

1899.
NEW ZEALAND.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

(STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1899.)

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

The REGISTRAR, Old-age Pensions, to the Hon. the COLONIAL TREASURER.

Old-age Pensions Office, Wellington, 19th June, 1899.

I HAVE the honour to make the following report for your information, and to supply the particulars required for the statement to be laid before Parliament in terms of section 62 of "The Old-age Pensions Act, 1898."

The Act came into force on the 1st day of November, 1898. In the same month a Registrar was appointed, and in December old-age pension districts were constituted, deputy registrars were appointed, and notices were issued throughout the colony that forms of claim were obtainable at all post-offices.

The number of pensions granted during January, 1899, in respect of which payments were made up to the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was 2,133, and the amount paid in respect thereof was £3,124 1s. 8d. The amount paid in respect of other than pensions up to the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was £510 8s. 1d.

The total number of pensions granted up to the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was 7,487, representing a yearly payment of £128,082; the average pension being about £17 2s. Tables are attached showing (1) the number of pensions at each rate; (2) the number of pensions granted in each old-age pension district.

The amount of absolutely forfeited instalments up to the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was £12 5s.

The number of pensioners who died before the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was thirty-eight, and the number of pensions cancelled up to that date was six, representing altogether a yearly payment of £763.

The number of pension-certificates transferred from one old-age pension district to another, up to the 31st day of March, 1899, inclusive, was twenty-three.

It is scarcely to be expected that the administration of a new measure will be altogether smooth at first. It is, therefore, a matter for congratulation that few difficulties have presented themselves, and that an entirely new experience had been generally anticipated in the detailed provisions of the Act and regulations.

Under the existing Act no provision is made for any payment to the representatives of a deceased pensioner. It seems reasonable that the portion of an instalment accrued up to the date of the pensioner's death should be paid to the person who has defrayed the expenses of burial. It seems desirable also that near relatives from whom a pensioner may legally claim maintenance should not be relieved by the Old-age Pensions Act of such responsibility. I recommend also that the Colonial Treasurer should be empowered to pay an instalment of pension which has been forfeited through non-delivery of the pension-certificate or other cause, not being the fault or neglect of the pensioner.

In many districts no resident Government officer is qualified to give a certificate as required on claims made by aboriginal natives. I suggest that whenever a Maori claimant has a knowledge of English the Stipendiary Magistrate might be authorised to accept the claim without such certificate.

Subsection (3) of section 13, relating to the method of calculating the joint income of husband and wife has not been uniformly interpreted. It might be well to remove all doubt as to the intention of this provision.

The claims of some persons, who are otherwise qualified, have been rejected on the ground that they have not been naturalised subjects for five years, as prescribed by section 64 of the Act. I suggest some modification of this disability.

For the past six months the work has been done at high pressure, as well as under difficulties by reason of inconvenient office accommodation, and I gladly acknowledge the industry and care of