

60. Fortunately, when this development movement first commenced the Office appreciated the significance of the trend of events, and set to work to ensure that, so far as the terms of the particular trust or will or the law would permit, estate assets were kept abreast of modern requirements. In order to modernize certain properties, alterations and additions were judiciously put in hand where the circumstances required or justified them, and so it has been possible for leases of altered premises to be arranged at good rentals. In this way the necessity for a heavy capital outlay such as would have been involved in the erection of modern buildings has in a number of cases been obviated, whilst the maximum return from the properties affected has been secured. Furthermore, what is important at the present juncture, the capital invested in such properties is comparatively moderate, so that, even if the rentals do fall to some extent for a time, the yield during such a period will be commensurate with the value involved. Before any outlay for extensive alterations has been authorized the whole position has been carefully surveyed, the surrounding factors and tendencies analysed, and expenditure sanctioned covering only improvements which were essential and warranted in maintaining or in enhancing the letting-value of the premises concerned. For many reasons it is apparent that the time has arrived to call a halt in extensive building and land-development schemes in some of the larger cities, especially in connection with shop, office, factory, and warehouse properties, and to exercise a conservative policy as to outlay in this respect until the existing situation has had time to recover and correct itself.

61. From what I have already set out in connection with the causes and extent of the differential advantage of urban lands, it will be realized that, with rapid suburban expansion and the opening-up of new routes in the principal centres, there are so many dominating factors affecting land-values, and the uses to which they are put, that a change in any one of them may enormously affect the others. It is common knowledge how vitally such values are influenced by the direction taken by a much-used road, rail, tram, or bus route, or the location of a terminal or an important stopping-place by the way. The deviation of an existing route or the opening of an entirely new one and the consequential diversion of traffic may, in a short space of time, depreciate the value of one locality and enhance that of another. Likewise, town-planning and other city improvement schemes, as well as numerous kindred movements, must not be overlooked in this question of land-values and the revenue to be derived from the properties affected. Conceivably, then, at any rate in the larger centres, the value of many an urban block may within the next few years materially alter in response to the happening of one or more events of this nature. With the possibility of these fluctuations before us, it would be unwise to attempt to predict reliably or to gauge with certainty what the result will be.

62. The Public Trustee also administers a number of blocks of land valuable for their mineral or forest products. These holdings present their own peculiar problems, and all due precaution is taken to administer them to the best advantage.

INTESTATE ESTATES.

63. Property may be divided into two classes—inheritable and uninheritable. Rights in that which is inheritable survive the owner, but in the uninheritable they die with him. The beneficiaries who are entitled to the residue, after the satisfaction of the creditors, are of two classes—firstly, those nominated by the last will of the deceased, and, secondly, those appointed by the law in default of any such nomination. A will is regarded as the natural and normal mode of disposing of property at death, for it has the effect of enabling a person to give definite expression to his intentions as regards the post-mortem distribution of his property. Consequently the laws relating to the devolution of property on intestacy have been said to be “an expedient set of rules framed to supply a remedy for neglect on the part of deceased persons” who have not left any testamentary document at all or who, leaving such a document, have not framed it so as adequately to dispose of the whole estate.