

VALUATION OF LAND.

It is the intention to introduce amendments to the Valuation of Land Act in the direction of securing greater accuracy in distinguishing between the value of land and the value of improvements; under the existing law it is found impossible in practice to do so. The amendments which will be proposed will enable the land-value and the value of improvements to be apportioned in an equitable manner so as to ensure an assessment fair to the State and to the individual owner, and will apportion, more fairly than at present, the burden of taxation between owner and tenant.

PENSIONS.

It is proposed that in future the administration of all New Zealand pensions shall be placed under one head. In accordance with the promises made by the Government in the past, an amendment to the Old-age Pensions Act providing for the payment of pensions to women at the age of sixty years will be circulated this session. Commencing at the age of sixty years, pensions would be paid on the following scale: Maximum pension at age 60 years, £21; age 61 years, £22; age 62 years, £23; age 63 years, £24; age 64 years, £25; age 65 years, £26.

The total number of women who will be afforded relief under this new proposal is estimated at about 10,300.

In addition to the above proposal the Government has under consideration an Invalids Pensions Bill, which is designed for the purpose of assisting those unfortunates who have been permanently incapacitated for work either by accident or by reason of being invalids, and who are not in receipt of either an old-age pension or a widow's pension.

An amending Bill will be introduced extending the benefits conferred by the Widows Pensions Act of last year to any woman whose husband is an inmate of a mental hospital within the meaning of the Mental Defectives Act, 1911. Payment on account of children born out of New Zealand, but whose parents were, at the time of their birth, domiciled in New Zealand, will also be provided for.

Strong feeling having been evinced in connection with the Military Pensions Act of 1911, which compelled many of the old soldiers desirous of obtaining a military pension to comply with the conditions of the Old-age Pensions Act as well as the conditions of the Military Pensions Act, the matter is being carefully inquired into by the Government, and legislation will be submitted during this session to remedy the present condition of affairs.

An important amendment to the National Provident Fund Act is also under consideration making specific provision for the co-operative action of employers and employees for the purpose of insuring workers in groups.

COOK ISLANDS.

It is the intention of the Government to make some endeavour to improve the health of the Natives of the Cook Islands, and so protect the race, by having qualified nurses stationed on each island when the population warrants the adoption of this course.

As I have already stated, arrangements are being made to establish wireless telegraphy at the Island of Rarotonga, and it is hoped that it may be possible to establish communication with Fanning Island, the cable-station in the Pacific.

As soon as time will permit, the Government intends to consider the educational system of the Islands, and hopes to place it upon more advanced and progressive lines.

A new Resident Commissioner will shortly be appointed to fill the place of Captain Smith, whose services have been retained in Wellington for the separate and better management of the Cook Island affairs. It is intended that the future Commissioner shall have no dealings with the Native Land Court, and, with this end in view, it has been decided to appoint a Judge to preside when necessary in connection with Court matters.

A Bill to consolidate and validate the Island Council's enactments will be introduced during the present session.