

Examination of books and records continued.

Mr. Macdonald reported that he had paid a visit to New Plymouth, and inspected the Public Trust agency there. He went into the question of the West Coast Settlement Reserves with Mr. Rennell. Mr. Rennell admitted that it was quite hopeless to expect to manage those reserves with the existing legislation, and he could not very well see what new legislation would alter the present state of things. Prior to Sir William Fox going into the matter, the Natives had leased to Europeans certain large areas of land in the Taranaki District. When the award was made by Sir William Fox they discovered that, possibly, out of thirty Natives who had given the original lease to the Europeans, only two or three of them had anything to do with the block, and that possibly a hundred Natives might be interested in the business. The leases were maturing. The European lessees had spent large sums of money in developing the property, and wanted new leases. There had been a constant fight going on as to how to adjust the position. Certain Native signatures had been obtained to the new leases, certain other Natives disagreeing therewith. It was the old story of European syndicates, some wishing to realise, and the others to hold on. That difficulty was accentuated by having to deal with a large number of Maoris, and all these leases were stuck up for that very reason. Mr. Rennell asked him what he should do. He had received a copy of the Commissioners' memorandum about the duties of officers of the department. He did not quite understand whether he had to give his own opinions. He (Mr. Macdonald) told him "Yes; the Commissioners intend you should do that. Supposing the Commissioners find out that certain reforms were necessary which you knew and failed to mention, it would necessarily affect their minds as to capacity for post; and therefore be as frank as possible." Mr. Rennell said he did not know that there was anything which he could say, but would think the matter over. It seemed to him (Mr. Macdonald) that the Commissioners would be in a better position to judge of the necessity for visiting agencies after they had received the reports from these officers. He could gather from what he saw at New Plymouth that the Commissioners would have to be guided by these reports. Mr. Rennell appeared to be thoroughly familiar with the working of the department there. He was a Maori scholar, and apparently had the confidence of the Natives in and about the district. Mr. Rennell had made certain suggestions to the Public Trustee about payment to the Natives.

Resolved, That the Public Trustee be requested to furnish to the Commission a balance-sheet made up to the 31st March, 1891, and, in order to avoid delay, the audit of the Audit Department will be dispensed with.

Resolved, That the Public Trustee be requested to furnish with the audited balance-sheet up to the 31st of December, 1890, as soon as it can be prepared, a detailed statement or statements showing how each amount standing in the debtor and creditor columns of the balance-sheet is made up.

The Commission adjourned at 5 o'clock.

FRIDAY, 3RD APRIL, 1891.

The Commission met at 10 a.m.

Present: The Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, C.M.G. (Chairman), A. Loughrey, Esq., and T. Kennedy Macdonald, Esq., M.H.R.

Examination of books and records continued.

Resolved, That a return be prepared by the Public Trustee of all estates unclosed on the 31st December, 1890, setting out the following details: (a.) Name of estate. (b.) Assets in estate, detailing—(1) Freehold and leasehold properties, where situate, property-tax valuation, and present rental if let; (2) all property, of whatever nature, other than freehold and leasehold estate. (c.) Annual revenue derivable from properties in estate. (d.) Claims against estate, detailing—(1) creditors' unpaid accounts; (2) annuities; (3) maintenance of lunatics, minors, &c. (e.) Balances to credit of estates. (f.) How such balances are to be dealt with, detailing names of legatees and their proportionate shares; names of heirs-at-law, &c. Such return to be in separate divisions, so far as the provincial districts are concerned, and the estates to be classed in alphabetical order, as intestate, lunatic, &c.

The Commission adjourned at 5 o'clock.

SATURDAY, 4TH APRIL, 1891.

The Commission met at 10 a.m.

Present: The Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, C.M.G. (Chairman), T. Kennedy Macdonald, Esq., M.H.R., and A. Loughrey, Esq.

Examination of books and records continued.

Resolved, That the following advertisement be inserted in the daily newspapers in Wellington, and in all other parts of the colony where agencies of the Public Trust Office exist: "Public Trust Office.—Important notice.—The Royal Commission now sitting in the City of Wellington, having regard to the working of the Public Trust Office, will commence to take evidence in the course of next week. Any person desirous of bringing any matter of interest and importance before the Commissioners may communicate with them by letter or otherwise, addressed to the Chairman of the Commission, at the Public Trust Office, Wellington.—By order of the Commissioners. J. GRATTAN GREY, Secretary to the Commission.—Wellington, 4th April, 1891."

A letter was received from Walter Dignan, Esq., solicitor, Auckland, drawing attention to a matter in connection with the balances paid into the Public Trust Office under section 41 of "The Rating Act, 1882." The secretary was instructed to acknowledge receipt of the letter, and to inform Mr. Dignan that the matter referred to would receive due attention at the hands of the Commissioners.