

PENSIONS.

In accordance with the proposal foreshadowed in the Financial Statement of last year, the Pensions Department has been recreated and placed under the control of a Commissioner, who administers old-age, widows', and military pensions. The gross amount paid by way of pensions under these Acts throughout the Dominion during the year ended 31st March, 1913, was as follows:—

					£
Old-age pensions	....	...	....	....	415,749
Widows' pensions	....	....	....	....	22,113
Military pensions	....	....	....	....	3,678

Whereas the figures relating to old-age and widows' pensions represent a full year's working, the amount paid by way of military pensions is the payment for the last quarter of the year only. The liability, however, in regard to military pensioners on the roll at the present time exceeds £22,000, and it is anticipated that the estimate of £25,000 per annum as the probable cost of the Military Pensions Act will be realized before the first twelve months have passed.

Applications for New Zealand War Medals are still being received, and, in cases where satisfactory proof is shown, medals are being awarded. Amongst those to whom medals have been granted are a number of members of the Maori race. The number of pensions in force at the close of the year under each head was as follows: Old-age, 16,509, a decrease of 140 on the figures of 1911-12; widows', 1,313, an increase since last year of 525; military, 568, or up to the present date, 675. The decrease in the number of old-age pensions is due to the fact that some 380 have been converted into military pensions.

Two Bills dealing with pensions have already been introduced—one to consolidate the whole of the law relating to pensions of the three classes enumerated above, and the other inviting Parliament to ratify the agreement relating to reciprocity in the matter of old-age pensions signed by the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Minister of Pensions for New Zealand.

In the Pension Consolidation Bill proposals are contained which will grant an old-age pension to women at the age of sixty. The estimated cost of this proposal is about £70,000.

Further proposals relating to the residential qualifications under the Old-age Pensions Act will also be contained in the consolidating measure. The Bill also extends the operations of the Military Pensions Act which was passed last year.

SHIPPING AND SEAMEN AMENDMENT ACT, 1912.

This Act having been assented to by His Majesty the King, it was by Proclamation brought into force on the 1st May, 1913. The Act deals principally with matters relating to collisions and salvage, and brings the law into accord with the Imperial Maritime Conventions Act and the International Maritime Conventions. The Imperial Government has been requested to arrange for the adherence of New Zealand to those Conventions.

LIGHTHOUSES.

During the past year automatic acetylene lights were ordered for erection on one of the Chicken Islands, on Channel Island near Cape Colville, and on Karori Rock in Cook Strait. The necessary tower for Chicken Island was procured, and it was erected in April of this year, the light being exhibited on the 28th of that month. The tower for Channel Island light is ordered. The public will be gratified to know that a final decision has been come to in reference to the matter of lighting Cook Strait in the vicinity of Cape Terawhiti. The site finally adopted has met with the general approbation of all concerned, and the work of erection is being proceeded with.

RECIPROCAL TRADE.

With a view to stimulating trade between Australia and New Zealand, the Minister of Customs recently visited Australia and successfully negotiated a reciprocal trade treaty with the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia.