

PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE.

This institution continues to make rapid progress. Notwithstanding the reduction in the scale of charges and rates of commission made within the last two years, the surplus of income over expenditure is considerable.

A comparison of the figures for the present year with those of five years ago proves its steady growth. On the 31st March, 1899, there were in the Office 2,491 estates of all kinds. On the 31st March last there were 3,470. The values of the estates at the respective periods were £2,110,316 and £3,152,882.

The number of wills deposited in the Office by persons who have appointed the Public Trustee their executor has increased in five years from 700 to more than 2,000. This is convincing evidence of the growing confidence of the public in the Office.

The large increase of business which must take place in the immediate future will necessitate an increase in the Head Office staff and better accommodation.

A new building will shortly be erected on a very suitable site which has been secured in the City of Wellington. The cost of a suitable edifice can easily be provided for out of profits already earned by the institution, without any expense to the State.

THE GOVERNMENT LIFE AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE DEPARTMENT.

The number of new life-insurance policies issued by this Department during the year was 3,137, assuring £702,350, representing an increase of £22,947 on the previous year. The death claims during the year were favourable, being £4,468 less than in 1902. The total amount paid by the Department since its inception in respect of death claims and matured endowments has been £2,571,019, and the total sum now assured by the Department is £10,060,262, or, including bonuses, £11,111,807.

The Department has no foreclosed properties on its hands at the present time, and the satisfactory nature of its securities may be gathered from the fact that £415 only was overdue at the end of the year out of an income from interest of £152,353.

The business in the Accident Branch has increased substantially, premiums amounting to £24,381 having been received, as against £14,100 in 1902. The funds show an increase of £248, and now stand at £1,255; but it will be seen from the Revenue Account contained in the annual report of the Department that, notwithstanding the great reduction that has been effected in the ratio of the expenses to the premiums, the premiums have been only sufficient in the aggregate to meet the claims and expenses and leave a slight balance in favour of the office. The claim experience of the Accident Branch is being carefully watched and analysed, and in time it will be possible to grade the rates so as to equitably meet the risk in each occupation.

STATE FIRE INSURANCE.

In respect to commencing the business of State fire insurance, considerable difficulty has been encountered. Applications were called for the position of General Manager, and ultimately Mr. J. W. Brindley was appointed. This gentleman was for over twenty-two years general manager of the Victoria Fire Insurance Company (Limited). Since his appointment he has been through the colony investigating and selecting for recommendation suitable district agents and sub-agents. The private fire-insurance companies doing business in the colony having decided that they would not accept reinsurance from the Government Fire Insurance Department other arrangements have had to be made which have caused some delay. The General Manager anticipates, however, to be able to commence operations not later than the 30th September next. It will be satisfactory to honourable members to know that the private fire-insurance companies have, since the Act was passed, reduced their premiums, especially on properties in country districts.

The total sum asked for the initial expenses is £6,360, which is for the whole of the financial year, but it is anticipated that not more than £4,000 of this sum will be expended.