

REPORT.

I.—THE WORK OF THE YEAR.

1. WORK ARISING OUT OF THE WAR.

THE continuance of the war has added further work to that on which the Department was engaged at the end of the year 1915-16.

The Military Service Act, 1916.—The most important legislation creating additional war work is the Military Service Act, 1916, the administration of which, so far as it concerns this Department, necessitated the establishing of an entirely new branch of the Government Statistician's Office. Reference to this will be found in Mr. Fraser's report in the Appendix hereto. With regard to the Head Office, the Act has thrown on it the burden of the staff work of this new branch, the direct administration of section 42 relative to Reservists changing their names, a considerable amount of correspondence with the Defence Department and the Government Statistician (in particular, answering inquiries as to whether persons drawn in ballots have been granted permits to leave the Dominion), and with the general public, more particularly with visitors to the Dominion who desire information as to their position under the Act. The administration of the Act has also thrown an additional burden on the Registrar-General.

Permits and Passports.—This work has been directly affected by the passing of the Military Service Act, which has necessitated very careful consideration being given to all applications by men of military age to leave New Zealand. So far as the First Division is concerned, permission to leave the Dominion is declined in the case of those capable of undertaking military service. In respect to those certified to by the Military Medical Boards as unfit for military service a permit may be issued subject to an adequate guarantee being forthcoming for the applicant's return to New Zealand within a specified period, which is, generally speaking, two months.

The permit restrictions in regard to men in the Second Division are such that, while each case is dealt with on its merits, they are not now permitted to leave the Dominion permanently unless under very exceptional circumstances, or it is clearly proved that they are altogether unfit for active or home service, while permits for temporary absence are granted only on bonds being furnished to guarantee the holders' return within a limited period. Similar guarantees are required for men over military age in cases where they are capable of rendering service in a civil capacity should that ultimately be required.

Returned soldiers discharged after service abroad are exempt from further service, and permits to leave the Dominion are granted to them as a matter of course.

On the 21st August, 1916, amended and additional War Regulations in regard to the inspection on arrival of oversea vessels were made. This has thrown increased responsibility not only upon this Department, but also upon the Customs Department.

Towards the end of last year it became necessary to evolve some means of ascertaining the intentions with regard to residence of new arrivals, in order that men of military age coming here permanently might not evade their responsibilities and that visitors to the Dominion might be allowed to come and go freely. The necessity was a real one in both cases, and in the latter it was of almost as much importance to the Government Statistician as to the visitors that they should not be enrolled. Already considerable trouble has been caused through the wrongful enrolment of such persons. The War Regulations of the 26th February, 1917, and the scheme for their administration have satisfactorily solved both problems.

In February last the Imperial Government directed that the issue of passports to women proposing to travel by steamers passing through the danger zone was to cease. Subsequently this was slightly varied in favour of women whose presence in England at the present juncture is one of pressing necessity. The restrictions, which virtually amount to a prohibition of women travelling to England, are still in force.

Shipment of Gift Goods and Transmission of Moneys.—The generosity of the New Zealand people is undiminished. During the year gift goods to the value of £158,465 were shipped through the Department. The contributions to relief funds in England amounted to £337,928, the principal items being—Belgian relief, £66,635 (exclusive of Government subsidy); British Red Cross, £62,203; New Zealand Comforts Fund (formerly New Zealand Red Cross), £51,661; other purposes, £157,427. The New Zealand contribution to the Belgian Relief Fund is per head of the population greater than that of any other country in the world.

War Funds Act, 1915.—The report of the Officer in Charge, printed in the Appendix hereto, shows that during the year excellent progress has been made towards the fulfilment of the objects of this Act. The provision in the War Legislation Amendment Act of last session requiring the Minister's approval of a war fund before permits to collect contributions therefor may be issued has proved of considerable value.

Amendments of the regulations under the Act with a view to reducing the number of returns rendered by societies (both administering and collecting) is under consideration.

Pointed attention has been drawn to various abuses of the practice of attracting the public to entertainments and other gatherings on the plea that a percentage of the proceeds will be given to various patriotic funds. It is absolutely necessary that the Department should have power to prevent any such gatherings being held without the Minister's consent, and regulations are now being drafted to give the Department the necessary power.