

PART II.

WEDNESDAY, 8TH APRIL, 1891.

Mr. ROBERT CHISENHALL HAMERTON examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Hamerton, I would like to say this: that, as we have gone through the books as far as we can up to the present time, we have determined now to begin the taking of evidence, and we think it right to commence with you first, as head of the department. Perhaps it might be well, if you desire to do so, that you should have the opportunity to make any explanation or statement you may have to offer, as it is the wish of the Commissioners to afford you free scope in that direction. Therefore, if you so desire, the Commissioners think that in the first instance ample opportunity should be afforded you?—There is a very large number of facts that I want to bring before the Commissioners. I have a list of twenty or thirty suggestions which I desire to submit to the Commissioners, which if adopted will make the working of the office run more smoothly than it can do under existing legislation.

2. First of all, then, let me ask you what is your position?—I am the Public Trustee of the Colony of New Zealand.

3. You are the head of the Public Trust Office?—Yes.

4. When did you join the office?—In July, 1880.

5. And how long have you been in the public service altogether?—I joined the public service on the 4th April, 1865. Four days ago twenty-six years of service were completed.

6. What was your occupation in the public service before you accepted your present position as Public Trustee?—Immediately before, I was Secretary for Stamps. On the 4th April, 1865, I was appointed clerk in the Sub-treasury at New Plymouth. In January, 1867, I was appointed Stamp Clerk in addition, under the Act of 1866. At the end of that year the office of clerk to the Sub-treasury was abolished, and I was therefore Stamp Clerk only. The local Stamp Office was then under the charge of the Registrar of Deeds at New Plymouth, and I used to work also in the Deeds Registration Office. Early in 1868 the Registrar of Deeds, Mr. Samuel Popham King, became very weak in health, and he asked me to take so much charge as it was possible for me to take of the Deeds as well as of the Stamp Office at New Plymouth. I did so. Mr. King became gradually weaker. Eventually he resigned, and I was appointed to be Registrar of Deeds, Deputy-Commissioner of Stamps, Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and Registrar of Joint-stock Companies. That was in August, 1868. I continued those duties until March, 1871. The Land Transfer Act of 1870 had been passed, and the Government had decided that none but solicitors should hold office as Registrars. I was not then a solicitor of the Supreme Court. The consequence was that the late Mr. William Sefton Moorhouse, who was then Registrar-General of Land, came up to New Plymouth in order to dislodge me, stating, of course, the reason for doing so. Mr. Moorhouse examined the books and records of the department, was satisfied with them, and told me that he would, if I wished, obtain an appointment for me in Wellington. I had been offered from the Colonial Secretary's Department an appointment in Invercargill. I was very loth to leave New Plymouth, but there was no help for it, and I came down to Wellington, Mr. Moorhouse being a fellow-passenger. He made his report to Mr. (now Sir William) Fox, who was then Premier. The result of it was that I was appointed Deputy-Registrar of the Supreme Court in Wellington, at £200 a year. That was on the 28th March, 1871. I was almost immediately afterwards appointed Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, at a salary of £75, which was shortly afterwards increased to £100. That was in addition to the other salary of £200. I occupied the position of Deputy-Registrar until, I think, the 17th November, 1874, when I was appointed Secretary to the Stamp Department by the Hon. Mr. Reynolds, who was then Commissioner of Stamps, at a salary of £500 a year. The appointment was probationary, and was confirmed in the following February. In 1877, I think it was, I was appointed to the financial charge of the Land Transfer and Deeds Registration offices. The Registrar-General retained, of course, his position, and administered the Act, but I had everything financial put in my hands for the purpose of effecting certain economies which it was then thought were needed. That was under the Hon. Mr. Ballance, who was then Minister. Mr. G. B. Davy was Registrar-General of Land. In consequence of this further duty cast upon me an additional salary of £50 was given; and, with increases, the salary amounted in 1879 to £650 a year. I was appointed Public Trustee when Mr. Jonas Woodward retired in June, 1880.

7. When was the Public Trust Office established?—The Public Trust Office was established under the Public Trust Office Act of 1872, and the duties commenced from the 1st January, 1873, Mr. Jonas Woodward being appointed from the Treasury as Public Trustee. He resigned in June, 1880, and I was appointed to succeed him, and to perform the duties of the office in conjunction with the Stamp, Land Transfer, and Deeds Registration Departments. I was appointed on the 8th July, 1880. The salary was £800 a year, but it was then subject to the 10-per-cent. reduction which obtained throughout the service, so that the net salary was £720. That reduction only lasted for a year and a half, or thereabouts. In 1881—I forget the month, but in consequence of the tremendous pressure upon myself, and of representations made to the then Ministry (Sir Harry Atkinson, I think, was Premier, but I am not quite sure)—the Government relieved me of the charge of the Stamp, Land Transfer, and Deeds Registration