

3958. Now, had you, before joining Thomas and Co., any experience in connection with auction-rooms and proceedings at such sales?—I had.

3959. Where?—In Matura, Southland. I was partner with Mr. McGibbon, trading under the firm of J. S. Shanks & Co.

3960. Was that at the Maturá Bridge?—Yes.

3961. How long were you in that firm?—I was two years there.

3962. Did you then give it up?—Yes.

3963. Then, of the five years you have been in the employment of George Thomas and Co., you were two years in charge of sales. What have been your particular duties in that firm during the last three years?—During the last three years I have acted as salesman, traveller, and managing clerk.

3564. Do you mean by salesman that you use the hammer?—No; not here.

3965. Will you explain then what your duties have been as salesman during the last three years?—My duties as salesman do not refer to the auction business; they refer to the grain, produce, and general merchandise business.

3966. Do they refer more particularly to private sales?—Yes, those I conduct.

3967. When speaking of yourself as salesman, you refer to the making of private sales?—Yes.

3968. Now, during your experience with Messrs. Thomas and Co., you have observed that a considerable amount of business has been put in the way of the firm by the Public Trust Office?—Yes.

3969. How many sales do you think, during the five years, have annually passed through that firm's hands from the Public Trust Office?—I could not exactly tell.

3970. On an average, has there been a sale once a month or once a week?—We might have had seven or eight sales in the twelve months.

3971. Were those sales of effects belonging to the estates of dead men and dead women?—Yes.

3972. Those effects must have varied in values and kind a great deal from time to time according to the positions of the deceased persons, did they not?—Yes, they did.

3973. Well, can you tell us generally what such effects consisted of?—In some cases jewellery—watches, chains, rings, and other jewellery. In other cases it was personal clothing. I think those were about the only lines we did.

3974. And scientific instruments?—I cannot say I remember any.

3975. Ship captains' instruments?—I cannot say I recollect any of those.

3976. Musical instruments?—No; I cannot remember them.

3977. Never any jew's-harps?—No. I should not pay particular notice in any case if they were there.

3978. You know, as a man of the world, what men and women do get about them during their lives. Have you had writing-desks?—It is a very difficult matter for me to state, because we have so many other sales in the same way. I only know we have had books, clothing, jewellery, and boxes.

3979. Sealskin-jackets?—I will not be certain about them.

3980. Overcoats?—Yes.

3981. Dress-clothes?—Yes.

3982. Has the Trust Office ever favoured you with any pound notes to sell?—No.

3983. Sometimes these are found among personal effects?—As a rule, there was considerable discretion used by the Trust Office officials in that direction before the goods came my length. I do not think I ever found anything in the pockets of any clothing sent for sale. An official waited on us and went through all the pockets.

3984. Will you tell us who that official was generally?—There have been two who have gone through the things with me. The Rev. Mr. De Castro and myself have gone through them.

3985. Has he been the principal officer who directed these sales?—Yes.

3986. And therefore Mr. De Castro was very particular in searching through the personal effects to see there was nothing in the pockets of clothes belonging to deceased persons?—Yes; that is so.

3987. Do you ever remember his finding anything when making those searches?—I cannot say I recollect his ever finding money. If he found anything of any value which was not to go with the goods at the time—letters or any documents—they were all made up by me, superintended by Mr. De Castro, and handed to him to take over to the Public Trustee; and in some instances, where there were a quantity of letters and things which he thought he would have to look through, or which were very valuable, I sent over a boy with him.

3988. Then, the Rev. Mr. De Castro had the conduct of those sales that went the way of Messrs. Thomas and Co.?—I could not say that in every instance. I would have thought it; but our instructions came from the Public Trustee's Office.

3989. Did they come from Mr. Hamerton?—They were always signed "For the Public Trustee."

3990. Did Mr. Hamerton ever appear in the auction-room to make a search in the personal effects in your hands?—No, not to my knowledge.

3991. What other officer can you remember besides Mr. De Castro?—I cannot remember the name of the gentleman; but no doubt you will find it out downstairs; he was a young, fair Irishman.

3992. Was his name Ronaldson?—I believe that was the name.

3993. Had you a good attendance generally when those sales were taking place?—Yes.

3994. Do you remember what your instructions were from the Public Trustee about advertising those sales?—No; I cannot recollect, because there were originally instructions regarding advertising which were carried out all through.