

FIRE BRIGADES ACT.

I have already mentioned that the Fire Brigades Acts were consolidated and amended.

During the year three new fire districts were constituted—viz., Wellington, Te Awamutu, and Mount Roskill—making in all forty-eight Fire Boards now operating.

Further large quantities of fire-hose, fire-escape ladders, and other equipment not manufactured in the Dominion were indented, through the High Commissioner's Office, to the order of the various Fire Boards and the United Fire Brigades Association.

Assistance was rendered by the Department in the carrying-out of the annual demonstration of the United Fire Brigades Association held in Dunedin.

The usual inspections of fire brigades have been held by the Inspector of Fire Brigades, and the routine work required by the Act performed. In accordance with requests received from various Government Departments and local bodies, numerous special inspections and reports in the matter of protection of buildings, water-installations, purchase of fire-appliance machinery, &c., have been made.

PASSPORTS.

An increase is shown in the number of passports issued during the year—viz., 4,048, as compared with 3,863 last year. Renewals were granted in 1,335 cases. In addition, a number of travel documents were issued to nationals of countries not having consular representatives in the Dominion.

RAFFLES.

As foreshadowed in my last annual report, the question of alluvial-gold raffles has occupied close attention during the year. It was found that the requirement that full particulars should be shown on the tickets was insufficient, and the additional condition was imposed that all advertisements, circulars, and propaganda must first be submitted to the Department for approval. With these two safeguards it was possible to see that a fair statement of the position was placed before the public. Experience has shown that raffles of this nature are difficult to control, and endeavours were made in some instances to either evade the conditions laid down or to openly defy them. A number of successful prosecutions were undertaken, both for the sale of tickets after the authorized date and for breach of conditions of the license, and in two instances where agents had broadcasted tickets the controlling authorities were called upon to dispense with their services. The balance-sheets of the later gold raffles indicated a very different position from that pertaining to earlier ones. In cases where a profit was shown the amount was small in comparison with the gross takings, and in several instances a substantial loss resulted. All the licenses for alluvial-gold raffles have now been issued, and for the future licenses will be confined to paintings, drawings, sculpture, or other works of art or literature.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS.

At the end of February, 1927, the Dominion was honoured by a visit from Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York. Their Royal Highnesses arrived at Auckland on H.M.S. "Renown" on Tuesday, the 22nd February, and a few days later commenced a comprehensive tour through the North and South Islands. Unfortunately, owing to indisposition, Her Royal Highness was unable to accompany the Duke on the latter portion of the journey through the South Island from Nelson onwards, and returned to Wellington to rest, rejoining later His Royal Highness at the Bluff, whence they departed for Sydney by the "Renown" on the afternoon of the 22nd March. In all, some forty-four centres were visited. As on the occasion of previous Royal visits, a special reception was accorded the Royal guests by the assembled Maori tribes at Rotorua. The tour also included a short visit to Russell for deep-sea-fishing purposes, and a brief stay of two days at a specially arranged trout-fishing camp at Kowhai Flat, on the banks of the Tongariro River, near Tokaanu. The visit was marked from beginning to end by most unbounded enthusiasm on the part of the people, the welcomes tendered Their Royal Highnesses at every centre once again emphasizing the deep-seated loyalty and devotion to the Royal Family that has always characterized the people of these Islands. Excepting the indisposition of Her Royal Highness, the visit was in every respect an unqualified success. The supervision of the whole of the arrangements for the Royal tour was in the hands of this Department, and I desire to take this opportunity of expressing to the other Departments of State that assisted my cordial thanks for their able and willing co-operation throughout. The thanks of the Department are also due to the Mayors, to the local authorities, and to all those concerned in the various places visited, for the loyal and whole-hearted manner in which they undertook the framing and carrying-out of the reception arrangements, and assisted the Government to the utmost of their ability to ensure a warm welcome everywhere.

SOLDIERS AND HISTORICAL GRAVES.

Veterans' Graves.—In conjunction with work carried out on war graves in the various districts, improvements were effected in cemeteries containing graves of the Maori and other wars.

Auckland District: Work was completed on the old soldiers' graves in Symonds Street Cemetery, Auckland; in Lower Mauku and Rangiriri Cemeteries. In the last-named cemetery the majority of those who fell in the Battle of Rangiriri were buried, and the cemetery, which is on the main road to Auckland, has been greatly improved by the provision of a stone wall, arched entrance-gate, and concrete overtops for all graves.

Taranaki District: The graves of old soldiers in Te Henui Cemetery and St. Mary's Churchyards were thoroughly renovated, in addition to which all work, including the erection of a stone wall, was carried out at Ohawe Cemetery, near Hawera. The tablet in this cemetery was unveiled by the Minister on the 13th January, 1926, in the presence of a large number of local residents and veterans of the Maori War.