

GENERAL.

On the 22nd August, 1919, the Hon. T. M. Wilford, Minister of Justice, resigned, and the administration of the Police Force was assumed by the Right Hon. W. F. Massey, P.C., Prime Minister.

The policy of establishing new police districts, thereby reducing the areas under the supervision of officers to more reasonable proportions, is proving to be satisfactory. In December, 1919, a new district, containing thirteen stations, with Inspector's headquarters at Timaru, was set up under the charge of Inspector Hastie. Another, including the North Auckland district, with headquarters at Whangarei, was established on the 1st May ultimo under the charge of Inspector Mullany. With some increases in the strength of these new districts it is hoped that much closer attention to the public wants will result, as well as increased efficiency on the part of the men.

The greatest numerical strength of the Force was attained in 1916, when the number was 916. Cessation of recruiting during the war caused a reduction, until in 1919 the number was 878. On the 31st March, 1920, the number again reached the record, 916. In my report of last year I drew attention to the superior advantages offered by the Police Force as an employment and a career. Recruiting has gone on steadily, and on this date the number of men of all ranks in the Force is 947, notwithstanding resignations for various causes, some due to the allegedly better conditions in other employments. In this connection I may mention that a large proportion of those who resigned for that reason have made application for reappointment.

In 1918 and 1919 two increments of 1s. 6d. per day each were granted to all non-commissioned officers and constables. This increase, designed to meet the abnormal cost of living which developed during the Great War, seemed at the time to be liberal and satisfactory. As time went on, however, the cost of rent and commodities did not decrease, but rather increased at a greater and faster ratio, and applications for further increases in pay were received. A substantial increase seemed to be justified, and recommendation was made accordingly. I am confident that the claim will be met in the same generous manner as before. Though recruiting has greatly improved, yet for various reasons, generally well understood, the Police Department, like some other public Departments, has not received additions fast enough to meet the demands for new establishments in growing centres and districts, or for additions to stations whose staffs have become inadequate owing to local increase of population. I have no doubt that the increase of pay, which I understand is about to be granted, will sufficiently stimulate recruiting to enable the Department to meet all reasonable requirements of the public at an early date. This the Department is most anxious to do.

In my report for 1919 I drew attention to the housing difficulty, which affects the police in common with other citizens. I pointed out the difficulties in administration caused by the existing conditions in that respect. The policy of purchasing suitable properties has been steadily pursued when opportunity offered during the interval, and many satisfactory purchases have been made of buildings—some for the purpose of police-stations, and some for the accommodation of officers, non-commissioned officers, and constables. It is proper to state here that though many other suitable properties have been offered, yet they were declined because the purchase would involve the expulsion of tenants in residence. In no case has any house been purchased except where the owner was the tenant or the house unoccupied. A satisfactory beginning has been made, but a great deal more must be done to house and equip the Department and its members, and I trust the policy above indicated will be steadily pursued while necessary. In this connection I beg to draw special attention to the necessity for devising a comprehensive scheme of house accommodation for the married men stationed in the cities and large towns in proximity to their stations. It is of urgent and vital importance that this should be done as early as possible, and I trust that, in the general project of house-building which the Government has in hand, this matter will, if possible, be included.

I beg to draw attention again to the overburdening of the police with the work of other Departments. The paucity of police would not be acute with existing numbers but for that cause. Responsible officers are constantly complaining about it, and the public complain about police shortcomings without understanding its cause. The remedy generally seems to be to increase the strength of the Police Force until it is capable of meeting its own duties adequately as well as the duties required by other Departments.

Early this year it was announced that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales would visit this Dominion. His Royal Highness arrived at Auckland on the 24th April ultimo in H.M.S. "Renown," and commenced a tour of the country from Auckland to Invercargill, and departed from Lyttelton for Australia on the 22nd May. Immense enthusiasm marked every stage of the tour. The intensity of the feeling exhibited and the demonstrations of loyalty aroused by the presence of the Prince gave evidence of the immense strength and depth and breadth of the attachment of the people to the King and Royal Family. It is certain that the visit has strengthened the sentiments governing the relation of the Royal Family to the people. The hundreds of thousands of people who attended the organized welcomes to the Prince are not likely ever to forget what they felt, and saw, and heard on these occasions. It is my good fortune to be able to record that no accident or casualty of any kind arising out of the arrangements for the Prince's reception has been reported. This is undoubtedly due in great measure to the very careful and perfect arrangements made by the local bodies, who in all cases courteously and fittingly invited the co-operation and assistance of the police officers in preparing the plan of reception and the regulation of the traffic and crowds. It only remained, therefore, for the police to see that details so pre-arranged were carried out when the Prince arrived at each place named in the itinerary. This was done as nearly as possible, and there is reason to believe with entire satisfaction to all concerned.

The tragic death of Constable V. Dudding, who was shot while in execution of duty on the 6th October, 1919, focussed public attention upon the unsatisfactory provision existing for the compensation or relief of the widows and children of members of the Police Force who lose their lives, or their health or fitness for further service, through the execution of their duty. Parliament being in session at the time, prompt action was taken by the Government to provide a