

REPORT OF THE WORKING OF THE PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1949

SIR,—

Public Trust Office, Wellington C. 1, 10th August, 1949.

I have the honour to submit a report on the working of the Public Trust Office for the financial year ended the 31st March, 1949.

NEW BUSINESS

During the past year 3,614 estates and funds of a total value of £7,679,136 were accepted for administration, compared with 3,551 of a value of £7,702,601 in the previous year. Notwithstanding a slight reduction in value, the new business for the year was satisfactory.

An outstanding result has been the substantial number of wills deposited appointing the Public Trustee executor and the number redrafted on behalf of living testators. The new wills reached a total of 7,881, which constitutes a peacetime record and an increase of 1,061 on the previous year's figures. The 144,360 wills now held on deposit for living testators constitute a solid reserve of future business.

Testators are advised to review their wills from time to time. Changes in a person's assets and circumstances make this essential if hardship is not to be inflicted on beneficiaries. That the public is becoming increasingly aware of this is indicated by the greater use being made of the service available. The number of wills redrafted at the request of testators has increased from 3,991 in 1939 to 6,589 in the past year.

ADMINISTRATION OF ESTATES AND KINDRED DUTIES

The main function of the Public Trustee is to act as executor, trustee, attorney, administrator, or in various other fiduciary capacities. During the year the administration of 4,275 estates and funds was completed, and assets to the value of £8,939,843 were transferred or distributed to the beneficiaries.

Over the past ten years two trends in estates administration have become noticeable. The first—a result of the buoyant financial conditions ruling in the Dominion—is the ready market for the sale of all classes of assets. The turn-over of estates for the year has shown a marked increase over that of a decade ago, when the administration of 3,245 estates was completed, 1,030 less than for the year ended 31st March, 1949. The second trend is the decreasing number of testators who provide for life tenancies under their wills. The low rate of interest obtainable on investments has doubtless been the reason for testators preferring to make outright gifts of their estates rather than to create life interests.

Both these factors are responsible for the reduction in the number and value of estates and funds under administration at the close of the year, 18,953, valued at £58,834,467, as against 19,612, valued at £59,879,674, for the previous year.

Particulars of the main classes of estates and kindred matters are dealt with below :—

Wills and Trusts.—As mentioned in previous reports, this class of estates represents the most valuable portion of the Office business. For the year under review the number of wills and trust estates accepted for administration was 2,231, of a total value of £4,766,928, an increase of 134 over the number accepted during the year ended 31st March, 1948. The steady flow of wills and trust estates placed under the Public Trustee's administration continues to be a pleasing feature of the new business, and, having regard to the number of wills deposited with the Office, it is logical to assume that the intake of estates will be maintained and increased in the future.