

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 27TH JANUARY, 1880.

The Rev. Dr. STUART re-examined.

1. *Rev. W. E. Mulgan.*] You wish to give further evidence as to the management of the Museum estate at Dunedin?—Yes; the evidence of Professor Hutton on pp. 335 and 341 of your Blue Book appearing to the Council of the University of Otago to considerably misrepresent their action as Trustees and Governors of the Otago Museum, and to unfairly charge them with incompetence and negligence in administering their trust, they expressed the wish that I should ask for an opportunity of laying before you a brief account of their proceedings in reference to the institution in question. I need scarcely say that I do not charge Professor Hutton with any intentional misrepresentation. So far from being negligent of the interests of the Museum, the Council of the University, having a due appreciation of the services of Professor Hutton as Curator and Lecturer, and finding that, owing to political changes, his position was not so satisfactory as they deemed desirable, appointed him Professor of Natural History and Curator, on 13th February, 1877, at an additional annual outlay to the University of £400, at a time when prudence would have counselled fuller consideration. As soon as the Council got information of the passing of the Act securing the modest endowment for the Museum for which they stipulated before taking it over, they appointed a Museum Committee to formally take over the institution and make the necessary arrangements for its working. At the first meeting of that Committee the question of the sum of £295 3s. 1d., to which Professor Hutton's evidence (6776) refers, came up for consideration. It was found that this sum had been advanced by the Curator, in the interests of the Museum, out of his own funds, without the cover of a Parliamentary vote. The Committee considered that in equity the money was due to the Curator, and accordingly repaid him, hoping to be reimbursed by the Government. I may say that the Government Auditor had difficulty in passing this item in our accounts, because of the want of authority. Afterwards the Government paid directly to Captain Hutton the sum of £119 14s. 8d. in Treasury bills. This amount was in reduction of the £295 3s. 1d., and was passed on by Captain Hutton to the Treasurer of the University. Professor Hutton is mistaken when he says that the Council never made any attempt to get the balance. I will refer to this point further on. The Committee, at its first meeting, further arranged to meet the working expenses of the Museum on condition that new purchases should be suspended till the endowment became available. The financial condition of the University left the Committee no alternative. It was, however, known that the Curator had sources of occasional revenue which would, in the circumstances, be useful. For example, in one year he received from the Institute £66 10s. 8d; from sale of duplicate Museum articles, £53 17s. 6d., and duplicate books, £25 : total, £145 8s. 2d. With regard to Professor Hutton's statement that sixteen months' rent was lost, such a statement must have been made in ignorance of the facts. The leases did expire at the date he mentions, that is to say, in the case of the large run, in March, 1878, and in the case of the smaller one in March, 1879. But the lessees paid to the Government their assessments on the former run to 1st October, 1878, and on the latter to 1st March, 1879; and in both cases the rent under the new leases began on the 1st January, 1879, instead of 1st May, 1879, as Professor Hutton stated. Instead, therefore, of the land being held sixteen months rent free, the fact is that the larger run only was held free, and that for three months only. I shall account for this interval presently. As to that part of the assessment which the Government received after the passing of the Act, the Council made several efforts to induce the Government to pay this over and at the same time to reimburse the balance of the £295 3s. 1d. which has been so often referred to. The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Mr. Strode interviewed Mr. McLean, then holding a portfolio, and another deputation interviewed Mr. Macandrew, when a Minister, to urge the refunding of these sums. The Ministers reminded the deputations of the valuable endowment, and of the liberality of the Government to the School of Mines, and refused to give any promise. I may here be allowed to say that I wrote to my friends in Parliament soliciting their good services in these matters. Then as to the delay in the leasing of the endowment. In June, 1878—I think June was the month—the Council met to consider the leasing of the endowment and the conditions of sale. The result was the appointment of a Committee with power to act. At a subsequent meeting the Committee advised postponement on account of the times and the season. Mr. Donald Reid, their agent, and Messrs. Strode and Harris, who all knew the country, urged this course. The endowment was advertised in August, but Mr. Reid, having made personal inspection of it, counselled an application to Government for alteration of the boundaries without affecting the acreage, in the interests of the Museum and adjoining runholders. The Council accepted the suggestion—but this involved delay. The Government having reported that their Attorney-General advised that the alteration desired could not be effected without an Act of Parliament, a lease for fourteen and one-third years, from 1st January, 1879, was offered at auction, and realized an annual rental of £916 13s. 4d. This was fully £300 in excess of the rent expected in June previous, so that there was ample compensation for the delay. Immediately after the sale of the lease of the Museum Reserve, the Museum Committee held a meeting to make arrangements consonant with this improved financial condition. Professor Hutton assured them that £600 a year would be sufficient provision for the Museum. This sum was at once granted, and also the outstanding scores were wiped out. I observe that Professor Hutton's evidence gives countenance to the idea that the Committee and Council were not very cordial

Rev. Dr. Stuart.

Jan. 27, 1880.