

The retention on the staff of those acquainted with the business of managing trust estates is of great importance. The want of seniors in that respect is a serious defect at present, although remediable with time. The diminution in the average salaries paid serves to emphasize that point.

The result of undermanning is to cause the delays in correspondence and accounting before referred to. That such delays exist and cause great dissatisfaction is admitted by the office on all hands. The following passages from the evidence of the Public Trustee himself indicates this: "I am always girding at the staff about the delay in answering correspondence." "I seldom go outside Wellington without meeting people who say they have had no replies to their letters." The evidence of the Agents is to the effect that constant irritation on the part of the public is caused through the inability to act or answer questions owing to delays at Head Office.

A certain amount of delay is inevitable where the whole action of the various agencies is controlled from Wellington, but the compensation for the delay arising from that fact is to be sought in the advantages which the office offers. Further, in many cases where questions of law have to be considered, or where the answer is dependent more or less upon extensive inquiries outside the office, the charge of delay in replying is not justifiable. But allowing for these considerations, there is delay, and it is due to the undermanning referred to.

To the question why the position has not been met by a sufficient number of appointments of skilled persons from outside, the answer of the office is that experience has shown that they require special training, and that their introduction causes dissatisfaction amongst the juniors qualifying for those posts, for promotion is checked, and they find themselves doing responsible work equal to that of outside appointees with less remuneration.

In 1912 thirty-three new appointments were made, only two of which were from outside the Civil Service. Of these, twenty-one were cadets and nine were transferred from other branches of the Service. Several more cadets would have been appointed, but the list of Civil Service candidates was exhausted.

The staff is much stronger than it was, but is still inadequate, and while it continues so overtime must be worked. Competent juniors are said to be coming forward, so that it is expected in a few months overtime will disappear, except such as is inevitable at balancing times and when the Native rents have to be made up. In the meantime the existing staff are most loyally working long hours. The staff should now be augmented by at least twenty cadets to be specially trained in the skilled departments.

One remedy proposed for the congestion is that of

Decentralization.

An Act was passed in 1912 enabling Deputy Trustees to be constituted at four centres—namely, at Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, and some place selected in the Provincial District of Wellington, with such powers as the Public Trustee delegates to them. Under this it is proposed to intrust the absolute charge and realization of estates up to £1,000 in value to those Deputies without their being obliged to refer to Head Office for instructions as hitherto. They will also keep and make up locally, instead of its being done in Wellington, the accounts of those estates. As a very large number of estates, especially intestate, are under the limit of value mentioned, circumlocution, delay, and the consequent dissatisfaction will be saved, and the Head Office and the branches in question will be relieved of an enormous amount of correspondence.

This practically means that at the centres named the District Manager, as regards the estates intrusted to him, becomes a Public Trustee, except in so far as certain powers may be specifically withheld from him.

This is a departure from the original idea of the Public Trust Act, which was to render the Public Trustee the official solely responsible, and the State responsible for him. We acknowledge the plan possesses some advantages.