

report on Seacliff appearing abridged in the *Daily Times* of the 14th ultimo. This caused great talk in Dunedin, and I was stuck up at every street-corner about it and blamed for the whole thing. I therefore resolved that I would publish my letter, and wrote you accordingly, also Hislop; and I see no reason for, but many reasons against, further delay. I shall be only too glad if this should have the result of 'bringing the whole matter up afresh.' I have nothing to lose but everything to gain in the truth being widely known. The building is there to speak for itself, and I know it to be the best building of the kind in New Zealand, in spite of the childish tittle-tattle fault-finding there has been about it in one quarter, and the damage done to it through ground-slip in another. As soon as the letters are published I will forward you a copy.—Yours truly, R. A. LAWSON. P.S.—The letters are addressed to yourself and not to Mr. Ussher.—R. A. L.” “Dunedin, 9th December, 1887.—W. N. Blair, Esq.—Dear Sir,—As promised, by same mail I forward you published copy of letters *re* ground-slip, Seacliff, originals of which were forwarded to you on dates of same. You do not inform me of the circumstances which have arisen since you wrote your report in 1885; but, whatever they may be, I do not suppose they have quite reversed the position, and I think it will be found to be rather a difficult undertaking to prove that the foundations have been the means of causing the ground to slip at the north wing of the Seacliff Asylum and neighbourhood. I have no doubt your own common-sense will lead you to take the right course in this whole matter now, and I am glad that in the present Government there are men who have practical knowledge as well as firmness and judgment, and I shall have no fear as to the ultimate result for good.—Yours truly, R. A. LAWSON. P.S.—I have no desire further in this whole matter than that a right understanding should exist as to the true position of affairs, and that the necessary work should be done to secure the building.—R. A. L.” You will notice, gentlemen, that in this letter of the 5th Mr. Blair tells me in one breath that there is not the slightest objection to the publication.

*Mr. Blair*: Not personally.

*Mr. Lawson*: The correspondence is here and speaks for itself. While he says that even were it printed he does not care much, yet on the other hand he recommends me not to publish anything at present, while he holds over me an implied threat, as the closing paragraph of the letter shows: “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.” Gentlemen, I want the truth, and I care not how long we may stay here if we arrive at that. As if there were some skeleton in the cupboard at Seacliff which is to be brought out in order to scare me into silence! I value Mr. Blair’s friendship, and have always done so, but I value yet more my own good name and my good conscience, and if the one stands in the way of the other, then Mr. Blair will have to give way, as far as I am concerned. I will defend my rights and my good conscience, no matter what the result may be to Mr. Blair. I learnt also from this letter of Mr. Blair’s the one patent fact that he does not even yet realise the vast importance of the agencies at work in the damage done and doing at the Seacliff building, so graphically but truly and forcibly described in Dr. Hector’s report, who, when referring to the smaller slip at the temporary building, says that “the northern part of it is constantly moving forward with an irresistible strain.” Dr. Hector, in his report, prophesied, in fact, that this northern part would move constantly forward with an irresistible strain unless carefully provided against; and my recommendation of what should be done was founded on that report. How strange the contrast between those words of Dr. Hector, which described so truly and prophetically the work of damage even now progressing night and day at Seacliff, and those of Mr. Blair, where he says, “I thought we could cope with the difficulty, and so close up the matter for ever”! As if it were some trifling matter! But it is not a trivial matter that we are dealing with: it is a very serious matter, affecting a building which has cost close on £200,000, and which is becoming daily more and more dangerous in consequence of the moving ground. It is not a trifling matter, as Mr. Blair alleges, which can be covered up, as it were, by taking a shovel and spreading a few handfuls of earth over it. I say, shame on Mr. Blair, who can make light of the present dangerous condition of the building at Seacliff, where there are hundreds of poor helpless creatures closed in night and day; and he a public servant, placed in his high position by the public to take charge of and guard all the buildings under his control. So, realising the urgency of the position, I resolved, in the face of Mr. Blair’s implied threat, to publish my correspondence, which I have done; and it is now before you, gentlemen. When these letters were under discussion in Parliament certain statements were first publicly made as to the defective, or alleged defective, foundations of the building; and on learning this I wrote to the Hon. the Colonial Secretary on the 20th January, 1888, as follows: “Dunedin, 20th January, 1888.—Hon. T. W. Hislop.—Sir,—I have not yet received any particulars of information as to the statements made by Mr. Blair or Public Works Department as to the Seacliff Asylum, in Parliament or to the Government. I also understand that an official from Wellington has been visiting the building and taking measurements; and, as it is only fair that I should know of any accusations which are to be brought forward, I respectfully request that full particulars and all information be forwarded to me through you on this matter. In a case of this kind, where my professional character and reputation are at stake, I trust you will see the reasonableness of my request. I shall also feel obliged if you will be good enough to forward me an order to the officer in charge at the Seacliff Asylum, so that I may obtain access to the building, &c., for myself and such others as I may desire to take there for the purpose of inspecting it, with the view of giving evidence at the inquiry should such be necessary.—I have the honour to be yours truly, R. A. LAWSON, Architect.—Colonial Secretary, Wellington.” I received from the Hon. the Colonial Secretary the following reply by telegram: “Have asked Works Department to write you *re* particulars asked for. I have telegraphed to Dr. King to permit inspection by you or your nominees.” This prompt and courteous reply was not, however, followed up by the Public Works Department. I never did receive that information from them, although it appears that the Colonial Secretary had himself requested that it should be handed to me. As I have just said, they have not done so, and I only saw the information when it was laid on this table before you, gentlemen.