

3. It was so notorious that they had to send the old man to Wanganui Gaol to save him?—I dare say there are a few such cases, but I do not think they are of any extent. I very seldom leave Wellington, as it is not possible with my work here in Wellington that I can go about much, and I am dependent upon other people to report. But we have requested the police to report every case where possible; and, as I have said, we do not wait for a conviction.

4. I only wanted to point out the fact that this thing might be done quicker. When the police spoke to the Magistrate the old man said, "I am going to Palmerston to live," and the thing was continued. He got his pension all the same, and he never went to Palmerston; it was only an excuse. When the thing is brought under the Magistrate's notice the matter should be attended to more expeditiously?—Of course, I cannot remember all the cases, but I should like to look up this particular case you refer to, and see when it reached me. No delay has ever occurred in the office; a letter comes in one day and goes out the next. The Post Office have instructions to go on paying the pension until it is stopped—that is to say, for the currency of the year. If the pension is stopped, then the instruction goes out to pay to an agent only, and the man is told he must have an agent.

5. Has it come under your notice, Mr. Mason, that in making the first claim old-age pensioners have erred and made misstatements in regard to their claims?—I do not think there is any very great amount of misstatement in that respect. The Magistrate, of course, is responsible for this inquiry. The return comes in to me, and where there is no income I pay up to the amount allowed by the Act. I only look at the Magistrate's certificate. If the pensioner's income is £34 a year there is no deduction; but if it exceeds £34 a year, and there is property, it is deducted. The responsibility rests with the Magistrate, and I know nothing beyond the Magistrate's certificate.

6. *Mr. Field.*] You do not think, Mr. Mason, that it would be possible to pass any stringent provision to keep the old-age pensioners out of the hotels?—I think if a man is in the habit of frequenting hotels we should certainly make him appoint an agent, and if that agent could not control him, and there was a scandal of his being seen going in and out of hotels, we might make a provision for the pension being absolutely stopped.

7. There is a strong feeling abroad that it would be a good thing to prevent old-age pensioners going into the hotels?—That is a matter to be considered; but, in my opinion, the hotel story is not worth any more than what is stated by "the man in the street." But I do not think that my opinion is worth more than that of others in regard to this.

8. Except that you have the experience as to whether these men are abusing their old-age pensions?—The only time that I have been away from Wellington was the occasion I mentioned, but here I have watched the people to some extent, and on the occasion I speak of when I was away from Wellington for a short trip eighteen months or more ago. I made inquiries of every policeman, Magistrate, and Deputy Registrar I saw on my way between here and Auckland, and in the neighbourhood of Auckland, and the opinion I formed in regard to this was that there was not any extreme amount of drinking on the part of the old-age pensioners. However, when there is a scandal with regard to drinking in some districts it might be well to stop them going to a public-house at all. — It is a question I do not like to offer an opinion on, however.

9. Your experience goes to show that the pensioners who spend their money in drink are very few indeed?—I have very little opportunity of observing them. We have asked the police to report, and I think some of them do report cases which are not sufficient to justify a charge of drunkenness. I assume that there is not very much of it.

10. As to the making of claims before the Magistrate, Mr. Mason, the Magistrate finds in very many cases it is difficult to discover the question of age and property: do you think it would assist if counsel were employed in cases in which the Magistrate thought there was sufficient difficulty to justify the employment of counsel? Do you think it would help?—The Magistrate can always ask the police to make special inquiries. I do not think that cross-examination in Court would be needed. A Magistrate can ask these questions. He may be misled, but if not satisfied he can always adjourn the case for further consideration.

11. You think, then, it is unnecessary to allow the employment of counsel?—I should think so.

12. With regard to the question of a pensioners' roll, is there a new roll made up and framed every year?—We have a register which contains the application of every pensioner who has had a grant of a pension, the amount of it, and full particulars. That list is sent to the Post Office once a year, and every month—and, in fact, day by day—all the alterations that take place are noted. Notice of death, notice of change of money-order office where the payment is made, notice of transfer to another district, notice of change in the amount of the pension, and if the pension is renewed—the pension-year ends for each pension according to the day on which it was first granted, and so it is renewed; pensions are renewed day by day, wherever there is a sitting of the Magistrate's Court. Mr. Haselden generally holds a Court in Wellington on a Saturday morning if there are any claims. Every Saturday morning he will pass a few claims, and that goes on all over the colony. We get in this notice of renewal from the Deputy Registrars, and the alterations are made. The notice is sent to the Post Office, and they alter it in the schedule.

13. Do you think it would be an improvement to have a pension-year?—We thought that out, and I think it would involve an immense amount of work at a particular time of the year for the Magistrates. We felt it would be very difficult indeed for us to take twelve or thirteen thousand pensioners all at one time in our office. I thought, if the Wellington Magistrate was to investigate the renewal claims—there are upwards of a thousand in Auckland and upwards of a thousand in Christchurch—he would not be able to do anything else for a month of his time; probably for weeks, at any rate, but it might be got over. There is another consideration to be taken into account. As far as I know, the Magistrate who travels about perhaps has just time to hold a Court and take a few old-age-pension claims at a place, and he would not have time to stop for thirty; it would throw out all his arrangements if he had thirty or forty to take at once.