

A special non-profit scale of charges for administering the estates of deceased soldiers has also been established. In estates under £400 the Public Trustee does not, as is the case with a private trustee, require to take out probate or letters of administration, entailing the cost of Court fees and solicitors' charges. The Public Trustee, in lieu of such procedure, simply files an election to administer at a total cost of 3s. This is of great advantage to soldiers' estates, which are usually of modest amount. The office charges nothing for handling military pay, and charges only 1 per cent. on the other assets. There is no charge for legal services. This arrangement has been the means of administering some hundreds of soldiers' estates at purely nominal cost.

The Public Trust Office has also made arrangements to act as attorney or agent for soldiers, with power to pay allowances, insurance premiums, &c. A nominal fee of 10s. 6d. or £1 1s. a year, according to the work to be done, is charged, and interest is allowed on any moneys held by the Public Trustee under the agency. Many hundreds of soldiers have availed themselves of this arrangement, and I desire in the interests of the soldiers that the existence of the privilege should be widely known.

#### GOVERNMENT LIFE INSURANCE DEPARTMENT.

The outbreak of the war and the heavy casualties suffered by the New Zealand Forces have naturally caused a large increase in the claims under policies in the Government Insurance Department, and war claims to date have been received in respect to 295 policies, representing £63,433 assured.

The Department's policies issued prior to the war were and are free from any restrictions, so practically nothing in extra premiums has been received in respect to these policies. For new insurances in the case of those joining the Forces engaged in the war an extra premium at the rate of £7 10s. per cent. per annum on the sum assured is now being charged, but, unfortunately, up to the present time the mortality has been about 12½ per cent., and the extra premium should therefore be at least £12 for each £100 of insurance. Until the Department has had some further experience it is not proposed, however, to increase the extra rate.

At the time of the earlier casualties some uncertainty arose as to the proper attitude for the Department to take up in connection with the settlement of claims under policies on the lives of soldiers dying at the seat of the war. The difficulties more particularly arose in respect of the smaller claims. It may be mentioned that the Department is empowered by law to settle claims under policies assuring £200 and under without requiring administration to be taken out. In the case of policies over that amount probate or letters of administration are necessary. When settlement is effected without administration, evidence has, of course, to be produced to show that the deceased policyholder has left no will, or that if a will is forthcoming it is the last will. In view of the special facilities in the matter of the execution of wills after leaving New Zealand afforded to soldiers, it was finally decided to ask for administration in the case of all war claims irrespective of the amount assured; and, as it has been felt that the expenses attendant upon this course might perhaps press unduly upon small estates, the Department now pays the Court fees in respect of death-claims where the sum assured is £200 and under, and where administration would not be otherwise necessary. It should be added that there are two classes of war claims—(a) where the military authorities certify that the soldier has been actually killed, and (b) where they certify that the soldier is believed to be killed. In both cases the Department raises no difficulty as regards admission of the claim and payment of the sum assured if administration is granted by the Court.

#### STATE FIRE INSURANCE.

The year 1915 has proved the most prosperous in the history of the State Fire Insurance Office. The income amounted to £76,299, as compared with £67,693 for 1914. The net profits, after placing an additional £1,000 to Investment Fluctuation Reserve and an additional £2,608 to Unearned Premium Reserve, amounted to £25,652, as against £18,660 for 1914.

The total of accumulated funds at the close of 1915 amounted to £116,684, as compared with £87,423 at the close of 1914.