

PETITION.

The Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives.

The petition of James Barnes Heywood, Secretary to the Treasury; Robert Joseph Collins, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury; Thomas Francis Grey, acting for Under-Secretary of Defence.

1. It was recently alleged in Parliament that a payment of the sum of £76 4s. 9d. out of public moneys, for reorganizing Defence stores, had been made through the Chief Postmaster at Christchurch to Captain Seddon, an officer in the Permanent Forces of the colony, the date of such payment being the 9th June, 1904, and the number of the voucher 15819.

2. Your petitioners were asked by memorandum from the Right Hon. the Colonial Treasurer (who is also Defence Minister), to inquire and state whether such payment had been made.

3. From the books and records of the Defence Department and the Treasury your petitioners satisfied themselves that there was no such voucher or payment, and gave certificates accordingly; the Chief Postmaster at Christchurch also, by memorandum, stated that no such payment had been made by him.

4. In the course of their investigations your petitioners discovered a voucher for a payment by the Chief Postmaster at Christchurch to one Richard Sneddon, of the sum of £76 4s. 9d., the date of payment being the 9th June, 1904, and the number of the voucher 15819.

5. Thereupon it was stated in Parliament that in the previous allegation a mistake had been made as to the identity of the voucher; but that a payment of between £70 and £80 had, in fact, been improperly made to Captain Seddon in Christchurch for reorganizing Defence stores, and that a voucher for the payment existed, and had been seen.

6. At the request of the Right Hon. the Colonial Treasurer and Defence Minister your petitioners again made further search, and, after satisfying themselves on the point, gave certificates that no such voucher had been made and passed through the Treasury, and that no trace of any claim by or payment to Captain Seddon of any sum whatever for the reorganization of Defence stores could be found.

7. These certificates were laid before Parliament, but the allegation of the payment and voucher was reiterated, and it was also stated that it was not fair for the Premier to ask your petitioners to make a report upon such a matter, knowing perfectly well that it would prejudice their case to report in a manner adverse to the Premier.

8. Your petitioners feel strongly that such a statement involves a grave reflection on their integrity, as well as their independence. The system in force in connection with the issue of public moneys is so complete that if any such voucher or payment had been issued or made it could not fail to be discovered, even though the voucher itself had been destroyed. There was therefore no room for honest mistake on their part in the certificates they gave. They consequently feel that the statement in question amounts to a charge of deliberate dishonesty.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that, in order to give them an opportunity of vindicating themselves, the Controller and Auditor-General, who is an officer of Parliament, be directed to inquire and report to your honourable House whether the certificates in question are correct in substance and in fact, and whether any such voucher exists or was ever issued and passed through the Treasury, or any such payment was ever made.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will every pray.

JAS. B. HEYWOOD,

Secretary to the Treasury.

ROBERT J. COLLINS,

Assistant Secretary to the Treasury.

T. F. GREY,

Acting for the Under-Secretary for Defence.

DEAR SIR,—

Audit Office, Wellington, 14th August, 1905.

I shall be obliged if you will attend on me at my office here to-day at 11.30 a.m., and afford me all the information you have respecting the payment which is alleged to have been made to Captain R. J. S. Seddon, and as to which I am requested by the House of Representatives to inquire.

Yours, &c.,

J. K. WARBURTON,

Controller and Auditor-General.

F. M. B. Fisher, Esq., M.H.R.