

REPORT ON THE WORKING OF THE PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1932.

Public Trust Office, Wellington, 24th September, 1932.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit a report on the working of the Public Trust Office for the financial year ended 31st March, 1932.

PROGRESS OF THE OFFICE.

1. The operations of the Office continue to expand in a healthy manner, indicating that the public confidence in the Department and the reputation for faithful and skilful services which it renders to beneficiaries and clients, combined with economy of administration—a reputation which has been built up and consolidated over a long period of years—are fully maintained. The new business reported for administration during the year amounted to the satisfactory total of £6,412,123, and, though the phenomenal figures recorded in the years immediately preceding the past year have not been equalled, the falling-off is accounted for substantially by the lower basis upon which the value of the new business has been assessed, in consequence of the general fall in the value of assets and investments under the conditions which have ruled.

2. The total value of the estates and funds under administration at the close of the year amounted to £59,132,512, representing an increase of £1,605,249 over the corresponding figure for the previous year and constituting the highest total recorded in the history of the Office. In arriving at the above total, account has been taken of the reduced basis of values now obtaining. As this has made it necessary to write down considerably the value of assets under administration, the growth of the volume of business is correspondingly greater than is indicated by a comparison of the figures for the two years. The unavoidable accumulation of assets has been a marked feature in the administration during the past year, as in the present state of the property and financial markets, as a general rule it has not been possible to realize at prices acceptable to the beneficiaries. In more favourable times the majority of these assets could have been readily and advantageously converted into cash, and distributions and the completion of the administration of estates facilitated. This result of present-day conditions is referred to in another portion of the report, but is mentioned here as, in conjunction with the figures for the new business recorded during the year, it enables a more accurate perspective to be obtained of the growth of the business.

In assessing the value of the estates and funds under administration and the new business reported from time to time it has been the practice of the Office to take into account only the estates and funds for which the Public Trustee performs administration duties of a definite and active nature. Such matters as trusteeships for debenture-holders and those estates of mental patients or aged and infirm persons which are administered privately but are subject to the Public Trustee's supervision are excluded completely from the statistics given above. If the figures relating to these classes of business were included in the general total the value of estates and funds under administration at the close of the year would be increased by £2,392,407.

3. Further evidence of the confidence which is reposed by the public in the Office is found in the figures relating to the wills deposited with the Public Trustee by testators. During the year the number of wills held on deposit increased by 3,601, after making allowance for the wills withdrawn in cases where estates fell in for administration. The total number now held on deposit is 77,124. In addition, it is known that many wills appointing the Public Trustee executor are held by solicitors, banks, and others, so that a large volume of future business is assured.