

very much complicated by the execution of a faulty will or the failure to make a will at all. It is the duty of all persons possessing money or property, or having dependants, to make a will. The making of a will is not the easy and simple matter which the average "man in the street" puts it down to be. It is unwise to make a will without taking the advice of a qualified person in regard to its provisions. To illustrate this, it is only necessary to take the case of the ordinary man who wishes to make a will in favour of his wife and children. The idea current amongst many is that the money or property may be left to the wife in the first place, and on her death handed down to the children. Such an arrangement is impossible, for, if the estate is to be held intact for the children, the wife may not touch anything but the interest or income. On the other hand, if the wife has full control, there is always the possibility of the estate being dissipated through various causes.

For a very long time past the Office has drawn wills free of charge where the Public Trustee is appointed executor. The Office recognizes the importance of will-drafting, and so has provided specially qualified officers to advise testators in the drawing-up of their wills and to prepare the documents for signature. Moreover, before being finally deposited every will is perused by competent and expert officers.

LEGAL DIVISION.

89. The handling of such a large number of estates as the Office has under its control involves legal questions of every variety. In conveyancing alone large numbers of conveyancing or trust instruments are passed forward daily. By this, not merely formal official documents are meant, but transfers, conveyances, leases, settlements, deeds of family arrangement, agreements, mortgages, powers of attorney, and so forth. The Office possesses its own legal staff, and all these documents are either drawn or perused by this staff. In addition, as I have already stated in this report, several thousands of wills are prepared or perused annually.

The Office is widely represented throughout the Dominion, and, in order that this wide representation may be turned to the fullest advantage in the Office working and the policy of decentralization carried to its logical conclusion, for a number of years past competent officers have been attached to the branch offices to perform on the spot legal duties in connection with the work at these centres. Extensions of the policy are made whenever the volume of business at a branch is sufficient to warrant such a step being taken. During the year legal clerks were appointed at Whangarei and Timaru, and a legal clerk has been attached to the Palmerston North Branch to assist the District Solicitor there.

The applications to the Supreme Court for grant of probate during the year total 762, and for the same period there were 248 applications for a grant of an order to administer on intestacy. Private practitioners are employed in obedience to specific directions of testators, or, in conformity with Office practice, in cases where an estate is introduced into the Office by a private practitioner and there is no known reason which would render such a course unjustifiable. Compared with the number of applications made during the preceding year, there was an increase of twenty-three in the number of probate motions and of twelve in the motions for administration on an intestacy.

90. In regard to estates of under £400 in value the Public Trustee may file in the Supreme Court an election to administer according to the will, where the deceased person died testate or, under intestacy, where the deceased left no will. This procedure is simple, expeditious, inexpensive, and most useful, and proves a benefit to the beneficiaries in those small estates in the interests of which it was framed in order to minimize the cost of administration. If, after an election to administer is filed, further assets are discovered which raise the value of the estate above that previously estimated, it is provided by statute that, if the increased value does not exceed £600, no further action in regard to obtaining a grant of administration is required, but where the increased value exceeds £600, the Public Trustee is required to file in the Supreme Court a memorandum stating this fact, and then to proceed in the ordinary way on a motion for probate or administration. It is interesting to see that the Committee set up by the Lord Chancellor in 1919 to inquire into the