In assessing the value of accumulated property an exemption is allowed of £50.

The effect of these provisions is that a person having an income of £34, and having no more than £50 worth of property, will receive the full pension of £18. If his income exceed £34, his pension will be diminished to a proportionate extent.

If a person holds property of the value of £50 he may still receive the full pension, but his pension will be diminished £1 for every £15 worth of property he owns in excess of the exemption, so that a person possessing £320 worth of property will not receive any pension.

As only the deserving persons are to receive pensions, it is important to ascertain

WHO ARE THE DESERVING?

It would be as well to mention at the outset, in case there are any old men in other colonies who have conceived the idea of hastily emigrating to New Zealand, that the people of this colony have no intention of allowing it to become a dumping-ground for the aged poor of other countries, and that a period of residence of twenty-five years is necessary before a claim to a pension can be established.

Aliens, Asiatics, lunatics and criminals, as would be expected, are excluded from the benefits of the Act. There are, however, degrees of criminality, and a criminal is not within the meaning of the Act unless "during the period of twelve years immediately preceding he has been imprisoned for four months, or on four occasions, for any offence punishable by imprisonment for twelve months or upwards, and dishonouring him in the public estimation; or during the period of twenty-five years immediately preceding such date he has been imprisoned for a term of five years with or without hard labour for any offence dishonouring him in the public estimation."

A crude definition, perhaps, but a line had to be drawn somewhere. The words "dishonouring him in the public estimation" are said to be taken from the Danish Act, and will probably need a good deal of judicial interpretation. Wife deserters (and husband deserters) are also disqualified.

Great efforts have been made to establish a distinction between those who are entitled to "pensions," and the recipients of charitable aid. The task was an almost superhuman one after it had been decided that poverty was a necessary qualification. With this object an attempt has been made to institute a "character test." The result is that anyone reading the Bill would almost imagine that it had been drawn up by a Parliament of Puritans, and that the pensioners would be numbered among the saints. Yet no one can deny that the object is a most laudable one, and it is to be hoped that, at any rate, some worthless characters will thus be excluded. To obtain a pension a claimant must show (to the satisfaction of a magistrate) that "he is of good moral character, and is, and has for five years immediately preceding, been leading a sober and reputable life." If a pensioner is convicted of certain offences (drunkenness in particular) the magistrate may forfeit any one or more instalments of his pension, and "if, in the opinion of the convicting court, any pensioner misspends, wastes, or lessens his estate, or greatly injures his health, or endangers or interrupts the peace and happiness of his family, the court may, by order, direct that the instalment be paid to any clergyman, Justice of the Peace, or other reputable person for the benefit of the pensioner, or may, by order, cancel the pension certificate." After this who shall say that the women's franchise has had no influence on our New Zealand legislation?

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM.

The amount of money annually involved can only be estimated approximately. New Zealand has a population of 750,000 people, and the Government estimate the cost of the pension at £120,000 a year. In nearly every country of the world this would be met