

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE FOR 1904-5.

The estimated expenditure for the current financial year upon all services of the Government I have set down at £6,601,412, which is more than the actual expenditure for the year ended 1903-4 to the extent of £167,131. The table (No. 7) which accompanies this Budget shows very clearly the increases or decreases over or under the expenditure made last year. "Interest and sinking fund" show an increase of £45,000, caused by having to make provision for the interest on new loans only partly charged last year. Permanent charges show an increase of over £35,000, of which the extra contribution of £26,600 for the cost of the maintenance of the Australian Naval Squadron is principally responsible.

I have set down the provision for the old-age pensions at last year's estimate (£215,000), although we did not actually spend more than £200,845, but I have reason to believe that last year's expenditure on this service will be exceeded. The total of the appropriations for this year are in excess of the actual expenditure from votes last year by the sum of £88,393, but if we take out the services for postal and telegraphic, for education, and for working railways, departments in which the expenditure increases automatically with the requirements and prosperity of our people, it will be found that we have been able to reduce the excess by £64,101.

Savings will be found in the Legislative class; also in the Colonial Secretary's and in the Public Health Departments. The Department of Agriculture, the Printing Department, the Defence Department, and the Lands and Survey Department contribute reductions on last year's expenditure. Outside the three large Departments I have already named, the requirements of other Departments are estimated at very little in excess of last year's expenditure.

My Government have used the greatest care in the preparation of the estimates which will be laid before you, and have exercised the utmost economy, while avoiding too drastic a curtailment of provision for services which might imperil the legitimate requirements of our colonists or impair the value of the services rendered.

Our increased expenditure of late years has given occasion for many adverse remarks upon our administration. Of course, I do not for one moment deny that the yearly estimates become larger and larger, but, on the other hand, have not our receipts increased by leaps and bounds, and the colony's business proportionately grown and prospered? Do not our settlers and citizens require to be provided with all the up-to-date appliances of railways, telegraphs, and telephones, and postal facilities must be brought to their doors. The extension of these services necessitates a large yearly outlay, quite apart from the capital cost. Again, as our population increases so is it essential that larger sums are required to be spent upon the education of the rising generation.

Parliament also decided that we should look after the health of the community and always to be at war with disease. Honourable members must not forget that this colony has led the van in providing a pension for our aged and deserving pioneer settlers who unfortunately have been unable to accumulate a competency for their declining years; over £200,000 per annum is required for this service alone. Our contribution for naval defence, it must be admitted, is a wise outlay.

With islands abounding in the most beautiful and varied scenery—semi-tropical and alpine intermixed—and with thermal wonders absolutely unique, we cannot be blamed if our Tourist Department endeavours to attract visitors to this favoured colony. Good work, and of a most beneficial character, has been done by our Department of Agriculture. The examination of meat for human consumption, and affording assistance in stamping out disease amongst our live produce, is work of great importance; while the grading of our dairy-produce and of our hemp secures a high standard of excellence, and as a result enhanced prices to the producers.

I should weary honourable members if I were to enlarge further upon the many new services which my Government have inaugurated in the interests of and for the welfare of our people. It is our aim and desire to develop our magnificent country, and to assist in making the people of this colony healthy and prosperous; but it is idle to imagine that such important work as this can be done without increased expenditure.