

Mr. Ormond.
13th Sept., 1877.

must do their work thoroughly. For instance, there is a special officer who passes all rails and other material, and gives a sort of diary of what he does.

1761. Who is acting?—Mr. Hemans has lately been appointed. Up to a short time ago Messrs. Hemans and Bruce were acting together for the colony. That arrangement came to an end about two months ago. The Agent-General represented to the Government the whole position of the matter, and it appeared that at the first starting of the public works Messrs. Hemans were the firm that acted for the Government. Then it was thought desirable to associate another firm with them. Mr. Bruce was supposed to be the head in that line. The commission had to be increased then; but Sir Julius Vogel represented to the Government that, although we had two Inspecting Engineers, yet practically we had only one, as Bruce's house was doing all the work, and the other simply signing their names. We telegraphed to him to offer the business to Mr. Bruce, at little more than half the commission. Mr. Bruce declined, and Mr. Hemans has since accepted.

1762. What was the commission?— $1\frac{1}{2}$ at first, and when the two were employed it was $2\frac{1}{2}$ or $2\frac{1}{4}$ —I am not sure which.

1763. And now?—And now it has reverted again to $1\frac{1}{2}$ or $1\frac{3}{4}$. I shall look to refresh my memory on that point.

1764. *Mr. Larnach.*] You are the Minister for Railways?—Minister for Public Works.

1765. The railways are practically part of the work?—Yes.

1766. How long have you been in office?—Since January last.

1767. In what state did you find the Railway Department, efficient or otherwise?—I found it efficient, pretty much as it is now.

1768. Will you state what changes, if any, you have made since assuming office, in the Railway Department? Bear in mind that the questions I am putting are merely for the information of the Committee?—I do not know that any changes have been made except those I have already stated in evidence; for instance, the change with respect to Superintending Engineers taking over the part of the constructed railways business. Of course, since I took office, we have established this uniform tariff.

1769. You have made no radical changes?—No.

1770. Did you think the department, generally, was over or under-officered?—I do not think the construction is over-officered. In fact, I know that the officers are very fully occupied; and, turning my attention to that subject, I looked into the department to see what economy could be practised, and it resulted in what I have already told the Committee—that we could get rid of one of the Superintending Engineers, and we gave Mr. Passmore notice that his services would be dispensed with.

1771. Do you think the salaries paid to officers of the department a fair emolument, or above or below what is fair?—I do not think they are too highly paid; when we contrast the pay we give to our principal officers with the sums paid for private work in the colony, they are not paid highly at all.

1772. Do you think they are fairly paid?—My own opinion is that it is the business of the colony to get its work done as economically as it can. As far as I can judge, the officers are satisfied with their remuneration. I do not know whether the principal officers are very much satisfied at the action I have taken as Minister, in stopping, practically, the privilege of private work.

1773. As Minister for Public Works, will you kindly explain to the Committee what part you have with the supervision and practical management of the railways?—I have to approve everything that is undertaken in the way of construction.

1774. Does the Engineer-in-Chief take upon himself to sanction anything?—No; I have to sanction everything. I get the recommendations of the officers for construction through the Engineer-in-Chief, and act upon them.

1775. Do all the abstracts come before you periodically?—They used to. There is a change now in the system. As a rule, it would be impossible for the Minister to go through the abstracts. All he has to be satisfied about is that the officers assure him the payments are in compliance with his orders. Any payment would be stopped at once in going through the Audit and Treasury, unless it was under authority.

1776. Then, with regard to receipts and so forth, I presume they are reported to you periodically?—Every month the returns are laid before me.

1777. So that you can carry in your mind pretty well if any marked difference occurred between one month and another?—I should do so, and make inquiry at once as to the cause.

1778. Will you state how many civil engineers, including the Engineer-in-Chief, there are at present salaried officers of the Railway Department, what duties appertain to each, and what salary each gets?—I could not answer that right off.

1779. Can you state how many civil engineers, including the Engineer-in-Chief, are at present salaried officers of the department?—No; I could get you the information.

1780. Has either officer permission to accept private practice; or would you agree to or tolerate any officer who did not give his whole time to the duties under Government?—There are certain officers in the Public Works Department who, by the terms of their engagement, were entitled to private practice, subject to the approval of the Minister in each case—these were the terms on which they were engaged. The Engineer-in-Chief, the two Superintending Engineers, Mr. Blackett, Assistant Engineer-in-Chief, the late Colonial Architect, and, I think, Mr. Blair in Otago, has a similar right. Those are the only cases I know of. They have not very largely availed themselves of this privilege. This subject has been very carefully considered by myself and the Government; and since I have been in office, I think some three or four months ago, I communicated with the Engineer-in-Chief, and represented to him that I thought it undesirable this practice should continue, and pushed the officers to voluntarily give it up. They have not responded to that by giving it up; they seemed to think there was no reason to give up the privilege to which their engagements entitle them. I requested the Engineer-in-Chief to acquaint the other officers that on any future application coming to me I should refuse it. I have acted on that.

1781. In such a case, I presume it would not be a breach of faith on the part of the Minister for Public Works to give notice that after a certain date private practice would not be allowed?—I do not think that was necessary. I had the power in my own hands, and exercised it.