

widows', 227; and military, 672. This increase is principally due to the amendments embodied in the consolidating Act of last session, the more important of which were the lowering of the old-age pension age for women to sixty years and the removal of the income and property qualifications for the military pension.

The gross payments during the year were as follow :—

	Gross Payments.
	£
Old-age	416,774
Widows'	27,077
Military	29,447
Totals	<u>£473,298</u>

I must explain in connection with these figures that the greater portion of the new pensioners were admitted to the roll in the second half of the year. No less than 1,160 women between the ages of sixty and sixty-five and 604 veterans of the Maori War were granted pensions subsequent to the passing of last year's Act on the 11th October, 1913.

It was estimated in 1913 that the additional cost consequent upon the amendments of last session would approximate £100,000, and it is anticipated that this estimate will yet be reached.

The new pensions granted during the year were as follow, the figures of the previous year being shown by way of comparison :—

	1913-14.	1912-13.
Old-age	3,320	2,072
Widows'	421	657
Military	747	577

The Pensions Act will be further amended this session. Under the existing law the pensions payable to the children of widows is limited to four children in one family. It is proposed that in future the pension shall be paid in respect of each and every child under the age of fourteen years. Residents of the Cook Islands who are at present excluded from the benefits of the Military Pensions Act are in future to be admitted to the benefits of that Act. Pensioners who may leave the Dominion temporarily are at present debarred by law from drawing the pension which has accrued during their absence. This anomaly will be remedied. British women who have, under the existing law, lost their nationality by reason of marriage with aliens are to be included within the benefits of the Act. A further amendment will allow a woman whose husband is an inmate of a mental hospital to qualify for a widow's pension.

It has long been felt that provision should be made to improve the condition of miners who have been incapacitated from earning a livelihood on account of the disease known as miners' phthisis. A Bill will be introduced this session which, it is hoped, will give adequate relief to these sufferers, who are not only debarred from earning a living, but have to bear the burden of the expense of constant medical attention.

It is the ultimate object of the Government to abandon the present method which penalizes thrifty and deserving persons by excluding them from the benefits of the Act on account of their possessing a home. This will entail considerable cost. In the meantime, the amending Bill of this session will make provision for continuing the full pension to the surviving married partner in cases when the value of property left by the deceased would have had the effect of decreasing or completely extinguishing the pension.

Other important reforms such as invalids' pensions and pensions for the blind are receiving the earnest consideration of the Government, and the necessary legislation dealing with these reforms will be submitted as soon as circumstances permit.

The agreement relating to reciprocity in the matter of old-age pensions entered into by the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth and the Minister of Pensions for New Zealand was ratified during the year by the passing of the Old-age Pensions Reciprocity Act on the 28th August, 1913. The Commonwealth Government has not passed a similar measure, consequently the New Zealand Act remains inoperative in the meantime.