

2407. But there were many occasions when property was knocked down to you? And how many occasions do you remember when the property was knocked down to you?—I cannot say, I am sure.

2408. You admit that on a good many occasions it was knocked down to you?—Yes, but I have always given a fair price, and given more.

2409. How can you tell when property was knocked down to you that the auctioneer, catching your eye and seeing your eagerness to acquire certain articles—how can you say that he did not dwell as long as he otherwise would for another bid?—Because I think Captain Thomas was far too honest to do anything of the sort. I have known Captain Thomas since 1848.

2410. Captain Thomas was in Melbourne for some years?—He was. When I knew him he sailed from London for the Cape.

2411. Are you aware that he was in business in Melbourne for some years?—I am not.

2412. If I tell you he was carrying on business in Melbourne for some years, will you believe me?—I do not know his Melbourne experience. I lost sight of him for some years.

2413. Well, I happen to know, and do you think this: that the Supreme Court would permit a trustee to buy any part of his *cestui que* trust?—I do not know whether the Court would object or not. I see no harm in it, or I certainly would not have done it. It occurs to me I bought for Major Atkinson himself.

2414. In what position was Major Atkinson?—Premier.

2415. Can you give us the particulars of those purchases?—I bought one or two watches for him, but they were bought for him in a friendly way.

2416. I have not the slightest doubt but they were. Sir Harry Atkinson would oblige you?—I never had any private favour from Major Atkinson.

2417. Then how came you to buy certain articles of jewellery for Sir Harry Atkinson?—Because he asked me to do so.

2418. How long ago is it since this occurred?—Some years ago now.

2419. You are sure that Major Atkinson was in the Government then?—Yes. I only mention that to show you people do not think there is any harm in it. I always thought, at any rate, that Major Atkinson was one of the most honest men we have.

2420. I do not think any one would contradict you, so far as Major Atkinson is concerned?—He would not have asked me to do it if it was wrong. That is the reason he asked me.

2421. Did you ask him voluntarily, or point out to him that there were bargains to be picked up?—Certainly not. He asked me if there were any watches to be sold. He wanted some for his boys, and asked me to let him know when there was a sale of that kind of jewellery by the Public Trust Office.

2422. And you did let him know?—I did.

2423. And then did he ask you to buy certain watches?—Two watches, I think. They were for his boys.

2424. Did you ever buy anything else for Sir Harry Atkinson?—I do not think so; I do not recollect.

2425. What kind of watches were they?—Not particularly good ones.

2426. Silver or gold?—Silver.

2427. Did you ever buy any clothes for Major Atkinson?—No.

2428. Are you sure?—I am sure. I do not think there was anything beyond these watches.

2429. You never bought any blankets for him?—No.

2430. Did you ever buy a kit? You know what a kit means—say, an intestate's kit. Did you ever buy one right out?—No.

2431. You have told the Commissioners that you have made purchases for Sir Harry Atkinson and also for Mr. Hamerton. Do you remember any other officer in the public service you made purchases for?—I do not know whether I ever bought anything for any one in the office. I do not remember.

2432. Did you ever buy anything for any other Minister besides Sir Harry Atkinson?—No.

2433. Have you ever bought anything for any of the clergy of the parish?—No.

2434. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Would you tell us, Mr. De Castro, what is your general principle in the office in connection with taking possession of the property of intestate persons—that is, the personality. What is the *modus operandi*, suppose you hear the news of the death of a person in Wellington?—In Wellington we should send up a clerk immediately to the house, unless the police had already taken possession and had the effects positively in charge at the station. If not, we should send up the clerk in charge of the particular class of accounts, who would take an inventory, bring that inventory down here, lock up the house, and we should give instructions when the proper time came for the sale of the personality.

2435. That is your usual principle?—Yes.

2436. Is that ever varied or departed from?—Well, sometimes the police go for us, and obtain the effects of a person.

2437. Then, who is the clerk who usually has charge of that department?—The clerk in charge of that particular class of accounts. There were two clerks at one time in charge of intestate estates, one having charge of the estates of persons dying intestate, A to L, and the other M to Z. If a person died in either of these branches, the clerk in charge of that branch would be sent up to take possession of that estate. If Jones was the name of the intestate, the clerk in charge of A to L would go up, and if the name was Robinson the clerk in charge of M to Z would be sent up.

2438. Who is the clerk in charge of this department now?—Mr. Ronaldson has charge, with the assistance of Mr. Pyke.

2439. How long has Mr. Ronaldson been in charge?—Since Snythe left that would be twelve months.