by age and residence, whereas previously it was 37 per cent. in 1903, and 43 per cent. in 1902. The number actually granted was 1,063, as against 1,386 in the previous year, and 1,694 in 1902.

Besides affecting every new applicant for a pension, the new system has been made to apply during the past year to all pensioners who were already on the books, and as these latter came up for the annual renewal of their pensions, their position was exhaustively inquired into for the first time, and this without any hardship whatever to those properly qualified.

The fringe of this special investigation had only been touched at the date of my last report, and although it was then anticipated that the result of the few months' experience thereunder would be maintained throughout the year, I was not prepared for what has actually happened. To say that there has been considerable misstatement of their true positions by claimants in the past is but to state the case mildly, and the extent of the imposition practised and the amounts obtained by unscrupulous persons is almost incredible. The safeguards now existing are necessary to prevent the darker side of human nature having play.

At the close of the financial year just ended, there were 850 less pensioners on the rolls than there were two years previously. This, it must be noted, means that there is a decrease in the annual liability under the Act of £16,277. The actual number of pensions cancelled has greatly exceeded this number, being 690 last year and 622 in the previous year, a total of 1,312 for the two years; but the excess of new grants over the number of deaths in each year has had the effect of reducing this abnormal decrease to the number stated—that is, 850. And it is this fact of the natural increase exceeding the natural decrease that has to be taken into account in viewing the results that I now place before you.

In 1902, when it might with reason have been said that the number of incoming pensioners had, after over three years' working, practically reached a minimum, the number of new grants exceeded the deaths by 759, and for the year now under review, with the searching inquiry that