

expenses since the Public Trustee has had the management of the estate. I notice also by the accounts that the estate is charged with commission to the Christchurch agency as well as to the Public Trustee. As further samples of the manner in which money has been spent, I would mention an item of £2 2s. for valuation *re* fencing and stubbing, the work itself costing £1 10s.; also a charge of £3 for passage of Public Trust officer from Wellington *re* Supreme Court case, there being at the time an agent here and a solicitor acting, and no evidence being required.

I have no desire to attribute the blame of the present position of the estate entirely to the Public Trustee, because I am aware that the machinery for administering estates under the Act is necessarily somewhat costly; but it is inconceivable to me that a business man would, in the management of his own affairs, have allowed a claim of £536—whether good, bad, or indifferent—to land him in costs of £1,200, or a total of nearly £1,750; nor do I think he would have allowed his own estate to cost £1,600 in legal expenses.

With regard to the Public Trustee's dealings with myself, I wish to make the following statements: I have been unable to get any information in reference to the estate, or obtain the discharge of the Public Trustee's duties to me under the various orders of the Court without incurring the expense of legal assistance. My own application for copies of the accounts in connection with the estate were disregarded, and it was not until I engaged a solicitor to write for them that they were furnished.

In reference to my maintenance out of the estate, I think that, with an estate worth £9,000, the maintenance of myself, an only child, should never have been a matter of any difficulty. In addition, the Public Trustee has been aware all along that I am physically unable to earn my own living, and have no other source of income. Yet I have several times had to engage solicitors to protect my interests, and but for their exertions I should have been left almost destitute. Several applications made to the Court by the Trustee have been detrimental to me, and in every case the solicitor acting for me has opposed them successfully. These proceedings have involved me in considerable expense in addition to the costs allowed out of the estate. Moreover, I have had the greatest difficulty, and have been put to much expense, in obtaining payment from the Trustee of the maintenance-moneys due under orders of the Court. On the 27th February, 1889, so large a sum as £187 9s. 1d. was due to me for arrears. To get this an application to the Court was necessary, and I had to engage a solicitor, and incur expenses in addition to the amount allowed out of the estate. In March, 1890, the payments were nearly twelve months in arrear, and the Public Trustee made application to the Court for an order reducing the amount of maintenance as from 20th June, 1889, alleging that the estate was not able to pay the demands upon it. I engaged a solicitor to oppose the application, and he submitted a scheme whereby the demands were provided for, while the further diminution of the estate was prevented. This proposal was before the Trustee for months before he made decision, and it was only when my solicitor threatened further reference to the Court that he definitely consented, and the proposal was accepted as made. During the time this matter was in progress the Trustee was informed that I was in urgent need of the money and was being put to expense because of the non-payment of my maintenance; but it was not until a month after the order of the Court had been made that he forwarded the money, and then only after my solicitor had written several letters and sent several telegrams. Since the date of the last-mentioned order of the Court—viz., 29th August, 1890—my solicitor has had to write and wire repeatedly before he could get any money for me.

In reference to my solicitor's letter to you of the 17th instant, and his application to the Public Trustee of the 2nd instant, mentioned in that letter, I may say that after twice telegraphing to the Trustee my solicitor, on the 18th, received £20 from the District Agent here.

Gentlemen, I respectfully ask your attention to this matter because it seems to me that, with an estate like my father's was when it passed into the Public Trustee's hands, it is most unfair, unjust, and scandalous that I, his only daughter, and an invalid, who had every right to expect to be respectably and comfortably maintained, should now be reduced to little more than a pittance, and that, in order to retain and enforce payment of this, I should be compelled from time to time, at considerable expense, to fight as for dear life—an expression that in my case is no exaggeration. Unless some alteration is made I cannot help fearing that the whole property will be dissipated in the course of a very few years, and an estate that was four years ago ample provision for my father and myself for life—will have totally disappeared, and I, his only daughter, and unable to earn my own living, will be left destitute before I reach middle age.

Yours respectfully,

FRANCES ESTHER WRIGHT.

The Commissioners, Public Trust Office Inquiry, Wellington.

4153. Is the amount of costs stated by Miss Wright correct?—No.

4154. What were the actual costs in disputing the brothers' claims?—The Public Trustee's costs were £779 1s. 11d.

4155. Does that £779 not appear to be a monstrous charge, considering that the amount in dispute was only £536?—It is large.

4156. And did not the Court also order that the plaintiffs' costs should be paid out of the estate?—Yes.

4157. You will not deny that the amount of the plaintiffs' costs which you paid out of the estate was £430?—No.

4158. So that Miss Wright's statement that £1,209 were paid in costs is correct?—No. I have a statement here showing that the cost of the relatives' litigation was £779 1s. 11d., not £1,200, as stated by her. The total costs paid by me under direction amounted to £1,111 7s. 10d., not £1,600, as stated; but I submit it cannot be held that the Public Trustee is answerable for the heavy costs of the action.

4159. *The Chairman.*] Since you have raised that question, Mr. Hamerton, has it ever occurred to you that, in your dealings as Public Trustee with the estate of the late Mrs. Dallon, you have laid yourself open to a suit in equity by her son—that you, personally, are perhaps responsible?—It has not occurred to me, but I do not deny it.

4160. *Mr. Loughrey.*] Is it a fact that two guineas were paid for the valuation of the fencing when the amount of the work to be done was £1 10s.?—The fee of two guineas was paid for work value £56, and the arrangement was that the tenants were to allow some, the owner of the adjoining property some, and the estate had to pay £7 15s.

4161. Is it a fact that on the 27th February, 1889, a large sum was due to this young lady on account of maintenance?—Yes, I believe that is so. I could not pay it because I was waiting for the order of the Court to enable me to pay.

4162. Is it a fact that this young lady has to engage a solicitor to make application to you as she states?—It need not be so, but I believe she has done so.

4163. Did she communicate with you privately?—I think she has.

4164. What is the amount allowed to her at the present time for maintenance?—She is entitled to £1 per week under the order of Court dated the 29th August, 1890.

4165. How is the money forwarded to her—at what intervals?—She received her money about a month after the order, and then she received nothing more until little less than a month ago. There is now £5 due.

4166. How do you think a young lady can exist if she only receives moneys at such long intervals?—It is an oversight; I cannot account for it.