

Office?—No; my duties here are not professional. For instance, if I were to bring up and show you now the papers awaiting me it would really give you a better idea than anything I could *viva voce*. The position is exactly this: I am not in the office, and yet I have the run of the office. I have no clerk under me, and yet every clerk is at my call, and if I choose to give any direction it is supposed to be as implicitly followed as the Public Trustee's direction, and I act independently of him when I think fit; but, on the other hand, I never attempt to assume, or pretend to do, what is beyond my province.

2301. The Commissioners have already had before them the head of the office, Mr. Hamerton; the second in command, Mr. De Castro; the third in command, Mr. Moginie: now, where do you come?—I consider myself second. If the Public Trustee were out of the office, and no official head present, I assume the position, though I do not interfere in the working of the office. But I am the person to go to a Minister, and have had to sign on my own responsibility more than once. It is a defect in the statutory framing of the office. When the Trustee is absent, there is no one else to represent the office, and I act in his place when called upon. Therefore, since I have been here, I have had to go to Ministers and do things just on my own responsibility.

2302. Apart from your long and valuable experience, have you ever had any experience commercially, or in a general way of business, outside of what you have been brought into contact with as a lawyer?—No. I have never been in any other line of business; but I contracted for the Government of Victoria for three years in reindexing all deeds in the Registry of Deeds, and then I had the run of the Registrar-General's Department.

2303. And of course your long and varied experience as a solicitor has given you a considerable insight into matters of business generally?—I consider I know in a general way almost everything. I do not understand book-keeping, but books are no mystery to me. I do not understand merchants' buying and selling and rigging the market, as it is called, but I can understand what is meant and can follow anything that comes before me, and gauge a claim and gauge the probabilities of success at the start of an action as well as almost anybody.

2304. So far as professional knowledge is concerned in your position in this office, has your time been anything like fully employed in the direction of using that knowledge?—Yes, because the office itself is so exceptional. I am always full to the brim, but for the last few months I do not run over. In six weeks or two months I may have once two hours of idleness. It has taken me one full working-day's steady application to get the Board papers ready for this afternoon. There are ten deeds gone before them for execution. In every one of these ten deeds I had to satisfy myself that every antecedent circumstance connected with it was in order. I had to see that the titles were in order, that they agreed with the conditions of sale, that the wording of them was satisfactory, and then to summarise their history upon the Board paper.

2305. Could that only be done by an officer having a legal training?—I think it could not be done by anybody else. It would not necessarily take a solicitor, but it would take a good conveying clerk to do that. If I find there is anything I do not like I will not put it before the Board: I send it back.

2306. You are referring to the securities that come up for consideration?—No; these are deeds to be executed in reference to conveyances and discharges of mortgages, leases, &c.

2307. In other words, if you were not about they would have had to be referred to a solicitor's office?—Some of them. The Board will not execute any deed, if I am in the way, unless I will certify under my own hand that I advise its execution by them.

2308. And, if you were not there, the same form would have to be gone through in connection with the solicitor's part of the matter?—The Public Trustee used to do it, and would have to do it again. The Public Trustee had always done it before me.

2309. But he has never been in active practice as a solicitor?—No.

2310. He has never had any experience as a solicitor?—He has had no practical experience.

2311. Then, you advise on many matters and on any matter requiring legal advice?—On anything referred to me, no matter what. The legal advice is a small part of the matter. If any difficulty arises I am asked, "What do you think of it?" There may be very little law about it, but the mere fact of its being referred requires an answer. I may give an instance which happened last week in the case of Wright, a lunatic, at Christchurch. That is a case of considerable difficulty. A daughter of the lunatic, entitled to maintenance-money out of the estate, wired by her solicitor to know if she could have some money, and the Public Trustee referred it to me. That, certainly, was not a legal question, but I had to look into a very thick pile of papers, and then I had to point out that the money had become divided into two branches. There was what was called estate-money and income-money. The estate-money arose from the balance of £1,300 raised under order of the Court, and there was an order of a subsequent date directing certain payments out of the estate; but this young woman's money was to come out of income. I found that estate and income, both being cash in the office, had become mixed, so I had to see what was best to be done. There was a sum in deficiency bills bearing interest, but part of it was income and might be realised. That was accountant's work; and it took me four hours to unravel the matter, reduce it to writing, get the clerk in to point out to him carefully how it ought to be arranged in future, in case of having to account when the lunatic himself died. That is not lawyer's work in any way, but I consider I never was brought here as a lawyer. The work was too much for the Trustee. The statutes allowed of no proper provision for a deputy, and so they created an office which should be a compound one—a general help, with legal knowledge.

2312. Do you think, in your professional position as office Solicitor, that it is desirable for an office like this to have a solicitor on its staff?—I do not think we could work without it; I do not think it is possible; there are so many little questions all day long.

2313. I will put it in another way. Have you considered whether it is apt to provoke jealousy in the direction of solicitors' firms who might be expected to give business to the Trust Office?—I