

possessed of a surplus, why should the personalty be sold, contrary to his wish, for a mere fraction of its real value? Why should the natural and affectionate request of a son to obtain his mother's jewellery and personal effects be treated with contempt and insult? And yet all this has been done by the chief officers of the Public Trust Office. And, more than all this, after refusing, without the slightest justification in law or in equity, to hand over to a son his mother's watch, what can be thought of the action of the Public Trustee, who, not long after such refusal, sent this watch and other jewellery into the auction-room, and purchased the very watch as a birthday present for his daughter? Is this an evidence that no "estate has suffered the loss of a farthing by this irregularity"? But why pursue the unsatisfactory topic? The revelations on this subject to be found in the evidence are of the most heartrending character, and conclusively prove that the chief officers of the Public Trust Office had become so demoralised by the practice of such "irregularities" as to be incapable of understanding the gross impropriety of their conduct. It is very curious that they should have found a solitary defender in the officer charged by Parliament with the duty of control and audit, and who of all men in the Civil Service should have held high the standard of honour and good conduct.

THE CHARACTER OF THE EXAMINATION.

Mr. FitzGerald is good enough to discuss the manner and method adopted by the Chairman in connection with the examination of the witnesses. That manner and method has not commended itself to Mr. FitzGerald. The Commissioners had no expectation that it would. As has already been stated, Mr. FitzGerald grew angry when he personally was under examination. He winced terribly when exposed to the pertinent fire of questions connected with his neglect of duty, and endeavoured to shelter himself behind a barrier that he raised by saying that the Commissioners were hostile to every one who came before them. The very opposite was the case. The Commissioners had no hostile feelings towards either the Public Trust Office or the Audit Department. Every officer that came before them and gave his evidence frankly and honestly was treated with the greatest courtesy and consideration. When the Commissioners, however, found a witness prevaricating, and indisposed to assist the investigation, they knew how to act with him, and acted accordingly.

The Commissioners are not responsible for the wretched character of the book-keeping in the Public Trust Office; Mr. FitzGerald is. He now admits, "There is no question that the scheme of book-keeping in the Public Trust Office is unsatisfactory." It should not have been left to a Royal Commission to ascertain that fact, and to get it admitted by the Audit Department. Had Mr. FitzGerald, as Auditor-General, done his duty, and personally inspected the books of so great a department, instead of leaving them for many years without examination, he would have seen the necessity for calling attention to a reform in the method of keeping the accounts, and this grave scandal would never, in all probability, have arisen. His neglect in this respect is the more inexcusable as he visited the Public Trust Office once a week, and went through the form of signing his name to the correctness of the cash-book and the accuracy of the cash balance, when he had never personally examined either the one or the other.

Now, with respect to the special incidents in connection with the examination to which Mr. FitzGerald refers.

The Commissioners knew nothing of Mr. Hamerton's illness. They were aware that Mr. Hamerton was naturally a good deal worried towards the middle and close of the examination, in consequence of the complete *exposé* of the weakness of his administration. Was Mr. Hamerton incapacitated from daily attending to his duties in the Public Trust Office? Did he ever consult a doctor with a view to obtaining a certificate of his inability to give evidence, and was the certificate granted? If so, the Commissioners know nothing of it. They are, however, not surprised to now learn that Mr. Hamerton has suffered in health from the nature of the inquiry. The marvel would be that he should be strong and robust after he had learnt the full history of his management of the Public Trust Office as revealed in the evidence. While the Commissioners regret that Mr. Hamerton's health appears now to be impaired, there was no apparent evidence of weakness in that respect while the investigation was proceeding.

As to the statement that either Mr. Hamerton or any other witness was refused an opportunity to revise his evidence, it is absolutely untrue. A proof-slip of the evidence given by each witness was forwarded to the witness, with a request that he would revise it. In no single instance was this practice departed from with respect to officers in the Civil Service. A reference to the minutes and correspondence will prove this fact. It is a matter of regret