

373. Is it not true that in Canterbury and Invercargill the railway trucks differ in size?—The trucks have all been made from the same standard drawing, and are used throughout the colony. *Mr. Conyers.*

374. Has there not been much complaint in Canterbury respecting the weighing of goods, because the Government undertakes to furnish to a consignor the weight of a consignment of goods, and practically refuses to do so?—Yes, I am aware of that. 15th Aug., 1877.

375. Do you think it right for the Government to do so?—I think the railway should weigh goods for its own purposes only, and that the Government should confine its work simply to the carrying of goods; much time is taken up in a case where a large quantity of grain has to be weighed, when every bag passing through the shed has to go on the scales. I am strongly opposed to this course, also to that of giving weigh-notes. Goods should be carried at the weight given, and charged accordingly. Should occasion arise when it would be thought that the wrong weight had been given, then the goods should be weighed at the railway station for the purpose of checking; and in the case of an attempt at fraud the law provides for the severe punishment of the person offending.

376. You would recommend, then, that the practice of giving weigh-notes should be discontinued?—Yes; I have already recommended that course. All such things tend to block the traffic on a line, and increase the responsibility of the department. I will give an example: A farmer brings, say, 50 tons of grain. It is found necessary to store it, during which time a great deal of the grain becomes damaged by rats, then the Government are expected to compensate the owner.

377. You recommend discontinuing the issue of weigh-notes?—I am thoroughly opposed to the Government giving weigh-notes. In my opinion the Government should provide for nothing beyond the carrying of goods.

378. Then you are opposed to the Government storing goods and grain?—Yes; all our storage rates should be prohibitory, or so high as to be rarely used.

379. Do you think you could obtain suitable officers from your own staff for the Audit Department—men good at accounts?—Yes; we have men quite competent for such duties. Some have been appointed Travelling Inspectors.

380. You have at present men who perform the duties pertaining to audit work?—Yes; there are men in the Railway Department now fully equal to the task.

381. The Commissioners, in their report, recommended town delivery. They say, "We are strongly of opinion that it is desirable to adopt the system of delivery, but that the delivery be by a carting contract at all large stations, and to apply it to all goods received for delivery, but that the delivery charge should be separate from the railway charge, and it should be open to the consignee to cart his own goods"?—I fully approve of the first portion of the clause relating to town delivery, but am strongly opposed to any consignee being allowed to cart his own goods.

382. Is it not making a farce of the whole thing by the Government calling for tenders for cartage, and inserting such a clause as you have referred to?—There is a legal difficulty in the way.

383. Would it not be well for the Government to do something to remedy the law?—Yes; I have already suggested to the Government that some action should be taken. The cartage charge should be made part and parcel of the terminal charges. We have terminal charges for handling goods. The cartage charges should be added in every case. This is done in England. In Dunedin and Christchurch the terminal charge should be increased from fifteen to eighteen pence per ton for cartage. It is very unfair to the contractor to have a clause inserted by which the consignee may take the work out of his hands.

384. I wish to ask you if you think it possible to introduce the system here of railway parcel delivery?—The same system as is now in operation in America?

385. Yes, the American parcel-delivery system, by which parcels and luggage are forwarded by the railway authorities?—It is a matter coming more within the scope of a private company. I am of opinion it should not be introduced by the Government. According to the American system you might book a parcel from here for Melbourne, and the company would see that it reached its destination, one payment sufficing. The American system has agencies established in all parts of the world for the delivery of parcels and luggage. You might, for instance, on landing at New York, hand your luggage to an agent, and without giving you any further trouble he would have it booked to any part of the world.

*Mr. Macandrew:* If I were going from Wellington to England, according to that system I understand I need only hand in my luggage to the station here, when it would be sent on without any further trouble on my part?

*The Chairman:* Besides this, you could have access to the luggage on the way.

386. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Do you think, Mr Conyers, that the traffic in New Zealand would be adequate for the support of such a company?—I cannot say.

387. *The Chairman.*] I would like to ask you if you have had experience on Christchurch railway lines when the traffic has become blocked?—Yes, lately I was three weeks in Christchurch during a block.

388. Was that attributable to want of rolling stock?—I attribute the cause to many things. I have referred to the subject in my annual report, where I state, "The inconvenience hitherto experienced has, in my opinion, arisen principally from the following causes—viz., insufficiency of rolling-stock, break of gauge, and the bad arrangements of the Christchurch and Lyttelton station yards. The work of assimilating the gauge and relaying the Christchurch yard will be commenced at once, and as a large number of wagons have been ordered from Home I am sanguine that the next year's arrangements will prove more satisfactory to the public." No matter what rolling-stock we have, great attention in the grain season is necessary to prevent blocking. Millions of bushels are brought to the railway stations in the country when the farmers are all threshing their grain at the same time. The increase expected next season over last year's yield is 30 or 40 per cent., a large area of agricultural land having lately been sold and placed under cultivation.

389. *Mr. Reader Wood.*] Would it be necessary to increase the number of railway wagons?—It is no use rushing the grain into the port quicker than it can be got rid of there. It would require a large number of vessels to take the grain away as rapidly as the farmers bring it to the country stations.