

record. At the present date the particulars of 300 societies have been recorded. From information gained from various sources it is probable that no less than 350 are now collecting funds for various objects in connection with the war, exclusive of hundreds of committees working under the Red Cross and similar organizations in providing personal comforts for the members of our Forces in all parts of the world.

There has been evidence of reluctance on the part of some societies to satisfy the requirements of the Act, and a few have expressed their intention of discontinuing their efforts rather than go to the trouble of supplying the particulars asked for by the Department. This is to be regretted, as the work entailed in furnishing returns cannot be considered arduous. It is fully realized that in a large majority of cases the secretarial work of the society is done gratuitously by men and women actuated by a high sense of patriotic duty, and the spirit of duty is evident from the promptitude with which many of them supply any information required and the care manifested in making up the necessary returns.

It has been the desire of the Government to ascertain as closely as possible the total amounts contributed by the people of New Zealand toward the assistance and comfort of members of our Forces, the relief of those incapacitated and the dependants of those injured or killed, and also the amount of monetary assistance collected for the relief of suffering amongst our Allies, and to ascertain the amount already expended or transmitted to Europe and the amount of the various funds in hand. With a view to obtaining this information a circular was issued on the 22nd December asking for a balance-sheet covering the period from the establishment of each fund up to the 31st December, 1915, and requesting that this information should be supplied not later than the 31st January last; and, although repeated requests have been made for this information, it has been found impossible to compile a full and complete return owing to the failure of a considerable number of societies to furnish the statement required, and also to the fact that in many instances accounts have not been kept, or have been kept in a very crude way.

Another cause of difficulty in the dissection of funds arises from the fact that many societies collect funds for general patriotic purposes, the contributors leaving the allotment of money to various objects at the discretion of their executive committees. Remittances of money for the relief of distress amongst our Allies have been made in different ways—through the Government, through consular agencies, through central organizations in London, and by direct draft. Small societies send moneys to large centres for administration, but even when this is done they frequently reserve the right to administer relief in their own localities.

Until some homogeneity is arrived at in the system of allocating the funds to the various objects for which they were raised it will be quite impossible to present a full and complete statement. Such a position, however it is desired, can only be brought about by the societies themselves, and the proposed federation of societies under the guidance of the Advisory Board now set up may result in some general scheme of centralization of control and expenditure.

The people of the Dominion have given so freely and so whole-heartedly to patriotic funds, and contributed to any and every demand that has been made upon them by all committees and leagues, feeling that whatever they gave would be advantageously used, that they have the right to know that every penny of that money is fairly accounted for, how much of it has been expended, what moneys are available, and what steps are being taken to make the wisest use of the funds. The Department has tried to obtain this information with some degree of accuracy, and the Patriotic Societies, in their own interest, should assist this office by promptly furnishing the necessary statements. Every assistance has been offered them by way of advice as to the preparation of returns where it was felt that such was necessary.

Regulations under the Act have been issued, and monthly and quarterly returns will be required under these regulations, which, with proper care and attention exercised in their preparation, will enable an account to be kept of the funds received and paid out during each period and what moneys are in hand. It is also proposed that the total amounts paid for assistance to returned soldiers or the dependants of soldiers will also be periodically furnished.

It is hoped that in a short time every society will see the necessity of complying with the requirements of the Department, and will recognize their duties as trustees of funds so generously placed in their hands.

In the administration of a new Act dealing with social conditions and developments of such an unusual character it must of necessity happen that any plan of operations can only be of a tentative nature. An endeavour must be made to evolve some scheme of work that contains at least the elements of permanency. No precedents are available for reference or guidance, and in the case of the War Funds Act it was especially difficult to foresee the course of events or judge to what extent the persons particularly subject to its provisions would fall into line and conform with its requirements. The main difficulty previously referred to arose from the fact that the patriotic effort was a voluntary one, and conformance with the Act laid upon those coming under its provisions certain obligations which, at first blush, seemed in some degree inquisitorial. In these circumstances a policy of patience is the only one to take, and, though slow in results, it has been and is being carried out. A very large amount of correspondence has been necessary in dealing with societies, and I am pleased to be able to say that there is now a more general willingness to comply with the requirements, and a better conception of the purposes, of the Act. Until the regulations have been in operation a few months and the effect of such as deal with monthly and quarterly returns is seen, it will be difficult to foretell how the future work of the office will develop; but I have no doubt that when societies realize the necessity of the Government being in possession of the particulars asked for, a condition will be brought about that will make it possible to obtain a very fair and full view of the position of the war funds throughout the Dominion. I hope, however, to be shortly in possession of sufficient data to enable me to place before you a summary of the receipts, expenditure, and funds in hand that will indicate the extent of the patriotic effort and the position as at the end of 1915.