

Ashburton, both managed by the North Canterbury Charitable Aid Board, where the general arrangements reflect credit on every one concerned.

A return showing the distribution of the pensioners in the various Homes and the amounts paid on their account is embodied in the Appendix.

FORFEITED INSTALMENTS.

The instalments due last year and unpaid on the 31st March, amounted to £1,350 5s. 3d. £1,330 5s. 3d. of this amount represents absolutely forfeited instalments on which there is no further claim, while the balance of £20 represents instalments the payment of which is in abeyance.

The absolutely forfeited instalments in each month are :—

						Absolutely Forfeited Instalments.		
						£	s.	d.
1905.								
April	...	...	...	...	...	115	8	4
May	...	...	...	...	...	100	5	0
June	...	...	...	...	...	110	6	11
July	...	...	...	...	...	123	16	8
August	...	...	...	...	...	97	18	4
September	...	...	...	...	...	121	16	8
October	...	...	...	...	...	119	10	0
November	...	...	...	...	...	96	11	8
December	...	...	...	...	...	103	3	4
1906.								
January	...	...	...	...	...	124	6	8
February	...	...	...	...	...	118	13	4
March	...	...	...	...	...	98	8	4
						<hr/>		
						£1,330	5	3

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES.

Prior to the recent conference of friendly societies' representatives, held in Wellington, paragraph appeared in the Press throughout the colony indicating that members of friendly societies were being penalised by the Department, inasmuch as the benefits derived by them from their societies were being applied to reduce their pensions. The Act is perfectly clear on this matter, and I took an early opportunity of refuting the statements by pointing out that friendly society benefits were specially exempted as income.

The definition of "income" in section 2 of the original Act of 1898, which holds good to-day, contains the following: " 'Income' . . . shall be deemed to include personal earnings, but not any pension payable under this Act, nor any payment by way of sick-allowance or funeral benefit from any registered friendly society."

In order, however, to satisfy myself that this section of the Act had not been overlooked by Magistrates, I addressed a circular to every Magistrate in the colony holding Old-age Pension Courts (copy herewith), and the replies received by me, which follow, leave no room for doubt as to the actual position—namely, that old-age pensioners who are members of friendly societies are not penalised on account of any benefits they may derive from their societies.

The correspondence is as follows :—

SIR,—

Old-age Pensions Department, Wellington, 17th May, 1906.

A conference of friendly societies is shortly to be held in Wellington, and several newspapers in various parts of the colony have published a statement to the effect that one question to be discussed is "the recent amendment of the Old-age Pensions Act by which recipients of benefits from friendly societies are penalised." This is, I understand, embodied in the circular convening the conference.

I have, through the Press in the chief centres, denied the existence of any such amendment, and stated that no pension, to my knowledge, had been affected by receipts from friendly societies.

As section 2 of the original Act distinctly states that "any payment by way of sick-allowance or funeral benefit from any registered friendly society" shall not be treated as income, I cannot imagine any circumstances under which such an allowance or benefit could be used to reduce a pension, but I shall deem it a favour if you will advise me that members of friendly societies have not been penalised in your Court in respect of such sums.

I have, &c.,

J. EMAN SMITH, Registrar.

Copies of Replies.

From Colonel ROBERTS, Stipendiary Magistrate, Tauranga.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your circular letter No. F 23, and in reply thereto have to inform you that I have communicated with the Deputy Registrars of Old-age Pensions here at Whakatane and Opotiki, and they inform me that there are no cases in which old-age pensioners in any of these old-age pension districts have been penalised on account of payments made to them by a registered friendly society by way of sick-allowance or funeral benefit having been treated as income.

From R. ACHESON, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, Hokitika.

In reply to your memo of the 17th instant, I beg to state that no applicant for an old-age pension in this district has had the same refused or reduced in consequence of receiving sick-allowance or funeral benefit from any friendly society.