

carted away to the Destructor and burned by one of our clerks—a matter which we were not aware of until some little time after it occurred.

2762. What was the name of that clerk?—I do not think that is worth while mentioning. I do not wish to enter into questions of difficulty with our clerks. I think my statement quite sufficient, that these books were destroyed in the Destructor.

2763. We might desire to get some information from that clerk?—I do not think that is a matter which comes within the scope of the Public Trust. I have not much objection to give his name, but I do not think it is a matter which concerns outside individuals.

2764. The Commissioners are the best judges of the information they want to get?—The information you have from me is, that one of our clerks destroyed these books, including some very valuable books.

2765. Is he in your service now?—No; we have dismissed him.

2766. Is he in Wellington?—No; he has left Wellington. I do not know whether he has left New Zealand.

2767. *Mr. Loughrey.*] Do you object to give the name of the clerk?—I do not care to rake up these old sores. I do not think it is necessary. Mr. Macdonald knows the name of the clerk. He knows we had some difficulties with one of our people.

2768. We do not want to go into your private affairs at all?—I do not wish to rake up these old sores connected with an unfortunate matter.

2769. *The Chairman.*] But we want you to bear this in mind: You have been in many instances agents for the Public Trustee in conducting auction-sales. All we want you to help us in is to give us information from time to time that we require?—Well, I think I have given you sufficient information in respect to that matter.

2770. *Mr. Loughrey.*] And do you state that the book containing sales on the 20th March, 1890, is burnt?—I cannot say that, but, seeing we should have to look up half-a-dozen books, including one of our ledgers, the accountant no doubt thinks the auction-book would be among them.

2771. Supposing we send you a list of dates of transactions made by you on which we want information, would you then be able to tell us?—I should be very happy and pleased if a clerk from the Public Trust Office would come over. We should show him every book we have in our possession. We shall be very glad to do that, but I do not wish to rake up these old troubles.

2772. *The Chairman.*] We do not wish to know anything of the trouble you have had with any of your *employés*?—Anything I can do in the way of exhibiting papers, I shall do with pleasure.

2773. We have complaints about estates which may have passed through your firm in the ordinary course of selling, and we wish to satisfy those complaints by ascertaining the way in which certain estates have been disposed of. We will send over a list of the things we require.

Mr. R. C. HAMERTON, Public Trustee, further examined.

2774. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Hamerton, since we last saw you, evidence has cropped up, in continuing our examination of your second officer in command, the Rev. Mr. De Castro, of rather a startling nature. That is to say, we gather from him that it has been the custom, since almost the Public Trust Office was established, to allow officers to attend auction-sales and buy portions of any estate in your hands for careful administration that is being sold by auction. Is that so?—I believe that has been so. I myself never issued any instruction upon it.

2775. Have you yourself ever purchased any article belonging to an estate?—I have asked the Chief Clerk to bid up to a certain amount for articles belonging to an estate.

2776. Then in that way you have acquired articles?—I have.

2777. And you have articles in your possession at the present time that have been so purchased?—Yes.

2778. Could you give a description of those several articles to the Commissioners?—I think I purchased three, perhaps four, gold watches and, I think, two silver watches.

2779. Did you ever buy any other article of bijouterie or jewellery?—I have an idea that there were two gold rings at one time.

2780. Both purchased on the same day?—Yes. They were very poor things, but they were called rings.

2781. Did you ever buy anything else?—Not that I am aware of.

2782. Did you ever buy any clothes?—No.

2783. The reason I ask you is because we find that the Rev. Mr. De Castro on one occasion bought a coat. So that the range of purchases by the officers is not altogether confined to jewellery?—No.

2784. Then, it was within your knowledge that the officers of the department were purchasing?—No, it was not within my knowledge. I did not know that any one was a purchaser. Well, when I say any one, I had an idea that Mr. De Castro purchased, because he did tell me he purchased some silver watches.

2785. Then, you did know that the second officer in command was purchasing?—Yes.

2786. Did you know that the third officer—Mr. Moginie—had also purchased?—No.

2787. Well, presuming you knew that Mr. De Castro was purchasing, and that you yourself had purchased, would you have objected to any other officer doing the same thing?—I should not.

2788. Do you remember the realisation by auction of part of the personalty in the estate of Mrs. Dallon?—I knew that realisation was going on, but I do not recollect the date.

2789. Well, there was a very nice ladies' gold watch sold among her effects?—Yes.

2790. And two rings?—I could not say. I know there was a gold watch.

2791. Do you remember the price those two rings you bought cost?—No; it was something very small.