

32. For the purpose of checking, how much better off are you, no matter who signs it? Whether that abstract is signed by the Receiver or the Warden, where does your check come in?—That abstract, being prepared and signed by the Receiver, is useless to check the Receiver's collections.

33. Wherein would lie the difference if signed by the Warden as a check?—I presume the Warden would not sign without being responsible for it. If I knew a Warden signed a statement without looking at it I should inform the Minister; but I presume every officer would take the responsibility for that which he signs.

34. You have not ascertained whether the Wardens who have signed have gone over it and checked it for themselves?—I think I must have some very good ground for inquiry before I make it into anything of that kind.

35. *Mr. Fraser.*] I asked you at the last meeting about the audit performed by your own officials, the Auditors who visit the different offices. You did not seem satisfied that those Auditors could check these accounts?—No.

36. You wanted, evidently, to have a separate audit, apart from that supplied by your own Auditors?—Yes; in the same way as there is the audit in the general office of the transactions of all the Postmasters in addition to the audit of the Post Office by the Inspector. The Inspector has not the material. He sees what the general conduct of the office is and that everything is in order, and that the conduct of the officials is good, and so forth; he sees that the entries in the books agree with the accounts in the general office, but that inspection takes place periodically or every half-year, as it does in the offices of the Receivers of the Mines Department.

37. You have heard the evidence of Mr. Stratford as to the physical impossibility of his visiting every office once a month, and therefore the impossibility of his being able to certify to the correctness of these abstracts?—Yes. If the Warden was so much overtaxed as he stated himself to be, the way out of the difficulty would be to employ a Clerk to assist him, or a Registrar independent of the Receiver. That appointment would, according to Warden Stratford's evidence, be justified if he correctly stated that he was overtaxed. Then there would be a Clerk, who would be the Warden's officer, to furnish a check on the Receiver. At present the Receiver has to keep an adverse eye on himself.

38. Would it not be possible for the Warden to keep a book, or have it kept for him, in which would be entered the name of each office he visited, with a record of particulars of all the licenses, and then, wherever he might be, he would have the information before him—I mean a book kept apart from the Registrar of the goldfields that would be the property of the Warden for his private reference?—It occurred to me that the Warden could provide himself with some means of checking his list of abstracts. I made this requisition on the administration, and if it had raised any objection I would have proposed an alternative.

39. Do you think it essential for proper audit that there should be some one to check the returns of the goldfields?—Yes. As far as I see, in this case there was a practicable course of checking the collections of Receivers of Gold Revenue, and I made a requisition that this course should be adopted.

40. *Mr. Montgomery.*] It was not your affair why the department did not comply with your requisition?—No; I have only one reason—the reason given by the Minister.

41. You had nothing to do with any difficulties they may have had with Mr. Stratford?—Nothing whatever; he was an officer of their department.

42. You made the requisition on the Mines Department, not on Mr. Stratford?—Yes.

43. You had nothing to do officially with him at all?—I had no correspondence with him.

44. You say the Minister did not disapprove of the requisition. What evidence have you of that?—The Minister's letter of the 16th October, 1897, in which he says, "In reply I have to state that, after perusing the correspondence, I have come to the conclusion that I believe I could easily have dealt with Mr. Stratford had the question been submitted to me in the first instance, but the matter has now arrived at such a stage as between Mr. Stratford and yourself that I prefer not to interfere, and I would rather that you carried out your intention as expressed in your memorandum of the 22nd ultimo, No. 274, to the Under-Secretary for Mines." [See B.-20, Sess. II., 1897.]

45. You tell us that you never have communicated with Mr. Stratford at all?—No, except in one little memorandum of the 11th December, 1896. It was addressed to the Mining Warden, Greymouth. The instruction had already been issued by circular by the Mining Department, and the abstracts still continuing to come unsigned by the Warden, in accordance with the instructions of the Minister, this memorandum was addressed to the Mining Warden, Greymouth: "The abstract of licensed holdings for the district of Ahaura for the month of November last are returned herewith, accompanied by a copy of the circular to Wardens issued by the Mines Department on the 23rd September, 1896. Please let the request therein made be complied with." This was addressed, you will observe, to the Mining Warden. It was calling attention to the working of his department.

46. That was an inadvertence on the part of the Audit Department. It was not intended to instruct the Warden's department?—No.

47. Beyond that you have not done anything?—No, except to draw his attention to the instruction of his own department.

48. Why did you not send the requisition to the Minister?—Because communications with the Under-Secretary have always been understood to be communications with the department.

49. Do you always communicate with the Under-Secretary for Mines?—I do not know that I shall after receiving this letter from the Minister of Mines.

50. Was it the custom before?—Yes.

51. Had any objection been taken previously?—I do not recollect any. The late Under-Secretary (Mr. Cooper) expressed himself as feeling that he was the mouthpiece of the Minister.