

2821. And any officer desiring to possess any particular article would no doubt, in his own mind, appraise the value to the extent that he would bid?—No doubt.

2822. Did it never occur to you, from the many transactions of this class that you put in the way of George Thomas and Co., that if they were aware that you or any officer in the Public Trust Office desired to possess an article the auctioneer would not run you very hard for it?—It never struck me that the auctioneer would depart from his strict line of duty. I have too much faith in the auctioneers of Wellington to think the contrary.

2823. After all, it is a matter of degree, under such circumstances, as to how long he would dwell between bid and bid in selling by auction, particularly in small matters, where every five shillings or extra shilling would tell. Do you see it in that light?—I do not quite grasp your meaning.

2824. Well, if a watch was being sold, and the biddings were 5s., and Messrs. Thomas and Co. knew that you or some officer in the Public Trust Office desired to possess that watch, and the Rev. Mr. De Castro was seen bidding for that watch on behalf of you, is it not possible, and even likely, that Thomas and Co., catching the Rev. Mr. De Castro's keen eye, would not dwell so long as he might under ordinary circumstances?—I do not think so, because that would be against himself and against the commission charge.

2825. It would in that respect; but have you never known such things to have happened?—[No answer.]

2826. I ask you again, Mr. Hamerton, seeing that George Thomas and Co. apparently were the favoured firm that conducted such sales, whether, in the event of having a knowledge that any officer of the Public Trust Department desired to possess a particular article, they would be likely to run the bidding against that officer in order that the article should not be knocked down to him?—I really do not see that it should make any great matter.

2827. Do you consider you have a fair knowledge of the world and the ways of the world?—Well, I cannot boast of very extended knowledge. My life has been spent inside an office mostly; but George Thomas and Co. were not dependent on the Chief Clerk at all for sales. They went there without the interference of the Chief Clerk, or without any intimate knowledge on my part of George Thomas. It was a pure matter of business that I directed these sales to go to George Thomas, because they were very small, and from Mr. Woodward's time he used to take these small sales. He had not the selling of land. I do not know that he ever sold landed property for the office.

2828. I notice that many of these what you call small sales run up to £100. This very estate of Mrs. Dallon is nearly £150; so they are not such small sales. Supposing you or any officer in the Public Trust Office asked one of Thomas and Co.'s clerks to buy an article for you, do you think then that the officer who asked Thomas and Co.'s clerk to buy that article would get no advantage?—Quite likely he would.

2829. If I tell you that that proceeding has been practised frequently, would you think that estates got justice?—No.

2830. Mr. De Castro also stated that he has had occasion, by your request, to buy watches for Sir Harry Atkinson, when he was Major Atkinson and Premier. Do you remember Major Atkinson asking you to arrange that piece of State business?—No. He did tell me about a watch, and I asked Mr. De Castro to see him about it.

2831. And are you aware that Mr. De Castro took up certain watches for approval to Major Atkinson?—I think he mentioned it to me that he did so.

2832. Then, you are aware that Major Atkinson did approve of the watches, and authorised a certain price to be paid?—No; I am not aware of that.

2833. Are you aware the watches were bought for him?—I was not aware it was more than one.

2834. Then, you were aware that one was bought for him?—Yes.

2835. You are not aware that two were bought?—No. I do not say they were not.

2836. You know, then, that one was, and the negotiation first took place through you and the Rev. Mr. De Castro?—I cannot call it a negotiation.

2837. You intimated to the Rev. Mr. De Castro that Major Atkinson would like to have a watch?—I think that was so.

2838. Well, now, do you not think that in all such cases any officer in the Public Trust service at the Head Office does not get a special advantage in being able to see these articles, whether of much or little value, in the first instance?—Yes; no doubt that is an advantage.

2839. For instance, when you advertise a batch of personalty of that class you do not name the estate to which it belongs?—I do not think it has been the practice to name the estate, except where there was a considerable quantity of goods for sale.

2840. Have you ever named the estate or personalty where jewellery was concerned?—I cannot call one to mind.

2841. Now, this particular case of Mrs. Dallon: was that estate named?—I cannot say without looking the matter up.

2842. Well, it was not named: will you believe that?—Yes.

2843. Well, supposing any friends of Mrs. Dallon desired to possess any of the articles of jewellery belonging to her estate, how would they know or find out when they would have the opportunity of buying at auction when you do not name the estate?—They could not, of course. Whenever persons have expressed a wish to purchase I have requested my agent to give such persons notice when the sale would be; but in the absence of such request I must agree there could be no intimation.

2844. In Mrs. Dallon's estate, here is a letter from one William Leslie Morrison, dated the 7th April, 1891: "Sir,—Would you kindly let me know if the jewellery in the estate of the late Mrs. N. Dallon is to be sold yet, as I arranged with the Rev. Mr. De Castro to send me word when