

poses upon him the duty of co-operating with the Minister of Public Works in draining some 1,300 acres of lake and swamps, and of financing the undertaking. Such tasks as those, it is conceived, can only serve to distract the Public Trustee from his more appropriate functions, besides exposing the office to friction with the Natives. Further, the Native Board seems to be lost sight of in these provisions.

In the case of certain of these reserves known as "The New Zealand Company's Reserved Tenths," a part not exceeding one-half of the rents and proceeds is paid to the beneficiaries. The balance is retained to form benefit funds, one for the North Island and one for the South. These funds and their accumulations are to be applied as the Public Trustee in his discretion thinks fit "towards the physical, social, moral, and pecuniary benefit of Natives individually, and the relief of such of them as are poor or distressed." This, it may be noted, is one of those indefinite trusts that serve to create irritation.

The functions of the Public Trustee in the distribution of the revenues from the reserves where they may be thus applied at his discretion are discharged through the medium of his local agents, who report or make recommendations upon applications received, and the Public Trustee endeavours to assure himself by inquiries as to the propriety of any suggested expenditure, and as to how far it will benefit the Natives. No general or settled scheme or plan has been devised with regard to the application of these funds. In like manner, as the proper disposal of the unleased areas of the West Coast Settlement Reserves involves the policy of how best to deal with the future of the Native, so does the application of these funds; and for similar reasons to those given in the case of the West Coast Reserves, we think these reserves and funds should be brought more into touch with the Native Department.

In connection with the reserves other than the West Coast Settlement there is a special Board constituted under the Native Reserves Act, consisting of the Public Trustee and the other members of the Public Trust Board and two Natives appointed by the Governor. This Board is a mere farce. It meets infrequently. Its last meeting was over a year ago. Former meetings were held as follows: In November, 1905; June and December, 1906; June, July, and November, 1907; May, 1908; February and August, 1909; none in 1910; and one in September, 1911. Of the two Native members, one attended the meeting in March, 1912; both attended the meeting in September, 1911; but neither was present at any other meeting on or subsequent to 1905. Each Native receives a guinea for his attendance, and merely registers the recommendation of the Public Trustee.

As the Native Minister has never attended, and the Under-Secretary of Lands is not a member of the Board, it is plain that the Public Trustee is altogether out of touch with the Departments that are most interested in his administration.

Under the Native Reserves Act there has always been power to appoint a Reserves Commissioner who should, subject to the Public Trustee, conduct routine business connected with such reserves. No such Commissioner exists. With regard to the West Coast Settlement Reserves, the Trust Office District Manager acts as agent, and it is his business to report as to leasing, to inspect lands, to report on applications or complaints by Natives, and generally act as the Public Trustee advises. In the case of the other reserves scattered over the Dominion, the nearest District Manager or Agent of the Trust Office reports when referred to. This work is rather that of an expert such as a Government Valuer or a Crown Lands Ranger, or such as the Reserves Commissioner, if appointed, might be expected to be.

Your Commissioners think that the foregoing considerations point to the necessity for some change in the administration of Native reserves.

It is noteworthy also that almost all the officers of the Public Trust Department who gave evidence before us on this point expressed the opinion that it would be a good thing if Native matters were removed from the office. In confirmation of this they point out that in the Native districts, owing to