

2625. *The Chairman.*] The Public Trustee leaves the control of the entire stock of jewellery to you?—Yes.

2626. He leaves you full scope to sell when you think fit?—No; I sell under his direction.

2627. How often do you take stock of this jewellery?—I think the last time I did it was about two years ago.

2628. *Mr. Loughrey.*] In the meantime has it not all been sold? You say you keep it twelve months?—Some, longer than that; generally two years.

2629. *The Chairman.*] Have you ever sold any jewellery within a shorter period than twelve months?—If the estate is in debt, we have sold it as soon as we knew the estate was insolvent.

2630. Now, I suppose any officer in the Public Trust service in Wellington can get a sight of this jewellery by asking your kind permission?—If it is going to be sold, he can.

2631. Then, before it is going to be sold I presume it is taken out of your safe and put on a table?—On my own table. It never leaves me.

2632. Then any officers on the staff can inspect that jewellery?—If they wish to.

2633. How long does it lie on your table?—No longer than is absolutely necessary for making out a memorandum for the auctioneer.

2634. I suppose for half a day?—No, not as a rule. If there is a quantity—say a dozen watches—it takes some little time to enumerate them and write memoranda to the auctioneer.

2635. It is on the table for an hour at all events?—Yes.

2636. Then I suppose there generally is a gathering and an inspection of it by the officers who may want any article?—If a man wants anything, he comes and asks me to let him see it, and I let him have it.

2637. Then, it has become a custom of the office, when there is going to be a sale of jewellery, from the Public Trustee downwards, to inspect that jewellery, and, if any officer should want any of it, to give time to make their arrangements for the purchase of any article at auction. For unless they go there themselves, they must make arrangements?—Yes, that is so.

2638. Do not let us have any doubt about this matter, because I view it, perhaps, more seriously than you appear to do?—All jewellery before sale, no matter whether it is a single watch, goes to Mr. Hamerton for his inspection, to show what is going to be sold.

2639. Then Mr. Hamerton, as Public Trustee, has the first inspection?—He sees it first.

2640. He has first choice?—Yes.

2641. Not to put too fine a point on it, he has first choice?—Yes.

2642. That fact gives him the opportunity of first declaring whether he would take the lot or whether he would like any particular thing or not?—Yes.

2643. And, if he does, he would ask Mr. De Castro to buy it for him?—Yes.

2644. Do you know whether Mr. Hamerton has ever attended an auction himself, and bought anything himself in the room?—No, he has not.

2645. Not to your knowledge?—No.

2646. This book gives very scant particulars as to the receipts by your office of personal effects, or of their disposition, and of the articles of jewellery disposed of?—Yes; it says, "Sold by Thomas, at such-and-such a date," and then you refer to the record.

2647. *Mr. Loughrey.*] If you have no inventory, what check have you on the auctioneer?—We send an inventory to the auctioneer.

2648. Why is there not a copy of the inventory attached to Dallan's estate papers?—There is no inventory attached to them. As a rule, I write a memorandum to the auctioneer, and keep a copy of it on the papers.

2649. *The Chairman.*] It is not so in Dallan's estate. You say that unless an estate is in debt you keep the jewellery for about two years?—For twelve months, as a rule. We generally exceed that, and it is kept for two years.

2650. In Dallan's estate there were funds in hand?—The debts amount to £39 16s. 2d.

2651. The debts were not pressing?—The debts are always considered pressing by creditors.

2652. You did not sell the jewellery for fifteen months?—We did not need the proceeds of the jewellery to pay the debts.

2653. Does Mr. Hamerton ever ask for this private book of yours to inspect it?—No.

2660. You are solely in control of this important part of the Public Trust Office business—the jewellery business?—Yes.

2661. *Mr. Loughrey.*] What lapse of time takes place after an estate comes into your hands before you pay creditors?—Of course, it all depends. If we know the estate is perfectly solvent the Public Trustee can pay if he chooses; but he avails himself very generally of the executor's year.

2662. So that, although creditors may be pressing, the Public Trustee does not pay them until the end of the executor's year?—Not as a rule.

2663. *The Chairman.*] When Sir Harry Atkinson asked you to buy those watches for him, why did he particularly ask you?—Because he knew me.

2664. Why did he not ask the head of the office, the Public Trustee—I suppose he knows him too?—Yes, very well.

2665. Perhaps he asked you because you were the general and principal jeweller of the Public Trust Office?—I do not know that he did not ask me through Mr. Hamerton. I believe he did. I believe he sent me a message through Mr. Hamerton.

2666. Then, you believe that when you were asked to buy those watches for Sir Harry Atkinson the intimation came through Mr. Hamerton?—I think so.

2667. I was going to ask you whether within your knowledge any other officer or person employed in any branch of the public service, or any other Minister of the Crown, made purchases of any articles belonging to estates which were being realised?—Not that I know of. Sir Harry