

Public Trust Office Act, 1876") require amplification. At present the law is practically a dead letter. It might, however, be made of very great service to the State. Power of sale should be given to the Public Trustee, and all lands whose owners have been absent for five years without leaving a known agent should vest in the Public Trustee, whether occupied or not; and no title should accrue to the occupier by adverse possession as against the Public Trustee, whose title should be absolute by the registration of a certificate under his hand that, pursuant to the statute, he had assumed possession or ownership, and demanded to be registered proprietor. There should also be a power of lease in case that course should be deemed expedient.

Section 19 of "The Administration Act, 1879," should be amended so as to make it clear beyond question that, whether the class of estate therein referred to consist of realty or personalty, or both, it shall be paid or transferred to the widow if it do not exceed £100 in value after paying debts, duties, and funeral and testamentary expenses; and I am strongly of opinion that that limit should be greatly extended where a family is very young, and where the widow will be charged for many years with the duty of maintaining and educating her children, or some of them. If this be conceded, the hard lot of the widows and younger children of those colonists who die leaving very small estates will be rendered less irksome by permitting, without the expense of an order of Court, the small shares of the children to be used for their benefit during childhood instead of being kept for them until they arrive at maturity.

I am of opinion that "The Civil Service Reform Act, 1886," so far as it relates to appointments, should not apply to this office. It is very desirable that the Public Trustee should be able to appoint the class of men most useful for the successful carrying-on of the business of the office. I submit that the provisions referred to do not permit of a selection being made, unless, indeed, the gentlemen to be appointed may be termed "experts." I think the Public Trustee should possess the power of appointment of all the officers of his staff, seeing that he is practically responsible for the due working of his department.

It would be desirable to form a guarantee fund, consisting of the profits of the Expenses Account, and the amounts now periodically paid into Consolidated Fund, to meet losses such as that resulting from the action *Hatfield v. Public Trustee*. Provision should be made whereby the business requiring the action of the Board should be more rapidly attended to than is possible under existing circumstances. The Board meets once a week—on Wednesday afternoons. If, then, an important deed is received for execution, say, late on Wednesday, after the termination of a meeting, a delay of a week is entailed. It is true, in matters of great urgency, explained to the members, two of their number have been good enough to attend at my office to attest the sealing of an instrument and signature of the Public Trustee, its purport having been first fully explained to them; but the delays which occur and which are distasteful to the legal profession having business with the office might easily be obviated by a change in the law which should relegate this part of the Board's duties to the body next hereinafter referred to. The business of the office has increased so greatly, and in the near future may—by recommendations which I trust will be made by the Royal Commission now sitting, and resultant action of Parliament—be expected to increase at a still greater rate, that it appears to me the time has arrived for a change in its government, either by placing the department under three officers analogous to the Railway Commissioners, or by the appointment of a Deputy and Assistant Public Trustee. These two officers, with the Public Trustee, should perform all the duties of the office Board. To each of these three officers should be assigned the control of one or more branches into which the work of the office has been subdivided—viz., Wills and Trusts, Intestacies, Lunacies, Real Estates, Miscellaneous, West Coast Settlement Reserves (if they still remain in the office), and Native Reserves. One of the three should be a solicitor of long practice, and should undertake all legal work, and advise the office on all points required. All matters other than ordinary routine should be placed before these three officers for decision. They should meet daily for a sufficient part of the day for the discussion of current business, and should have full power to carry on the office in every detail. It should not be necessary for the Public Trustee to transfer shares of banks and companies into his own name as at present. When sold he should be able to make title to a purchaser by execution of transfer as administrator, and exhibition of *Gazette* notice of assumption of administration, or order, or probate, as the case might require. There should be no necessity to obtain a Judge's order to distribute the funds of an insolvent estate. It is at present a mere form, and the cost might well be permitted to augment the dividend of the creditors. Affidavits should be capable of being made before any solicitor, whether or not he may be on the staff of the department. This small matter would obviate some little expense to estates in swearing the affidavits necessary for Court purposes, and would otherwise prove of convenience. Policy-moneys now protected by law should be available for payment of debts where no relatives are known, and possibly also where there are no relatives residing in New Zealand. The Public Trustee should have power to reduce rents under lease for a period of, or periods not exceeding, five years in the whole, where they are clearly shown by the declaration of two competent valuers appointed by the Public Trustee to be excessive. Titles to any land coming under the administration of the Public Trustee which may be technically defective, but admissible under the Land Transfer Act, should be completed by the office Solicitor without charge to the estate. No fees should be charged by the Land Transfer Department. The Public Trustee should be enabled to apply to a Judge of the Supreme Court for advice and direction upon any question whatever which may arise in his administration, and should be held blameless if he act on such advice. It would give an immense impetus to the office if all receipts given by, and all transfers, conveyances, powers of attorney, letters or deeds of trust, renunciations, and all other documents in favour of, the office were exempt from stamp duty. Provision might be made in any Act to be passed, in order to save expense to clients, that a letter appointing the Public Trustee attorney shall give him all powers usually expressed in a power of attorney (setting out at