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UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT.

FURTHER EVIDENCE BEFORE THE COMMISSION.

THE FINANCE COMMITTEE.

The royal commission appointed to inquire into the financial position and the administration of the Melbourne University took further evidence in the Law Courts Library. The members present were, the president (Mr. T. E. Fair, M.L.A.), Sir John Clarke, Mackinnon, E. C. Wardle and J. A. Boyd, M.L.A., and S. G. Black and E. E. Smith, M.L.C.

John Cope, a member of the University council since 1898 and of the finance committee almost the whole of the time, was a witness in this evidence as to the history of the committee. The committee had at first recommended to the council the establishment of a fund for the purchase of additional houses and authority for the investment of University funds. By a resolution passed by the council on 15th February, 1898, it was provided that the registrar be appointed to the council for two years and that the committee should be empowered to make a statement showing the condition of the various University funds. In October, 1899, he was appointed, and in this statement, it was indicated that the council was intended to invest in the purchase of buildings and the giving of annuities to members of the committee. Thus, the finance committee did not establish itself in the University. A finance committee could not carry out detailed work "as the man in the street" expected, nor was the University equipped with the machinery. It was only the committee which must trust its executive officers, who were paid high salaries for the work of the University. The council had checked the accounts. It merely acted as an advisory body.

The President: Was it your duty to advise as to the propriety and sufficiency of the books kept by the Treasurer?

If it is the duty of a director of a bank to go into the question of how a bank was kept?—They trust to the managers, who are paid high salaries for the work of the Treasury. Directors are not elected as experts.

Witness further stated to Mr. Boyd that since the Treasury the finance committee had been enlarged. The Registrar reported that when the resolution was passed, and never knew of it. He thought no finance committee was in the world would prevent frauds in the bank on the order of which had happened. That was the duty of the auditors and the detectives.

To Sir John McIntyre: He supposed that the Registrar had not read the minute bearing the resolution?

To Mr. Boyd: The Registrar was made responsible by the order of the government for financial matters and the administration, but the council passed a minute that "in practice this responsibility was not intended upon the council."

Robert L. E. Elkins, a member of the council since 1898, examined by the president, stated that when he was treasurer and chairman of the finance committee he carefully examined accounts before the cheques were drawn. Were you sufficiently accountable to say that you had prepared a report and the adjournment of the cheques were genuine and correct?—I can not say; Mr. Dickson was a trusted friend.

Witness (continuing) said that in order to save the higher officers from the perusal of documents charged by the bank it was decided to send the cheques to the Bank. The cheques were signed by the transfer was made he attended with the Registrar and Depositary of the Melbourne University, and the Safe Deposit Company would not take the documents except from him. He had not attended the Safe Deposit and inspected the documents. He trusted to the auditors to certify the correctness of the cheques. He said there was a bundle of papers which he believed were the cheques.

To Mr. Smith: The chairman of the finance committee, Sir John McIntyre, a styled treasurer in order that he might keep the cheques for the whole of the committee. Dr. A. Morrison, who was a member of the finance committee, stated that he was in daily attendance and, responsible for the proper keeping of the University accounts. The duty was that of keeping the accounts proper and the falling off in fees. Witness read a number of statements to show that he was on the finance committee and the cheques and the receipts were checked.

Interesting evidence was given by Dr. Barrett to the University Inquiry Commission last evening on the subject of scientific teaching. Dr. Barrett pointed out that the mining school was only barely equipped to undertake instruction and did not compare with that of Sydney. He thought it a great fault, seeing that this State was dependent mainly upon its mineral productions and that mining was one of the most important industries on the soil, that the University made no effort to train men to follow these natural pursuits. The president questioned whether there was a time of financial stress like the present it was opportune to consider such matters. Dr. Barrett replied that one of the leading universities in the world, that of Berlin, was founded when Napoleon was ravaging Germany. People were in real danger of being sold down the river if the University was not keen to cultivate brains. Germany did not compete with the very poor country when it started its university. Sir John McIntyre: There was no poverty in brains there. Dr. Barrett suggested further that colleges should be opened for veterinary and public health should be in close corporation with the University. Owing to the profession being overlooked, its great work in the near future would lie in the teaching of special science subjects.