

RAILWAYS.

The Government intends to call for applications in London for a General Manager to succeed Mr. Ronayne, who retires in January.

CUSTOMS AND MARINE.

It will not be possible to introduce any revision of the Customs Tariff this session. Negotiations already commenced for closer trade relations between ourselves and the Commonwealth will be continued; while it is hoped that next March there may be a conference, probably in Australia, of the Ministers of Trade and Commerce of Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand.

INCREASE IN THE GRADUATED LAND-TAX.

The present graduated tax is to be made more equitable by introducing a regular scale of graduations; and the tax is to be increased on estates over £30,000 in unimproved value, while the 25 per cent. additional graduated tax now imposed on estates of £40,000 and upwards is to be made to apply to estates of £30,000 or more in value. It is hoped that by this means, which is only one of many, large land-owners may be induced to break up their estates, and that closer settlement may result.

PENSIONS.

The Government proposes to put the administration of pensions under one head, and to extend the benefits of pensions to women at the age of sixty years, to invalids incapacitated for work, and to women whose husbands are inmates of mental hospitals. The existing grievances under the Military Pensions Act of 1911 are to be inquired into; and, finally, consideration is being given to a provision for the co-operative action of employers and employees for insuring workers in groups.

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE.

The Government has decided to publish the High Commissioner's annual reports on the general business of his office. Such reports have not hitherto been printed. The number of the High Commissioner's staff has increased since the year 1902 from nineteen to forty-eight. It will be one of the first duties of the new High Commissioner to undertake a thorough reorganization of the office, where his inquiries may show it to be necessary.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND HOSPITALS.

The Government proposes to extend the St. Helens hospitals, to add maternity wards to suitable country hospitals, to increase the number of mid-wives in the more remote parts of the Dominion, and, by subsidies, to encourage efficient and active medical men to settle in the backblocks.

The war against tuberculosis is to be carried on with vigour, and measures are to be taken to promote the health of Maoris.

DEFENCE.

The success of the new system may be regarded as assured. It is intended to amend the Act so as to simplify procedure; in particular, to substitute military detention for imprisonment as the penalty for non-registration.

INDUSTRIAL MATTERS.

Regret is expressed in regard to the industrial unrest at Waihi and at Reefton, which has caused not only hardship to those concerned, but a serious loss both of money and population to the whole Dominion. An amendment of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act is to be introduced whereby each Supreme Court Judge will preside (in all cases except those of Dominion awards) over the Arbitration Court in his district; instead of permanent representatives of employers and workers there will be expert representatives from each side in the trade affected; and provision will be made for secret ballots of workers and employers.

EXTENSION OF WORKERS' HOMES SCHEMES.

The Government proposes to modify the scheme of workers' homes so as to make it easier than it is at present for farm workers and others accustomed to country life to acquire homes in the country with an area of land varying from 1 to 10 acres in each case. It will do this, either indirectly by giving County Councils the right to borrow for the purpose, or directly by itself providing the homes on suitable terms. In this way the Government hopes to make country life attractive to many who now tend to crowd into the towns.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

Public buildings destroyed by fire are under the present system rebuilt out of loan-moneys. The Government will meet risks in future out of the Consolidated Fund, creating a sinking fund for the purpose.

ROADS AND BRIDGES.

Under the present financial condition in Britain the expenditure from the Public Works Fund may have to be restricted, but it is intended, if possible, to provide not less than the usual amount for assisting pioneer settlement.