

The number of the London staff under the High Commissioner has increased since the year 1902 from nineteen to forty-eight. The Government has not yet had sufficient opportunity of estimating the advantages of recent transfers of high-salaried officers from New Zealand to the London staff, nor of the increase in the expenditure, but is already satisfied that a thorough reorganization of the system of the office is required, and must be the first business undertaken by the new High Commissioner under the direction of the Government.

MENTAL HOSPITALS.

Owing to the large increase in the number of patients during the last few years, there has been some overcrowding in our mental hospitals, but active steps have been taken to overcome this. Including the temporary accommodation which has been provided at Motuihi for sixty-one males, the aggregate sleeping-accommodation for males at the mental hospitals is now just sufficient for the number of patients. There is still some overcrowding on the female side, but buildings are in progress, and will shortly be completed, which will relieve this, and give some accommodation to spare. Buildings are in course of erection on the new mental-hospital site at Tokanui, and the Government will pursue a vigorous building programme in anticipation of the natural increase in the number of mental defectives.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

In the matter of public health, hospitals, and charitable aid, the Government proposes to carry out a policy adapted to the ever-increasing requirements of the country.

Owing to the fact that many of our older hospitals have been built of wood, there is likely to be a considerable increase in the expenditure on buildings during the next few years. Nor do the increasing needs of the country render probable any substantial reduction in the cost of hospital maintenance.

The Government has in contemplation an extension of our St. Helens hospitals, and the addition of maternity wards to some of our most conveniently situated country hospitals. By these means it will also be possible to increase the yearly supply of trained midwives, who are especially needed in the more remote parts of the Dominion. It is also proposed to subsidize medical associations with a view to encouraging efficient and active medical men to settle in the backblocks.

It is hoped that, with the assistance of the Hospital Boards, an effective campaign against tuberculosis may be begun during the year; at the same time it is recognized that more stringent precautions must be taken to prevent consumptive immigrants from landing on these shores, and that provision must be made for the detention of refractory consumptive patients who, to the danger of the public, refuse to conform to the precautions considered necessary to prevent the spread of that disease.

As regards measures necessary in the interests of the Native race, the registration of Native births and deaths is of paramount importance, and legislation to provide for this is urgently required. By this means it may be possible to stem the Maori infantile mortality, check the practices of tohungas, and ascertain to what extent tuberculosis is responsible for Maori deaths.

The excellent work done by district nurses among the Maoris encourages the Government to make additional appointments. The system of subsidizing medical men for service in this branch will also be gone into with a view to placing it on a more comprehensive basis.

DEFENCE.

Very satisfactory progress has been made under the new Act, and the success of the new scheme of defence may now be considered assured. The task of inaugurating the new scheme has been no light one, and considerable care is being exercised in dealing with the many intricacies that have arisen since its initiation.

It has been found necessary to have certain amendments to the Act made to simplify procedure, and still further amendments may be required as the scheme develops. In this connection I would state for the information of honourable members that it has been decided that imprisonment in connection with non-registration will not be resorted to if it can be avoided. An alteration in the law will be asked for