

REPORT.

I.—THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT.

Of all the Departments of the Public Service the Department of Internal Affairs is perhaps the one the organization and functions of which as a whole are least known to the people of the Dominion, and this despite the fact that it is the oldest Department, having begun its existence in 1840, before the advent of responsible government, and is thus within twenty-four years of completing the one-hundredth anniversary of its establishment. The reason of this is undoubtedly the fact that the Department's activities cover such a variety of subjects, many of which have no connection with one another, and people dealing with it on as many as half a dozen different matters are naturally still in the dark as to what the Department does in other directions. It is not known to the public, for instance, as a unit of the Public Service dealing with such closely connected matters as those within the sphere of the Lands and Survey or Public Works Departments, still less do its activities cover one matter on a scale comparable to that on which the Treasury deals with the matter of finance. Again, the work of the sub-departments—*e.g.*, the Dominion Laboratory, the Registrar-General's Office, and Census and Statistics Office—to such a great extent involves direct dealings between the public and the sub-departments, without reference to the Head Office itself, as to obscure the fact that they are essentially branches of the Department. Finally, in exercising some of its most important functions the Department does not come into contact with the public.

It is not necessary to trace the history of the Department nor to show how it has been the parent of many of the present Departments. In so far as it exists for the administration of Acts of the Parliament of New Zealand the scope and variety of its activities may be judged from the following list of some twenty of the fifty Acts dealt with in whole or in part by the Head Office:—

Aliens.	Motor Regulation.
Animals Protection.	Municipal Corporations.
Cemeteries.	Race Meetings.
Counties.	River Boards.
Fire Brigades.	Road Boards.
Fisheries (Part II).	Science and Art.
Gaming.	Town Boards.
Land Agents.	War Funds.
Land Drainage.	Weights and Measures.
Local Elections and Polls.	

In addition to administration, the Department has to consider and report for your information on all suggestions for amendment of these Acts, the number of suggestions put forward by the Municipal and Counties Associations alone during the past two years numbering more than 150.

In so far as the Department is not engaged in administering legislation it has certain functions that distinguish it from other Departments. For instance, it is the Department of record for all matters of State—that is, matters affecting the Government of New Zealand. It is the channel of communication between Cabinet and Departments on matters affecting the Service as a whole, and it exercises all the functions of a central Department. In this last-mentioned connection all matters that do not properly fall within the functions of any other Department are dealt with here.

II.—THE WORK OF THE YEAR.

1. THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON THE DEPARTMENT.

With the eight months of war that fell within the financial year 1914–15 came a considerable increase in the work of the Department generally, but more particularly in that of the Head Office, and this war increase more than doubled during the financial year 1915–16. There has, of course, been no precedent to help in dealing with the entirely new matters that have arisen, and the preliminary work of thinking out methods and organizing the necessary machinery has been no light one.

Shipment of Gift Goods and Transmission of Moneys.—The first work of this description falling to the lot of this Department—namely, the transmission of gifts in kind and money to England—has continued throughout the past year, and in August last a new phase of this work commenced—the shipment of hospital requisites and comforts for our New Zealand troops in hospital in Egypt, Malta, &c.

I here take the opportunity of mentioning the valuable help rendered by the officers of the Defence Department and by the various shipping companies.

The value of gift goods shipped through the Department since the outbreak of war amounts to £139,870 (£80,000 for British and Belgian relief, £8,095 for Red Cross purposes in England, and £51,775 for hospital requisites and comforts for New Zealand troops in hospital in Egypt, Malta, &c.).

The Department continues to be the official channel for remitting relief-moneys to England. During the year the Department has handled £340,335 3s. 6d. The principal item is one of £202,077 7s. 7d. for Belgian relief.