

legal authority to do so and the beneficiaries desired funds invested in that manner, and in those other cases where the new shares were not wanted sales of the rights were arranged.

MENTAL PATIENT ESTATES.

46. During the year 447 estates of mental patients, with assets of a total value of £428,984, were reported to the Public Trustee for administration, and on the 31st March last there were 1,343 such estates, of a total value of £1,617,508, under the control of the Office.

The care and treatment of mentally defective persons and the control of their affairs during disability are questions of considerable importance to the community. From statistical information recently published it appears that 1 per cent. of the population of England and Wales is suffering from insanity or feeble-mindedness. In New Zealand statistics show that approximately 5,300 people are inmates of mental hospitals. These figures do not include the insane and feeble-minded persons who have not been formally committed to Government or licensed institutions.

Thus it will be seen that there are a large number of persons who by reason of mental disability require treatment. As a recent legal writer points out, the ideas current on the subject of insanity have undergone appreciable modification in late years. It is only within recent times that the subject has received anything approaching the consideration which it deserves. In the middle of last century attention was drawn to the condition of persons confined in mental institutions, but now all this is changed. With the advance of knowledge and change in public feeling efforts are being made to make the conditions of the insane as satisfactory as possible. That the necessity of dealing with the problem of the mentally unfit is now well realized is evidenced by the up-to-date legislation and other efforts which are being made on behalf of this class of persons. In England the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 set up elaborate machinery with the object of taking steps for the care and attention of feeble-minded persons other than lunatics. In New Zealand we have the Mental Defectives Act, 1911, and its amendments, which carefully and minutely lay down provisions for the care and attention of mentally defective persons. It is pleasing to note that in New Zealand the authorities responsible for the care of mental patients are making efforts to alleviate the distress and the necessarily unpleasant conditions of persons confined in mental hospitals by paying attention to classification, surroundings, and treatment. This is indeed a very important work, and will undoubtedly receive widespread approval.

The question of providing comforts which cannot be obtained in the ordinary routine of institutions is carefully considered by the Office in the administration of mental patient estates. As I have indicated in earlier reports, there is close co-operation between the Mental Hospital authorities and the Office in this matter, and where the health of the patient will permit and there are funds available necessary arrangements are made to provide suitable additional comforts.

As to the administration of the estates of mentally defective persons, careful provision has also been made. Under the provisions of the Mental Defectives Act, 1911, and the amending statutes the Public Trustee is required to undertake the administration of the estates of all persons committed in New Zealand to institutions for the mentally defective, except in cases where the Supreme Court appoints a private committee to act.

In order that prompt attention may be given to these estates, section 87 (1) of the Act requires that every Magistrate making a receiving-order, and every other person who under the authority of the Act makes any order of reception and detention of any person or for the confining of any person under Part IV of the Act, shall send forthwith to the Public Trustee notice of such order. Subsection (2) of the same Act provides that it shall be the duty of every person required by the Act to send to the Public Trustee notice of admission, death, or discharge of a patient. As soon as the notices of admission are received careful inquiries are at once instituted by the Office with a view to protecting the patients' interests as early as possible. It will be recognized that often the estates of insane persons are in a very involved and complicated condition, such complications being at times the