

Commissioners are of opinion that any further evidence of the nature alluded to by you could not influence their report. The production of letters between Messrs. Ussher and Blair (if such exist) at the date mentioned, is quite unnecessary for the purpose of enabling the Commissioners to come to a correct conclusion. Mr. Blair stated on oath that no letters passed between Mr. Ussher and himself between the dates alluded to on the subject of the foundations of the Seacliff Asylum. The Commissioners therefore consider that a reopening of the inquiry would elicit no information that could alter their decision, and would entail unnecessary expense. Your letter on the subject will, however, be forwarded together with the report.—I have, &c., H. P. HIGGINSON, Chairman of Commission. R. A. Lawson, Esq., Architect, Dunedin.”

It will be noticed that in above letter, although as Chairman of the Commission Mr. Higginson himself received the letters referred to as exhibits in the inquiry, he yet—in parenthesis—actually questions their existence! In reply to the above letter I again wrote as follows: “Seacliff Inquiry. To the Hon. the Commissioners. Gentlemen,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your favour dated the 2nd March instant, in reply to mine of preceding day, and in which you inform me that ‘the production of letters between Messrs. Ussher and Blair (if such exist) at the date mentioned (26th May, 1885, and 11th June, 1885, or thereabouts) is quite unnecessary for the purpose of enabling the Commissioners to come to a correct conclusion,’ and that ‘the Commissioners therefore consider that a reopening of the inquiry would elicit no information that could alter their decision.’ I am, however, still distinctly of opinion that not only does the correspondence between Messrs. Ussher and Blair exist—Mr. Blair himself having passed in certain letters which he said at the time was the correspondence referred to, and asked for by me. I am also further of opinion that the correspondence bears on the matters under inquiry very materially indeed. Under these circumstances I reserve to myself the right of taking what further action may appear to me requisite in order to elicit the truth. I thank you for your courtesy in forwarding my former letter with your report, and have further to request you to extend the same courtesy towards this present letter.—I have, &c., R. A. LAWSON. Dunedin, 3rd March, 1888.”

To the above I received the following reply, closing correspondence: “Dunedin, 5th March, 1888. Sir,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 3rd instant, which will be forwarded (together with your former letter on the same subject) with the Commissioners’ report.—I have, &c., H. P. HIGGINSON, Chairman. R. A. Lawson, Esq., Architect, Dunedin.”

I will not ask you to found upon these circumstances an opinion that there was an intention to avoid evidence which would help my position and be injurious to the Public Works Department; but I do wish you to consider whether gentlemen so careless or indifferent of what has been placed before them as to question its existence can be capable of forming a correct and unbiassed judgment. I also submit that in refusing to persist upon these letters being produced, when they might have contained potentially relevant matter, shows a decided want of thoroughness in dealing with an important subject of inquiry.

For the various reasons stated and apparent herein, I respectfully ask that you may cause the proper steps to be taken to have the several matters urged by me put to test.

I have &c.,

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

R. A. LAWSON.

MEMORANDUM ON THE COMMISSIONERS' REPORT BY THE ASSISTANT ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF.

Public Works Office, Wellington, 14th May, 1888.

Memorandum for the Hon. the Minister for Public Works.

SEACLIFF COMMISSION REPORT.

THERE are several points in this report on which I take the liberty of remarking, viz:—

As to not answering Letters.

The Commissioners under paragraph 1 say, “The Architect repeatedly called the attention of the Public Works Department to the fact that drainage was necessary, eliciting no reply, however, until the 29th* of May, 1882, or thirty months after his first letter on the subject was written.”

There must be some misapprehension in connection herewith, for it was clearly shown in evidence that the letters were answered in writing as well as by the action taken, and in cross-examination Mr. Lawson himself admitted the fact. There were three official letters addressed to me which it was alleged were not answered—23rd October, 1879, 16th January, 1880, and 29th June, 1880. They all referred to the clearing of the site and the isolating-drain. It would not have been a serious omission had these letters never been answered in writing, for the officers of the Public Works Department were in constant communication with the Architect about this matter, and, so far as could then be done, action was at once taken.

* Should be 19th.