

of the Department's work being performed where it ought to be performed—that is, in close connection with the clients and interested persons.

District Managers are encouraged to think and act for themselves in cases where matters requiring attention are within their powers, and in those cases where it is necessary to seek the direction of the Board the necessary machinery is provided.

Under these circumstances the work of the Head Office should be to some extent relieved.

There still remain a few centres at which permanent offices should be opened. As soon as suitable officers for appointment to those offices become available the organization may be regarded as reasonably complete.

BRANCH OFFICES.

Arrangements are also in contemplation to place the work at Ashburton under the charge of a permanent officer, who will work under the direct supervision and control of the Local Deputy Public Trustee at Christchurch.

A similar arrangement is already in force at Hastings, where the Officer in Charge is controlled by the District Manager, Napier.

Large as is the volume of work performed by the Office, it is felt by the Board that much more could be attracted if further facilities were provided for the public. It is only by the adoption of a progressive policy that the Office can take that position in the life of the community that it should take.

The Board is of opinion that something must soon be done to extend the activities of the Office in the four principal centres. Although large offices exist in each of these centres, it is essential that some means should be adopted of reaching people residing in the suburbs, and the opening of Branch Offices in suburban districts is now under consideration.

Such offices would prove most useful both to the public and to the Office. Each would serve as a bureau of information regarding the work performed by the Office, and would afford the public an opportunity of setting their affairs in order. This is a duty that appears to be almost entirely neglected by the greater portion of the community, and the removal of this neglect should be one of the primary aims of the Office.

OUTBREAK OF INFLUENZA.

At the end of 1918 and in the early months of 1919 the work of the Office was seriously affected by the epidemic of influenza which swept through the Dominion.

The pressure on the staff, both at Head Office and at the District Offices, was very severe. In the Head Office the staff was heavily depleted over a considerable period, and at the height of the outbreak no less than 218 officers out of a total staff of 264 were absent from duty.

The dislocation resulted in a large accumulation of work, which was reduced only by strenuous efforts on the part of the staff. The difficulties of the situation were increased by the sudden influx of estates of persons who died during the epidemic.

The information so far obtained and collated indicates that between nine hundred and one thousand estates were reported for administration as the result of the outbreak.

The Board is pleased to report that the unremitting exertions of the staff enabled the whole of the accumulated work to be cleared before the close of the financial year.

COMMITTEES OF ESTATES CLERKS.

Reference is made on page 19 of this report to the services rendered to the Office by the Committee of Accountants. The Board has considered it desirable that similar bodies should be formed in the other Divisions of the Office. The suggestion has been cordially received by officers, and Committees of Estates Clerks have been constituted in all the Divisions for the consideration of matters