

Mr. Ormond.
19th Sept., 1877.

1822. You do not know any special cases?—No; I do not know of any special case. There are two or three instances where contractors, by breaking down, have had to throw up the contracts. There is Mr. McKirdy, and a man named Oaks, who took contracts on the Wairarapa Railway, and broke down. They worked for a time at small contracts, after which they were enabled to take larger ones from the Government. The sureties they gave were responsible men. These contractors broke down, but their sureties have taken up the work, and are carrying it out. This has occurred lately.

1823. I understand that Mr. Passmore was dismissed?—Not dismissed. He had notice given him that his services would not be required after a certain time.

1824. I do not know what you call it?—He was engaged for a time, subject to twelve months' notice. When his services were no longer required, he received notice his engagement would cease.

1825. I will put my question in this way: Mr. Passmore was asked to retire when there was no further use of his services?—Yes; after his services were no longer needed.

1826. He was Manager of Constructed Railways?—Yes; Superintending Engineer of Railways in the North Island.

1827. His services could be better dispensed with than many of the engineers of lines not constructed?—My opinion of that was, that of the Superintending Engineers we could do without one. There were three other Engineers—Mr. Conyers and two others—whose services were absolutely wanted.

1828. The two other Engineers are Knorpp and Higginson?—Yes. In other words, I looked upon them as the best qualified for the business of "constructing" railways. Mr. Passmore was always engaged on "constructed" lines. He might consider that he was able to look after "constructing" lines as well as those constructed.

1829. Mr. Stevens.] I should like, Mr. Ormond, to ask you whether you know anything about the occurrence that was mentioned to this Committee the other day—an occurrence on the Christchurch Railway. In fact, I may say two occurrences, in reference to some irregularity in the signals which resulted in a certain amount of danger?—Can you name anything that would bring the circumstance to my recollection?

1830. The whole thing is referred to in articles in the Dunedin papers, which I believe state the case correctly. I have not got the paper in which the first article appeared. You will find one of the articles spoken of in that paper [Paper handed to Mr. Ormond, and extract read]?—I cannot give any opinion about this now. What I would say is this, that the general practice is to bring anything of this kind under the notice of the department. Any paragraphs appearing in the newspapers affecting the railways I call for an explanation. I think I referred this matter the other day for explanation.

1831. And you have not yet got an answer back?—I think not. My work is so much in arrear that it might be on my table and yet I have not seen it.

1832. It seemed to have attracted a good deal of attention. I do not know whether it would be for us to examine the papers. Shall we see the reply when it arrives?—Yes, when the papers come up.

Mr. Stevens: I do not know that there is anything more I wish to ask.

Hon. Mr. Ormond: I have the papers here about the steel rails which the Committee wished to see.

1833. Mr. Larnach.] May I ask you one question? Are you in favour of employes, guards, and similar officers in the Railway Department wearing uniform, in order that travellers may the more easily recognize them?—Yes. I think there is a general instruction that they should wear uniform.

Hon. Mr. Ormond: On the question of steel rails I hand in to the Committee a report from Messrs. Hemans and Bruce upon this matter, with a covering letter from the Agent-General. [Report read and ordered to be printed.] Mr. Carruthers, on the 3rd March last, makes the following memorandum: "The question of steel *versus* iron rails is not now very important, as most of the rails required are already ordered. Had the Home prices been as low when the rails were purchased as they are now, I should have recommended steel rails of heavier pattern than we have used. There is some risk of light steel rails breaking, and I do not think they should be used of a less weight than 52 lbs., and that 56 lbs. would be better." [See Appendix E.]

1834. Mr. Macandrew.] I understand, Mr. Ormond, that the Government has ordered wheels and axles, with a view to having carriages and trucks made here by contract, the Government supplying the wheels and the axles?—Yes; these are for specified lines.

1835. Then the contractors have to find their own ironwork?—The material that is ordered is for specific lines, for which there is urgent need of rolling-stock. It is only the wheels and axles and other ironwork that are ordered from England. The timber for the wagons is being procured in the colonies. Tenders will be called for building the trucks here.

1836. All the iron is coming from England?—Yes; all the ironwork in this particular shipment has been ordered.

1837. Of course it is important in encouraging colonial industry that as much wood should be used as iron?—Yes.

1838. Is it the intention of the Government to do so?—Yes.

1839. Will there be any time to have the wheels and axles manufactured at Port Chalmers?—Yes. Mr. Conyers has authority to use up material from any of the Government workshops.

1840. You have no idea to what extent that is likely to be carried out?—He asked for authority to expend £1,000, which was approved of at once.

1841. When was that?—That was recently.

1842. By whom was Mr. Hemans employed; was he employed at Home?—He was appointed in the colony.

1843. Now that the ordinary works are going on, would it not be better for the Government to have its own officers at Home?—It would require a large staff. I do not think the orders sent from the colony sufficiently extensive to initiate a department at Home.

1844. There will be millions of pounds' worth of material come from the Home country, and it is a great deal to have to pay 1½ per cent. to a firm's agent at Home?—I have considered the question, and find it would require a considerable department at Home, one that we would have very little power to control. It would necessitate a large staff being kept up.