

Mr. Thomson.

14th Sept., 1877.

FRIDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 1877.

Mr. HENRY THOMSON examined.

1845. *The Acting Chairman.*] Would you state, Mr. Thomson, what experience you have had in the management of railways generally?—I was seven years and a half on the London and North-Western, in England.

1846. Were you engaged in the active management?—No; more in the audit department. I passed through every department of the audit.

1847. And as regards management, where you had control yourself?—I had, on the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway. I entered that Company's service about a month after the act of incorporation, and prepared the whole system of accounts, and everything connected with it, to the day of opening.

1848. When was that?—In 1854, I think, or 1855. The first portion of my connection was the preparing of the whole system of accounts, and then, afterwards, I had charge of the Sandridge Pier and Station. I was Superintendent at Sandridge. That was the principal, the only outlet.

1849. How long did you remain in the Hobson's Bay Company's service?—From 1853 to about the end of 1855—very nearly three years; and then I was on the Canterbury lines.

1850. What was your position there?—Traffic Manager.

1851. How long were you at that?—About twelve months.

1852. Are you acquainted with the system of management now in operation on the New Zealand Railways?—I do not know that it is very much altered since I was in charge; and I have been in Canterbury ever since.

1853. I am now putting to you the Chairman's questions, in his absence. What is your opinion of the weekly system of accounts and returns, against a monthly system?—Does that allude to both sources of traffic, goods and passengers?

1854. Yes?—In the passenger, I am decidedly in favour of weekly accounts; but in goods, certainly monthly. Why I am in favour of weekly accounts, as regards passenger traffic, is, that the returns are light in point of labour, and are easily checked. The month's accumulation of tickets would be something enormous. But as to goods traffic, I am certainly in favour of monthly returns. I presume a monthly abstract of all that is done is meant.

1855. Do you consider that in the goods traffic the labour is very much greater under the monthly than the weekly system?—It would be very much greater in the weekly.

1856. Do you consider there is generally more security against fraud in the weekly than in the monthly system?—I think the weekly system affords the greatest protection against fraud. Every precaution was adopted by the audit department of the London and North-Western to prevent or detect it. The slightest irregularity at any station or in any account was sufficient to draw attention to that particular station, and every such irregularity was immediately inquired into—not merely an irregularity in accounts or cash, but of any description whatever.

1857. Do you think that under the weekly system the ease of detection is greater materially than under the monthly?—I do not know, positively, what system has been brought into operation lately. I believe that with proper supervision it is just as likely to be found out in the monthly as in the weekly accounts. It can be very easily known, from the way-bills and other documents which go to the office, by an inspection, and any irregularity can be found out in that way.

1858. When you were on these lines—the Hobson's Bay and Canterbury—was the monthly or the weekly system of accounts in force?—The weekly in both cases.

1859. Both as regards passengers and goods?—Yes; but it might be just fair to say that the whole of the goods traffic on the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay line was shipboard.

1860. Do you consider, with reference to the question of audit, that the present system is the best?—I think the best system is an audit at the centre, taking Christchurch for one centre and Dunedin for another, so long as there is a break in the communication as at present. I may say I belonged to the Grand Junction, before the London and North-Western became amalgamated. There were three audits prior to amalgamation—one at London, one at Manchester, and one at Liverpool. The whole were done away with except London, and we formed one audit for the whole of the lines, and audited every species of accounts.

1861. Would not that point to an audit in Wellington?—If Wellington were easily accessible it might, but I see a great disadvantage in Wellington being so far removed. Returns might be a month old before they would be checked in Wellington.

1862. Under the present system of travelling audit?—Yes; the returns must come by steamer. They will take some little time to prepare. If there were any errors, you could imagine the correspondence that would take place, and the delays of several days.

1863. How would you propose, if you do propose, to gather all these separate audits in the different railway centres into one, if you think that necessary?—I do not think it would be absolutely necessary to have one audit in Dunedin, and another in Christchurch. If one were established it would be sufficient, but I do not think there is anything objectionable by having the two audits. The accounts are separate and distinct, and it is just like adding together two totals. In the audit office everything should be shown so clear that you have only to put Dunedin and Christchurch together to make it complete.

1864. Can you give the Committee your general opinion on the subject of railway tickets? That is, the selling of them in the same way as postage stamps?—I am totally opposed to that.

1865. In all cases?—In all cases.

1866. Would you state your reasons?—I believe that the crush at the passenger stations is objectionable; that arises from a fault in the present system. If booking offices are opened in sufficient time, say a quarter of an hour (and when there is a busy train there is no reason why they should not be opened earlier, supposing no other train is leaving), and if passenger stations are kept for the people who travel, and not for people who loaf about them, and every one passes through the ticket office and takes a ticket, instead of having to wait until the bell rings, they will book all without crush or difficulty. I mean there should be no egress or ingress to a station except by passing through a