

1899.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE

(REPORT RELATING TO THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The PUBLIC TRUSTEE to the Hon. the COLONIAL TREASURER.

SIR,—

Public Trust Office, Wellington, 14th April, 1899.

I have the honour to inform you that since my last report on this office, in 1897, its business has increased satisfactorily. The accounts which have been furnished under the provisions of the office Acts show the position of the office from year to year better than anything I can say. It is extremely satisfactory to be able to report that, notwithstanding the fall in interest, the general complaints as to the difficulty of finding satisfactory investments, and the fact that many of the old securities which were bearing a higher rate of interest than that ruling now have fallen in, the earnings of the office have been such as enabled it to maintain the rate of interest hitherto paid to its clients in respect of moneys in the common fund. This rate can still be maintained.

But little difficulty has been found in investing the office funds on satisfactory securities, and the reports I have received as to the various properties mortgaged to the office justify me in stating that I have no anxiety with regard to our mortgage investments, except in two cases, in one of which there is a possibility of damage to the security by flood, and in the other, although I believe the office would lose nothing, it might take a little time to realise. The interest, however, in both cases has been regularly paid, and I see no reason to anticipate any default being made. The amounts involved are small.

The conduct of the officers has, on the whole, been satisfactory, but two years' further experience confirms all that I stated in my last report as to the inconvenience arising from the present offices, and I beg to repeat all that I then said. They are inconvenient, expensive, and unsatisfactory in every way, and I feel bound to urge the necessity of change. The necessary money can be readily found by the office without expense to the country. Suitable sites in the city are every day becoming more difficult to acquire; and all that is necessary is that the clause in the draft Bill attached to my last report should become law.

The work done by the office is steadily increasing. Much of this is quite unremunerative, and is such that a private institution would not undertake. It is necessary to be done, however, by somebody, and, although it is a positive loss to the office, it has to be carried through. I allude particularly to the large number of small intestate and lunatics' estates; but I cannot suggest any means by which it can be avoided. On the other hand, work that the office has to do, and for which it is not remunerated, was alluded to in my last report, and I would again bring it under your notice, with a view to having the necessary alterations in the law made. That the public confidence in the office is increasing is shown by the increased number of estates which are voluntarily placed under its care; but perhaps the most satisfactory evidence of this is the fact that 742 persons now living have appointed the Public Trustee the executor of their wills, and have deposited those wills for safe custody with him.

Wherever there has been any prospect of business being done an agency has been opened, and there are now thirty-four agencies in the colony. Of these, seven have been opened within the last two years, and inquiries are being made with the view of opening others.

For the purposes of comparison I continue the tables previously published to the end of the last financial year.

The work of the West Coast Settlement Reserves is going on smoothly, and fresh land is from time to time being taken up. I do not anticipate that there will ever be complete satisfaction either on the part of the Natives or the European tenants, because the Natives will not be content unless they can convert their land into money, and the Europeans will not be content until they can convert their leaseholds into freeholds. Small difficulties must of necessity occasionally arise, but I have not received of late complaints of any importance.