

So that the benefits of decentralization may be extended as widely as possible, there is in operation a system whereby the administration of certain estates is completed by District Managers, subject to the control and supervision of the District Public Trustees.

By means of decentralization the Office organization is prevented from becoming top-heavy. Apart from the considerations of economy and efficiency, it is a distinct advantage to those with whom the Office deals to be able to come into personal contact with the officers managing their affairs.

EXPERIENCE.

It was the aim of the founders of this institution to establish an official who would possess considerable experience in the special duties of trusteeship and administration, and for whose good conduct the Government would be responsible. There is little doubt that the aim of the far-seeing founders has been amply fulfilled. The Office has now had a long and valuable experience in administration work and the other duties entrusted to it, and with the accumulation of such experience and knowledge has been enabled to devise efficient and economical methods of administration and to establish an organization which will safeguard the interests entrusted to its care. It may be confidently claimed that the standard set up by the Office in its work is a high one, and that its clients receive good service from it.

SPECIAL POWERS OF THE PUBLIC TRUSTEE.

4. A considerable amount of misapprehension exists in regard to the special powers which the Legislature has from time to time conferred upon the Public Trustee, and, as some criticism has appeared again during the past year in regard to these powers, I take this opportunity of endeavouring to make the position clearer. The suggestion is frequently made that these powers are repugnant to the spirit of trustee law; but such an idea is a mistaken one. Upon an examination of the powers in question it will be found that generally they allow the Public Trustee merely to do, within prescribed limits, what the Supreme Court would upon application in the particular cases authorize him to do. Such, for example, are his discretionary powers of selling, leasing, managing, and otherwise dealing with estate assets, and the powers of applying estates funds for the benefit of widows, minors, and other dependants. In view of the special position which the Public Trustee occupies as a State official whose activities are subject to public inquiry and criticism, it has been possible to grant him these powers with the knowledge that they will not be abused in any manner.

As for the remaining powers, they are chiefly such as usually appear in well-drawn wills and trust settlements. The powers have been made available to the Public Trustee purely in the interests of the beneficiaries, and they are not exercised in such a way as to override in any way the rights of interested parties. To guard against the possibility of such an occurrence the Legislature has provided a simple process by which beneficiaries opposing any proposed course of action upon the part of the Public Trustee may refer the matter to a Judge of the Supreme Court for consideration and directions. Though this provision has been in force for many years, there has been only one occasion on which it has been utilized, and in that instance the Public Trustee's proposals were approved by the Court. This is striking testimony to the fact that the powers are exercised in the interests of the beneficiaries, not to their detriment. I claim that the history of the Public Trust Office is in itself sufficient assurance that any powers conferred upon the Public Trustee are exercised with discretion and caution, and will not be availed of arbitrarily or in a harsh and inequitable manner.

The powers have in no way operated to deprive beneficiaries of any rights which they may possess in the event of any estate not being administered in accord with the general principles of trustee law. The measure of protection afforded to beneficiaries in estates administered by the Office is, indeed, far in excess of that which is afforded in the case of any other trustee. The Public Trustee is a