

928. I understand that Mr. Ormond has made a request to the different Managers, or those in authority, for a report on the working of the lines; have you made any report in compliance with that request?—I have.

Mr. Lawson.
29th Aug., 1877.

929. Very recently?—Yes, within the last four days.

930. I have a letter here from the Ellesmere Road Board with regard to the width of live fences close to the lines of railways, and they have passed a resolution recommending that an Act of Parliament should be passed for the purpose of cutting the live fences down to about five feet for a distance of ten chains on either side of the crossings. Do you think that would contribute to the safety of the lines of railways?—Yes, I think it would; but I may tell you that is outside my province. That is a matter for the Permanent-way Engineer. As a matter of opinion I think it would be better, not only for those using the crossings, but for the driver of the engine, to be able to see as far as possible.

931. Are you in a position to give us any information as to the Victorian lines of railway?—No.

932. Was not this schedule of prices based upon the Victorian prices?—It was only towards the close of the Commission that it was suggested that the uniform rates should be gone into. Personally I had no idea it was contemplated to go into that question at all. My impression was that the uniformity referred only to a uniform system of accounts and forms. It was suggested by some one that the Victorian system of classification had been a very beneficial one; that it had been in force for a long time, and there was reason to believe that it would be equally suitable for this, not for the rates, but simply for the classification of goods.

933. Then are these rates the same as on the Victorian lines?—Excuse me; I said the classification.

934. I am asking about the rates?—I can give no idea.

935. Can you give any information as to whether the Victorian lines earn their expenses, or anything about that?—I have heard recently the Victorian lines are not paying.

936. Not paying expenses?—Well, it was not put in that way, that they were not paying simply.

937. As to the weighing of grain, goods, and so forth at the railway stations, giving weigh-notes to parties, and making a charge, do you consider it desirable?—I object to it altogether.

938. Perhaps you would just give your professional reasons, because it is a matter that has been agitated a great deal?—For the grain season it is a serious matter, but I would not object to it three-fourths of the year. We want room in the sheds, and it would be a serious obstruction to weigh or assort the grain that came into the place. I should object to it very strongly, and have done so all along.

939. And giving these weigh-notes, you think, has also caused a great deal of dissatisfaction?—It has. In this way. At the up-country stations the machines might be out of order, and then the merchant, who pays the farmer or producer upon the railway weight-note, weighs again at destination and finds it to differ. A great deal of dissatisfaction would arise, and claims for compensation result. It was this that induced the Provincial Government, at my suggestion, to introduce a clause in the regulations with regard to weighing, stating that they would not be responsible for the weights. They would weigh and make a charge for it, but would not hold themselves responsible. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction about that.

940. You are aware that the Government are ordering 300 more new trucks for the country districts. Do you believe it will be sufficient to meet the requirements of next season's traffic?—If it is 300 in addition to replacing the broad-gauge trucks, I would say Yes.

941. That is if every broad-gauge truck was turned into the narrow?—Yes. I may just mention that I wrote to the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce before I left, and asked him what was the prospect of the coming season, and his reply indicates an increase of 30 to 40 per cent. [Read the letter.] Perhaps it would be just as well if I were to explain what has been the state of things in Canterbury every season for years past, certainly before my time—three years ago. In 1875, that was the first season I was there, there were 129 miles opened, and 499 wagons in use. When I say in use, I may remark that there was always a proportion for ballasting purposes (outside of traffic), or under repairs. But there were 499 wagons, and that represented 3·86 wagons per mile. In 1876 we had 245 miles open, and 696 wagons, equal to 2·84. In 1877 we had 380 miles open, 890 wagons in use, representing 2·34. So that while in 1875 we had nearly 4 wagons to the mile, in 1877 we have less than 2½. That is one of the principal causes of the block in Canterbury.

942. The want of railway trucks?—Want of railway trucks, the mixed gauge, and want of storage. With regard to storage, I do not say it should be provided by the Government, but, to equalize the transit of the traffic, sufficient inducement should be held out to farmers and owners of grain to build sheds. At the present time we are helpless because we cannot get the grain into the sheds, and they have to put it on the ground.

943. You think 300 new trucks, with the present broad gauge converted, would be sufficient?—That is the very least.

944. And then how many would there be to the mile?—It would not be much more than 3·13. In New South Wales they had 3·68 in 1875, and 4·35 in 1877. I understand that, there, strong representations have been made that more are required. Of course it depends on the nature of their traffic. I do not understand whether it is similar to ours. In Victoria, in 1876, they had 3·43 trucks to the mile, and in South Australia, 4·16.

945. *Mr. Stevens.* I understood you to say, in answer to the Chairman, that if 300 new trucks are put on next season with the present 278 broad-gauge, you thought that would be something like adequate provision?—Yes, I should say that would be the minimum. At the same time you will permit me to say that I believe that during three-fourths of the year we could work the traffic with a very slight increase.

946. Very slight increase on what?—On the present.

947. Upon the 278?—Yes, with a slight increase of the present stock, if we had no break of gauge, for three-fourths of the year we could work the traffic.

948. You estimate in your answer the conversion of these 278 of the broad-gauge trucks?—No, I do not, because I believe they cannot be converted.