

quently it is our duty to see that our own house is put in order with as little delay as possible. With this object in view I am confident the people of New Zealand will welcome the change from our previous condition, and assist in establishing a practical and efficient system of defence, in order that, should the occasion arise, we may have available a body of thoroughly trained and efficient men.

VOLUNTEERS OF THE PAST.

Having regard to the fact that the defence system of the Dominion has been entirely changed, I feel it my duty to acknowledge the good work the men who have composed the Volunteers in the past have accomplished. As indicating the keen interest that is being taken in the defences of our country, I may say that at the present time the numerical strength of the Defence Forces throughout the Dominion has never been so great, even during the time of the South African war, when admittedly the movement was abnormally active. The officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Volunteer forces of the past have given cheerfully a large part of their valuable time in the cause of defence. To one and all of them I tender, on behalf of the country, my warmest thanks for their services. I feel confident that the same spirit that has prompted them in their efforts in the past will continue, and that the territorial system will receive the generous support from such good material as will insure its successful establishment and its smooth working.

OPERATIONS OF NATIVE LAND ACT.

NATIVE LAND COURT.

The work of the Native Land Court shows, in the number of cases advertised, a decrease in comparison with the previous twelve months. A total of 9,055 cases were scheduled for hearing, the number of *Gazette* notices being eighty. To deal with the business, the Court has held sittings in twenty-seven different localities. Only a small percentage of the cases advertised were what are termed "old claims." Although the Court was handicapped with a small judicial staff, it is satisfactory to note that the work has been fairly well kept up to date. During the twelve months under review the Court investigated the ownership of a total area of 113,281 acres hitherto unclothed with a title, and has also dealt with 310 partition applications affecting an aggregate of 148,370 acres. Forty-eight appeals were set down for hearing by the Native Appellate Court, which is a noticeable decrease, as compared with the figures for the preceding year. The revenue derived per medium of Court fees payable to and received by the Courts for the financial year ended March, 1910, amounted to £3,391 9s. 9d.

Since the coming into operation of the Native Land Act, 1909, a system of circuits has been arranged. The advantages are very apparent. Applicants now know the time when and place where the Court is going to hold a sitting months ahead, and they can make necessary arrangements for attendance. This conduces to expedition of business.

At this early stage I do not think it wise policy to suggest any amendments of the law, as I am of opinion that at least twelve months' working should be allowed to elapse before any alterations are made in the statute. In such a large consolidation measure some weak spots are sure to be discovered.

MAORI LAND BOARDS.

The Boards have been kept actively engaged in the revision and the confirming of private alienations, and in the administration of considerable areas of trust lands.

During the period under review 371 leases were approved of by the Board, the area comprised therein amounting to 265,122 acres; in addition to which sixty transfers, comprising 5,134 acres, were consented to, and twenty-six mortgages, comprising 3,292 acres, were recommended.

The aggregate area of lands administered by the Boards totals 941,677 acres. 920 leases of a total area of 245,444 acres have been granted. Schemes for cutting up and roading the remaining areas are now under consideration, and in several cases completed, only awaiting final approval.