

Mr. Conyers.
16th Aug., 1877.

and the person to whom consigned, also the amount of carriage to be paid to the Government, and whether the charge is to be paid by the consignor or consignee. When the stationmaster has written out these particulars, he takes a press copy of the return. The original the guard takes with him, and satisfies himself that there are no goods in the train but those specified in his return. On reaching their destination the goods are checked with the way-bill. Then the rates are checked and initialled. This way-bill is retained at the station until the end of the month, when an abstract is furnished of all the goods that have passed through the station during the month. The way-bills used state precisely what has been paid and what remains to be paid on the conveyance of the goods. They are numbered consecutively, and must correspond with the copies in the letter-books. At the end of the month each station sends its return separately direct to the Audit Office, where the returns are checked and compared, and if an error of a penny has been made it will be at once detected. Thus it would be impossible for any stationmaster to take a single fraction of money without collusion. Even then there would be great risk and difficulty, and it could not continue long without discovery, as the guard and others on the line would have to be parties to the fraud. Such is the English system, and such is the present system—with this difference, however, that our travelling auditor checked way-bills at receiving stations. They are afterwards useful for reference. The Commission that sat in Dunedin resolved that these way-bills should be sent to Wellington. I was opposed to this course, and the question was eventually compromised by sending a press copy. The travelling auditors can very well check these way-bills when they pay their visit of inspection to the different stations, for they are already checked by the receiving station clerk. Under any system, when the returns are checked and found to contain errors, a fine for each mistake should be imposed.

430. Have you the same number of officers on the Audit staff now as you had before?—Yes.

431. Then in point of fact this centralizing system of Audit entails additional expenditure, and does no more work than was done before?—We have the same local staff.

432. Could any saving be effected in the Audit Department if the whole of the auditing for the South Island Railways were carried on in the one office either at Dunedin or Christchurch?—Yes, undoubtedly. Instead of two heads being required for the department as at present, one being in Dunedin and one in Christchurch, only one would be needed, and he would supervise the whole of the Audit Department.

433. Is it your opinion, Mr. Conyers, that it would be much more efficient and economical were the auditing performed in the Middle Island either at Christchurch or Dunedin, and returns made monthly instead of weekly?—I am of the opinion that the adoption of such a plan would save labour and money, and be more satisfactory to every one concerned.

434. I understand you to say yesterday that a saving of £300 a month had been made since you took charge of the Canterbury lines. Will you be good enough to explain how that saving has been effected?—That saving was made from oil alone. The whole of the railway stock, carriages, and wagons were oiled every few miles by men appointed for the purpose. I saw a requisition prepared for an enormous quantity. I said there must be something wrong in requiring such a large supply as that, and found that the same quantity was obtained every few weeks. I called in the locomotive engineer to make inquiry of him on the subject, and told him that there must be something wrong somewhere in consuming such a quantity of oil; also that the matter should be thoroughly investigated. After he had gone into the matter fully, we found that the oil had been actually wasted in oiling the vehicles. They were getting oiled every twenty miles instead of every two thousand; the result being that the quantity of oil now consumed is so much reduced that a saving is effected of nearly £4,000 a-year.

435. What is the practice with regard to oiling vehicles in the North Island?—I do not know. Every railway-man who understands his work knows pretty well the quantity of oil that should be consumed by the number of miles travelled.

436. How many months' supplies of stores do you generally keep in stock?—About three months. It frequently happens that we have to requisition for stock within that period.

437. Are all supplies got by public tender?—Yes; from Briscoe and Co., Dunedin.

438. Has there been any falling off in the receipts since the new tariff has been adopted?—In Dunedin.

439. Generally?—I cannot speak much about Christchurch, as my experience there is limited. There is a considerable falling off in the receipts since last month, but that is accounted for by the grain season being over.

440. Taking the Otago portion of the lines with which you are familiar, is there a falling off in the receipts?—The Balclutha line has not fallen off, but the Port Chalmers line has decreased in receipts of about £300 a-week. The passenger traffic is also showing a great falling off on the Christchurch Section.

441. It has been alleged that in the blocking up of the Canterbury lines much was owing to the incapacity of the Christchurch Manager. Is that so?—I consider the present Manager, Mr. Lawson, a very competent man, and one possessing large experience in the management of railways. He has served a long time on the English lines. He has a thorough knowledge of the books necessary to be kept, and matters pertaining to audit. He does not however possess a knowledge of engineering: he does not profess it, his business being simply that of Traffic Manager. He holds a corresponding position to that of Mr. Grant, in Dunedin. I consider Mr. Lawson a steady, energetic, hard-working man.

442. Do you think this blocking would be obviated if you were to levy a prohibitory rate of storage, the same as has been done in Dunedin?—Such has been done in Christchurch.

443. I suppose I need hardly ask your opinion as to this point—namely, that in order to carry on the effective working of railways, the management must be as direct as possible; no "red tape" should be used if it can be at all avoided?—Yes, direct and prompt management are requisite. I may state that the General Managers on English Railways have full power to deal with all ordinary matters that arise, and when they have taken action to report the same to the directors to whom they are