

audits: an absurd answer given where the question was obviously misunderstood. The error was pointed out, but it stands uncorrected.

I find that the Chairman, addressing the Accountant of the Trust Office on the subject of the balance-sheet, asks him (Qn. 6496), "Is there any other term applicable to this balance-sheet than for me to say that it is a *cooked balance-sheet*?" Again, "Then, under those circumstances, do you still think the term *cooked balance-sheet* would not apply?" And when Mr. Moginie answered, "No, I do not think it would," Mr. Larnach replies, (Qn. 6502), "Well, I am sorry to differ from you. I am most strongly of opinion that it would apply, in the most forcible manner." And again, to the Sub-Accountant (Qn. 7476), "I, as Chairman of this Commission, will take the responsibility of applying the term; and I say that this and other balance-sheets preceding it were nothing more nor less than cooked balance-sheets." Such an expression, addressed to an officer in the service of the Government, holding a responsible position, and a man of well-known integrity of character, would, I take leave to say, have been, coming from any quarter, a gross impertinence; but coming from one "clothed with a little brief authority" as a Royal Commissioner, and addressed to a gentleman who was debarred by his position from making such a retort, verbal or physical, as the remark deserved, was a cowardly insult. It is only within the last two or three years that a man was found guilty by a jury in this colony, and was sent to gaol by the Chief Justice for six months, for using the very same words; and I should much like to know if the mantle of a Royal Commission entitles the wearer to violate the criminal law with impunity.

But there are other passages in this huge volume of evidence of a worse, because of a sadder, character. I call attention to the examination of witnesses (pages 124 *et seq.*), in the case of Mrs. ———. This poor lady died intestate. Her son wrote from Queensland to ask if his mother's watch might be rescued from sale and sent to him. The Public Trustee acted, all must admit, most unwisely. It appears that, from letters of the most confidential nature found with the deceased's effects, the Trustee had reason to believe that the son was illegitimate. It was not even certain that such was the case. However, the Trustee wrote to the young man to say that the watch should be sent on his proving his kinship to the deceased. Mr. Hamerton's action was harsh and even cruel. But what shall we say of the conduct of those who, for the sake of fixing a stigma on the Trustee, have not scrupled to publish the whole miserable story, and, whilst advocating the son's claim to an old watch, and expressing righteous horror at the manner in which he had been treated, have blazoned to the world the fact of his mother's frailty, and the stain on his own birth, which, even had he known it—for it is possible he may learn the truth for the first time from these papers—he would have given a thousand watches to have had concealed? The publication of this evidence in a public record will remain, if not cancelled, an indelible stain on the honour of the colony.

Again, I turn to page 186 of the evidence, and I find that the Commission had unearthed from amongst the papers a letter, sealed up and marked "Confidential." That they compelled Mr. Hamerton, who was before them, to break the seal and give it to them open. Mr. Hamerton—ill, utterly broken down by the long strain put upon him—unfortunately succumbed to pressure of a stronger will; and that letter—a letter written in the strictest confidence of private friendship from Mr. Martin to Mr. Hamerton—is actually published in the evidence. I believe that all who read that letter will agree with me in saying that every consideration of honour forbid its publication.

It may be said that a reference to these passages in the evidence was foreign to the purpose of this paper, which is a reply to the calumnies published against the Audit Office. I call attention to them because they entitle me to appeal to Parliament and the public against the judgment of men whose animus against the office whose affairs they were appointed to inquire into was so strong that they have displayed it by an unscrupulous use of the materials which came into their hands—by the production of confidential papers which every sentiment of delicacy and honour bound them to respect as such, and the publication of which could add nothing whatever to the task intrusted to them—namely, to recommend improvements in the administration of the Public Trust Office.

#### 9. *The Recommendation that the Audit-control should be removed.*

I am very far from saying that the work of the Audit is all that could be desired: no one is so well informed as myself as to its short-comings. But its inefficiency arises from the insufficiency of its staff, and until that staff is considerably increased its work will not be done in the manner the country has a right to expect. Half the time of one man is