

INSPECTION OF DISTRICT OFFICES.

During the past few years the inspection of the District Offices and agencies of the Department has fallen seriously into arrear, such important offices as New Plymouth and Hawera having been last inspected in July, 1916; Nelson, in March, 1916; Napier, in September, 1916; and Invercargill, so long ago as December, 1915. Some of the agencies of the Department had not been inspected since 1913.

An inspectorial staff was constituted at an early stage of the Board's period of control. Benefiting by my experience in Western Australia and in the Commonwealth service, comprehensive and detailed forms of inspection for the various classes of offices were prepared for the use of the Inspectors, thus ensuring that their reports would be furnished in a uniform manner, and would contain similar information for offices of the same class. The provision of these forms marks a distinct advance on the methods previously adopted. During the Board's term of control the following offices have been inspected :—

Local Deputies' Offices : Christchurch, Dunedin.

District Managers' Offices : Hawera, New Plymouth, Napier, Wanganui, Invercargill, Nelson, Masterton.

Agencies : Dannevirke, Waipawa, Motueka, Blenheim, Gore.

All matters which require attention or action are extracted from Inspectors' reports, and in every case the matter is followed to finality.

The Board is satisfied that the methods of inspection now adopted are as rigid and satisfactory as can reasonably be expected. As a result of the institution of a proper system a considerable advance has been made in the direction of securing the efficient and businesslike conduct of the work at District Offices, and an opportunity will be afforded of making the Office practice uniform throughout the Dominion.

SPECIAL REVIEW OF ESTATES UNDER ADMINISTRATION.

Amongst the matters which must shortly engage the attention of the Board is the establishment of a Chief Inspector's or Reviewing Division. The Board's policy of making the larger District Offices self-contained, together with the delegation of an increasing number of estates to Local Deputy Public Trustees for administration, renders it imperative that the work of inspecting the Branch Offices shall be regularly and systematically carried out and properly controlled and supervised.

It also became evident to the Board shortly after it took office that steps should be taken to secure a periodical and searching review of all estates under administration. The Board, recognizing the urgent necessity of the work, has done what it could to review the administration, and has directed, in the case of all new estates submitted for acceptance, that periodical reports of the progress of the administration shall be furnished for the Board's information.

The Board is of opinion that a special Reviewing Branch must be constituted with the least possible delay.

AUDIT OF BRANCHES.

Under an arrangement made with the Controller and Auditor-General the Office has been conducting an audit of its accounts so far as the staff will admit. The officers who conduct the audit report direct to the Controller and Auditor-General.

This arrangement is not regarded as satisfactory, or as being sufficiently independent in character, and as soon as more fortunate conditions exist in respect to staff the practice which has been adopted as a war measure should cease.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The following matters in addition to those referred to elsewhere in this report are worthy of note :—

Motor-cars have been supplied to five local Deputies and District Managers for use on Office business, and have proved of great benefit.

A forms-revision committee has been appointed.