

TRADE OUTLOOK.

With regard to the outlook for 1924-25, the year is commencing well. The price of copra is comparatively good, and if cacao prices continue to improve it should enable the planters to get upon their feet again. Both copra and cacao promise to be in fair supply. A fair average year is looked forward to.

PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE.

The Samoan Public Trust Office, which was constituted under the Samoa Public Trust Office Order of 1921, became a Department of the Administration as from the 1st January last.

PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE WORK.

During its existence the Office has handled about fifty estates, of an approximate value of £40,000. Though small in number, the estates represent every class of asset imaginable, and the difficulty of administration is frequently quite out of proportion to the value of the property.

The establishing of the Office has filled a real need here, as it will ensure the proper administration of all deceased estates. In a number of cases in the past no such proper steps were taken. As an instance, an estate is now in course of completion where a period of fifty-four years had elapsed between the date of death and the granting of letters of administration.

The fact that deceased estates can now be handled by fully qualified and impartial persons is a matter of considerable public importance in itself, and the Department has the full confidence of the local community.

CLEARING-OFFICE WORK.

An important function of Public Trust Office has been to act as a clearing-house for the settlement of real property of Germans which was vested in the New Zealand Government under the Samoan Crown Estates Order and for the personal property of German absentees or repatriatees. In addition, the books of all the former German companies have been completed, and these businesses are now being finally liquidated.

OFFICIAL ASSIGNEE WORK.

The Public Trustee also holds the appointment of Official Assignee, but, owing to the extraordinarily lenient credit system in vogue in Samoa, there has been little work in this direction so far.

GENERAL.

The Public Trust Office now also carries out the functions of local auditor of Administration accounts.

The fact should be emphasized that the Department is entirely self-supporting. Moreover, by advancing on mortgage some £6,250 of its funds to local planters and others it has been of some assistance during the last year or two of financial stress.

CROWN ESTATES.

During the year the cost of maintenance of the Crown estates has been reduced by approximately £21,500. This reduction is due mainly to an all-round reduction of labour and decreased cost of recruiting and repatriation charges for Chinese. The average monthly total of labour employed throughout the year was 952, as compared with 1,168 for the previous year.

Unfortunately there has also been a drop in revenue amounting to some £14,000, due to the reduced output of copra and cocoa.

During March-April, 1923, very heavy and prolonged gales were experienced over the whole island, and it is considered by most experienced planters in Samoa that these conditions were responsible for the heavy loss of copra as compared with the previous year. Added to this factor was the very dry spell following after the gales, resulting in a very poor fall of nuts, and the inclusion of a very large percentage of immature nuts right up to November-December.

Whilst the immediate results of the March gales have shown up in a considerable reduction of the copra output, it is thought that the ultimate result may be of considerable benefit to the palms, by producing a stimulating effect upon the root-growth and so producing a more vigorous growth of nuts during the succeeding years.

The poor crop of cocoa-beans may be attributed almost entirely to the March gales. March, April, and May of 1923 were the months when the crop was expected, and reports indicated that a fair crop could be looked for. The harvest proved to be the poorest ever experienced, and the beans of very poor general quality. This year's crop commenced earlier than usual, and reports indicate that same will continue for a longer period than is usual. Every indication points to an exceptionally good crop.

The end of this financial year marks the practical end of this Department as constituted in the past. The change of policy decided upon, and which has been put into effect, now leaves this Department practically free from most activities other than the four plantations—Mulifauna, Vaitete, Vailele, and Magia. It is thought that the recent advertising and activity carried on in New Zealand and elsewhere should result in these plantations being disposed of, thus leaving for the following period only such work as is necessary to finally record the arrangements and liquidate the remaining assets.