

The percentage of pensioners to the population eligible by age only is 30 per cent. Last year it was 29 per cent.

These facts are worthy of attention when considering any future amendment of the Act.

11,340 pensioners, or 78 per cent. of the whole, draw the full pension of £26. Four draw the minimum pension of £1.

There are still on the roll 2,173 out of the 7,487 pensioners who were admitted in the first three months of the Act ten years ago.

There are 105 European pensioners of the age of ninety and over. Of this number 7 are ninety-five and over, and 2 are centenarians.

#### NEW CLAIMS.

The number of new claims lodged during the past year was 2,834. These, with the 640 awaiting investigation at the seventy-five agencies of the Department on the 31st March, 1908, made a total of 3,474 claims dealt with. They are accounted for as follows :—

Granted	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,113
Rejected	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	498
Awaiting investigation on 31st March, 1909	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	863
Total	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3,474

The total claims lodged since the Act came into operation on the 1st January, 1899, now number 36,428. Of these, 27,730 have been granted, of which latter 51 per cent. are still on the pension-roll.

The new pensioners admitted during the year include 110 Natives. 1,916 of them, or 90 per cent., are of British extraction, including 52 whites born in New Zealand.

The percentage of new pensioners to the people who became eligible by age and residence each year, as with the percentage in the case of the total pensioners, shows an upward tendency, thus :—

Year ended 31st March	Europeans who became eligible by Age and Residence.	New European Pensioners.	Percentage.
1902	3,537	1,527	43
1906	5,900	1,948	33
1908	3,623	1,660	45
1909	3,720	2,003	53

Further particulars relating to the claims made and the new pensions granted appear in the appendix.

#### ANNUAL PAYMENTS.

According as the number of pensioners increase, so also must the annual payments under the Act. The gross payments passed through the accounts for the past year totalled £336,759 16s. 2d., being a sum exceeding that paid in the previous year by £11,560 13s.

The increase last year on the preceding year's figures was also £11,000-odd, and it will no doubt appear strange that, although there has been little variation in this addition to the annual payment in the past two years, there was last year an increase of 827 pensioners, as against only 312 in the year 1907-8. This seeming disparity is explained by the fact that the increase of pensioners in the past year was more pronounced in the closing months of the year, due, no doubt, to the widening of the scope of the Act referred to in my opening remarks. The full effect of this latter increment in numbers on the annual payments has yet to be felt.

After deducting the sum of £227 14s. 7d., representing overpayments of pension refunded, the net charge against the Consolidated Fund is £336,532 1s. 7d.

The distribution of the amount in the various postal districts is indicated by the following table :—

Postal District.	Number of Payments.	Amount.	£	s.	d.
Auckland	34,071	69,644	9	7	
Blenheim	1,837	3,779	7	9	
Christchurch	27,218	55,903	6	0	
Dunedin	26,022	52,231	16	5	
Gisborne	1,212	2,281	10	9	
Greymouth	6,108	12,926	2	9	
Hokitika	6,294	13,271	17	9	
Invercargill	10,138	21,012	2	5	
Napier	5,912	11,951	13	5	
Nelson	3,436	6,956	16	1	
New Plymouth	2,975	5,993	8	0	
Oamaru	3,524	7,282	16	7	
Thames	6,079	12,731	11	4	
Timaru	5,961	11,982	14	11	
Wanganui	4,697	9,786	0	5	
Wellington	15,656	31,701	1	4	
Westport	3,493	7,376	5	6	
Total	164,633	£336,813	1	0	

NOTE.—These latter figures include a number of payments which were not passed through the accounts by reason of some slight informality.