

to by attention to ventilation of the larger offices, a careful regulation of the hours of duty, and the unusually liberal vacation-leave enjoyed by officers. The table is hereunder :—

					Numbers comprised.	Average Absence per Sick Officer.	Average Sick-absence per each Officer employed.
						Days.	Days.
Men	...	...	...	...	993	8·85	4·38
Women	...	...	...	...	134	19·07	15·09

There were six deaths during the year. In the deaths of Mr. E. H. Bold, Inspector of Telegraphs ; Mr. W. C. Smythe, Electrician ; and Mr. John Hoggard, Chief Clerk of the Circulation Branch, the department lost three of its principal officers. Mr. Hoggard and Mr. Bold had been connected with the department since 1864 and 1865, and Mr. Smythe since 1884.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

The department has during the past year been called upon to overtake a large increase of work in connection with the paying of old-age pensions. The tact exercised and the consideration shown in the admittedly difficult task of making a large number of small payments to aged and decrepit people has been accomplished with smoothness in working which is very creditable to the officers engaged, and gratifying to the department.

At the principal chief offices the accommodation was found to be wholly insufficient to cope with the duties and attendance on the first of each month without serious inconvenience to the general public. This was met by utilising part of the telegraph public office in Wellington, and renting suitable rooms for one day in the month at Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

Beginning the financial year with 5,846 payments, amounting to £8,360 in April, 1899, the figures were almost doubled during March, 1900, when the payments were 10,697, amounting to £15,255 9s. 10s.

The increase month by month was, as anticipated, considerable during the early part of the year ; and, on comparing the figures for the last two quarters of the financial year, there is still apparent a steady increase, as shown by the following table :—

					Number of Payments.	Amount.		
						£	s.	d.
December quarter, 1899	...	...	...	...	30,089	42,830	14	6
March quarter, 1900	...	...	...	...	31,506	44,894	10	8

Although there are some 440 money-order offices throughout the colony, it has been found necessary to further extend the facilities for payment of old-age pensions, and a remittance system, worked through non-money-order offices, has proved a great convenience in outlying districts.

The work of issuing second-year's certificates and adjusting amendments consequent thereon created a mass of correspondence, largely by telegraph, which was quite unexpected. During December registered papers to be dealt with numbered about 190, while in March the number rose to 700.

At money-order offices the heavy pressure of work usual on the first day of the month is considerably increased by the paying of pensions, the majority of which are claimed on that day. The special arrangements made to meet this emergency have, however, in all offices proved adequate to insure payment without delay or inconvenience to pensioners.

Return showing number of old-age pension payments, and amount paid each month for the year ended 31st March, 1900 :—

Month.					Number of Payments.	Amount.		
						£	s.	d.
April	...	...	...	...	5,846	8,360	10	0
May	...	...	...	...	7,341	10,454	0	0
June	...	...	...	...	8,220	11,709	6	8
July	...	...	...	...	8,743	12,447	13	4
August	...	...	...	...	9,172	13,061	15	0
September	...	...	...	...	9,532	13,575	8	4
October	...	...	...	...	9,761	13,892	15	8
November	...	...	...	...	10,093	14,382	5	9
December	...	...	...	...	10,235	14,555	13	1
January	...	...	...	...	10,333	14,771	4	3
February	...	...	...	...	10,426	14,867	16	7
March	...	...	...	...	10,697	15,255	9	10
Totals	...	...	...	...	110,449	£157,333	18	6