

In reply I beg to state that in order to relieve the contractors, Messrs. Hopper, Ratcliffe, and Company, of Sunderland, of the rails they had rolled, and of which they were constantly pressing that delivery might be taken in terms of contract, the "George A. Holt" was taken up. This course was further necessitated owing to the impossibility of providing within the time required tonnage by part shipments. Unfortunately the manufacturers of the fastenings would not give delivery at Sunderland without considerable additional cost to their contract price.

I am fully aware of the desirableness of forwarding with each shipment of rails a proportionate quantity of fastenings, which I invariably, when ordering the shipment to be made through the engineers, require to be done; but it sometimes happens that the contractors for the rails are ready to deliver while the contractors for the fastenings have not completed them to time, which, from the unsettled state of the labour market, it is difficult to enforce them to do. Further, I am at the same time obliged to take advantage of every opportunity to ship material, in order to prevent its accumulating on my hands.

You may rest assured that no effort shall be wanting on my part to enforce, as far as I can, the rule of proportion to each shipment; but I would request that allowance may be made by the Government for the difficulties I have to encounter in doing so.

I have, &c.,

I. E. FEATHERSTON,
Agent-General.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

No. 4.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

7, Westminster Chambers,

Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W., 10th July, 1873.

SIR,—

I am glad to find, from the Hon. Mr. Richardson's Memorandum of March 15th (25-73), that his fear that the public works would have to be stopped from an inadequate supply of railway plant has, after the receipt of my letter of January 9th, enclosing a tabular statement of the quantity of plant despatched up to the 31st December, in some measure been allayed.

My reasons for sending out the plant by emigrant ships, as already partially explained in my letter of January 9th, were,—

1st. That I was despatching during the year some forty emigrant ships, each of which would of an average take 250 tons of dead weight in the shape of railway plant.

2nd. That I was thus enabled to send off the plant by instalments as fast as it was ready, instead of waiting until a full cargo could be obtained for a vessel specially chartered for its conveyance.

3rd. That the contractors objected to have their yards encumbered with a large quantity of plant, and refused to go on manufacturing it unless it was taken away within a reasonable time.

4th. That the vessels chartered for a cargo of exclusively dead weight were of an inferior class, and made much longer voyages than emigrant ships, and that the insurance on cargo by such vessels was enormously increased.

And 5th. That by this course a very large saving was effected in the freight of the plant.

I now beg to call your attention to this saving. I have never paid in emigrant ships more than 25s. a ton for rails. I have twice invited tenders for ships for the conveyance of railway plant; on the first occasion, after making ineffectual attempts to induce shipowners to tender, I arranged privately at 42s. 6d. a ton, this amount being reduced to 35s. by the allowance made by the contractors for delivering the rails at Sunderland instead of at London,

On a subsequent occasion I received two tenders at 70s. and 67s. 6d. respectively, both of which I rejected, chartering instead the "Millwall" by private arrangement at 55s. per ton, less an allowance of 7s. 6d. per ton in the case of Hopper, Ratcliffe, and Company, whose establishment is at Sunderland, and 4s. 6d. per ton in the case of William Whitwell and Company, whose establishment is at Stockton on Tees, this allowance being made on account of delivery being taken at Sunderland instead of London. Had I accepted the lowest tender, the cost to the Government would have been 67s. 6d. per ton.

The cost, through subsequently chartering two vessels by private arrangements for the conveyance of railway plant, has been 42s. 4d. per ton. The freight of railway plant by emigrant ships, as already stated, has been 25s. per ton.

The quantity of rails sent by chartered vessels has been 2,960 tons, at an average freight of 42s. 4d. per ton. The quantity of railway material sent by emigrant ships has been 13,519 tons at 25s. × primage 1s. 3d. = 26s. 3d. per ton. It will thus be seen that the saving effected on plant sent by emigrant ships, instead of by vessels specially chartered for the purpose, has been 16s. 1d. per ton. In other words, had I sent the 13,519 tons of material by vessels expressly chartered for its conveyance, I should have paid £28,615 4s. 4d., instead of £17,743 13s. 9d., thus showing a saving of £10,871 10s. 7d.

As another instance of the saving effected by the course I have adopted, I may mention that when I attempted to charter a ship for the conveyance of the material of the Thames Water Race, the lowest tender I received was at the rate of 36s. per ton, and this tender was subsequently withdrawn; upon which I privately arranged for the conveyance of the plant by emigrant ships at 25s. a ton, thereby effecting upon this transaction a saving of £913.

Of course I readily recognize that it would have been cheaper to have paid double or treble the amount of the highest freights above specified rather than that the public works should have been stopped for want of material. But what I desire to point out is, that the plant has been more rapidly despatched than it could have been, for reasons already given, had it been sent out in ships expressly chartered for its conveyance.