

wonder, gentlemen, that the public were amazed that this thing was allowed to go on, or can you wonder at the public speaking out and forcing themselves to be heard in the public Press? Mr. Street goes on to say: "This part of the building has gone so bad lately that many of the doors have had to be taken off, and about 1½ in. taken off the bottom. Notwithstanding the filling-in of the archways and doorways in the verandah of the courtyard with brickwork, it is quite evident that the building is subsiding. The plaster-work in the ceiling of the verandah is decidedly dangerous. The walls of Nos. 2 and 3 wards are bulging outwards. In a bed-room over the mess-room in No. 2 Ward part of the wall appears to be falling inwards. In the upper corridor of No. 2 Ward the cracks in the ceilings and wall still gape. In No. 1 Ward, in Attendant Janet Paterson's room, the cracks are again showing. This ward is at right-angles to No. 2 Ward. I understand that the Public Works Department have these matters under consideration, and I trust the Government will see that something is done towards remedying this serious state of things?" Is it to be wondered at, I again ask, that the public should demand some sort of inquiry into this thing? I have a letter here which I wrote in answer to a letter that was published in the *Evening Star*, but I shall not trouble you by reading it.

*Mr. Blair*: Read it.

*Mr. Lawson*: I will read it if you like. It is dated the 6th December, and is as follows: "I do not wonder at 'Publico' writing as he does after reading the report of W. P. Street, Esq., the Deputy Inspector of Lunatic Asylums, as it appeared abridged in the *Times* of the 14th ultimo, because, while Mr. Street may describe therein quite correctly the condition of the part of the north wing of the building, as caused by the movement or slip of ground at that part, it still remains to be stated that the condition of the building so described is solely attributable to the movement or slip of ground referred to; and, further, that, with the exception of the portion of the building so affected, which, after all, is not more in proportion than the one-fiftieth part of the whole, the Seaciff Asylum building stands as firm and solid, and without any sign of settlement or movement throughout to-day, and is as likely so to stand, as any building in New Zealand. This statement I challenge any Inspector, Deputy Inspector, or, in fact, any other man, to contradict, who has eyes to see and head to comprehend what he sees. The reason why the movement of ground has occurred, causing the injury to the portion of the building so often referred to and commented on, is a matter worth looking into. All I will say meanwhile is that I personally endeavoured, but hitherto without success, to obtain a thorough examination both of the Seaciff buildings and surroundings. There have also been reasons for my silence hitherto which I trust all honourable men will understand and appreciate; but the time has come when I must guard my 'own honour and reputation,' as friend 'Publico' puts it, and in a few days I intend publishing a few letters which I trust will, at least, convince all those who are worth convincing that I, at least, have clean hands with regard to the 'serious state of things' at Seaciff referred to by the Deputy Inspector of Lunatic Asylums in his latest report." That is a letter which I should send again to-day if it were necessary to do so. Again I ask you, gentlemen, can you wonder that my long forbearance should yield to action, and that by publishing my letters as I did I took the first step which has led to the present inquiry? [*Mr. Blair*: Hear, hear.] I repeat that "Hear." I say that I published these letters in the teeth of Mr. Blair's private letter urging me not to do so. [*Mr. Blair*: Hear, hear, again.] He still wanted to smother it up.

*Mr. Blair*: Read that private letter.

*Mr. Lawson*: Certainly, if you wish me to do so. It is dated the 5th December, and is as follows: "*Re Seaciff*: I have not the slightest objection personally to the publication of the correspondence; but any official correspondence can only be published with the consent of the Minister, and the answers must go with the letters. I cannot, however, find any record of the letters you mention. Were they addressed to Mr. Ussher or myself? I cannot suppose they are private letters, for, of course, you would not think of publishing them. Not that I care much; but if they are published my answers must go along with them, and if I have not answered any of them I will do so now. Kindly send me copies of the letters you refer to before doing anything further in the matter." You will see from that, gentlemen, that I had had the politeness to inform Mr. Blair what I was going to do with these letters, and did not wish to take him by surprise. I knew perfectly well that there were no replies in existence. This is a very peculiar thing. Mr. Blair writes: "As an old friend, I would recommend you not to publish anything at present. You have already written Hislop on the subject, and you will possibly have another opportunity of 'saying your say.' Circumstances have arisen since I wrote my previous report of 1885, which had they been known then would have made the report as regards 'movement in foundations' a very different thing." I now come to what I think is the key to the whole thing. Mr. Blair proceeds: "You once wrote me a private letter *re Seaciff*, which I never answered. One reason for my silence was, the 'circumstances' above alluded to. I thought we could cope with the difficulties, and so close up the matter for ever. If, however, we have to bring the matter up afresh it will all be brought up, and for old friendship's sake I should deeply regret it." Having read that letter, I shall have to read my reply to it. I did not intend to disturb the Commissioners with this private correspondence, as I do not see the necessity of its introduction.

*Mr. Blair*: As you have already published private letters of mine, you may as well publish the whole of them.

*Mr. Lawson*: There is no necessity for that. However, so far as my private letters are concerned, my letter-book is already before you. I have placed it unreservedly in your hands, and you can look all through it. I have nothing to conceal. I replied on the 8th December as follows, and sent him a copy of my published letters next day: "Dunedin, 8th December, 1887.—W. N. Blair, Esq., Assistant Engineer-in-Chief, Middle Island.—Dear Sir,—I have your favour of the 5th instant, and in reply have to state that the letters I proposed to publish are not private letters, and to none of them have I ever received a reply from you. You inform me Mr. Hislop has acquainted you that I have written to him regarding Seaciff. The reason why I did so was because of Mr. Street's