

was made on the 21st October, 1915, from which date all military pay of a deceased soldier, whether recovered from the Defence Department or collected from Post Office Savings-bank accounts, has been exempt from commission charges.

The fees charged in connection with soldiers' agencies vary with the duties to be performed. In every case they are purely nominal.

As an indication of the importance of the concessions made in the administration of soldiers' estates it may be mentioned that the interest credited on the surplus moneys in such estates for the year ended 31st March, 1918, amounted to £1,659, while the total commission collected by the Office for the administration of the estates during the same period did not exceed £1,073. The cost of the Soldiers' Estates Division exceeds the revenue by a considerable sum per annum.

The Board has evidence that the economical administration has proved of great benefit to the soldiers' dependants, who are often left in straitened circumstances.

Unfortunately, the administration is often unduly prolonged without any fault on the part of the Office, and this is sometimes the subject of complaint or misunderstanding on the part of beneficiaries in estates. Every soldier's pay-book contains a form of will, and it is essential that the form should be accounted for before distribution of an estate is made. The Public Trustee cannot safely proceed with the distribution until he knows whether the deceased soldier did or did not exercise the power of testamentary disposition. As a period of twelve or fifteen months, or even longer, frequently elapses between the death of the soldier and the receipt of his pay-book in the Dominion, protracted and irritating delays occur in securing final distribution of the estate.

The Public Trustee is largely powerless in the matter, but wherever possible the period of delay has been reduced. In any case where the soldier left a will in New Zealand the possibility of a subsequent disposition having been made by means of the form in the pay-book is disregarded, and an interim payment to the beneficiaries is made as soon as any of the assets are realized and the debts discharged. Moreover, under the special powers possessed by the Public Trustee certain preliminary steps, such as advertising for claims, obtaining proofs of kin, &c., can be proceeded with before it is established whether or not a will has been left.

INTESTATE AND MENTAL-PATIENTS DIVISIONS.

On the 31st March, 1918, the estates being administered by these Divisions were as follows :—

	Number.	£
Intestate	2,339	1,265,522
Mental patients	2,739	689,855
Convicts	32	8,791
Personal acts	122	25,226
Unclaimed lands and property	373	21,826
	<u>5,605</u>	<u>£2,011,220</u>

The severance of the Intestate Division from the Soldiers' Estates Division is referred to elsewhere.

Additional premises have been leased for the accommodation of this Division, as indicated on page 10.

The work of the Division has proceeded smoothly and expeditiously throughout the year.

NATIVE DIVISION.

This Division deals with the administration of the West Coast Settlement Reserves, Native Reserves, and other reserves vested in the Public Trustee under the authority of special Acts.

The Public Trustee, as statutory trustee of such reserves, undertakes the leasing of the lands, the collection of rents, and their distribution to the Native beneficial owners.

The Public Trustee is also frequently appointed by the Native Land Court as trustee of the estates of Natives under disability and Native minors, and in discharge of the duties so imposed arranges for the leasing of lands, the general management