

Mr. Conyers.
28th Sept., 1877.

2199. *The Chairman.*] And are the rails?—No; the rails have marks placed upon them in England by the maker—N.Z.R. It is done at the time they are made.

2200. I have been furnished with an account from a very large firm in Canterbury, Cunningham and Co.; they have one of the largest establishments in the South Island. Their account for four weeks amounts to £9 9s. 8d., in which they discovered eight errors; they returned it to the office for rectification; they were then furnished with sheets called overcharge remittance sheets. There are no fewer than five of them here appended. The first overcharge sheet is for 5d., the second for 5d., the third for 5d., the fourth for 2s. 6d., the fifth for 3s. 8d.; all of which they required to sign and return before they can settle the account?—Yes.

2201. And this account is dated 20th August, and this other 27th September. Now I want you to look at these papers, and say if that is the system of running accounts in the railways now?—Do you mean as to errors?

2202. Is that the new system of auditing accounts and rectifying errors?—This is the new system and the old. It is the universal rule with regard to overcharge sheets, with this difference, that under the new system the Stationmaster or the Station Clerk must get a receipt from the person to whom the overcharge has been made. For instance, suppose I charge you 10s. for carrying goods, and we discover an error of 2s.—that is to say, I should only charge you 8s.—I write out one of these overcharge sheets, to show to the Audit that I have paid you that 2s. Under the old system, the only difference was, the consignee or owner would never see what was signed by the Manager, only the Audit in Wellington took the Manager's signature for this; whereas now we have to expose our little shortcomings to the world.

2203. You simply expose them to the public?—Of course. I think the man who has made this error should be punished for it. It shows he is a blundering fool.

2204. It is not the railway clerk that does this; it is done in the goods shed, is it not?—It is the men that compute the rates.

2205. Here is an instance of 1 ton 118 lbs.?—It is a consignment of small loads, and he has made a charge upon each.

2206. Instead of sending accounts, they put the public to trouble to get receipts for 7s. 4d.?—Yes. You see in the books at the station they debited this account of £9 9s. 8d., and the station clerk is responsible to the Audit in Wellington for that amount. The instructions are, if you have made an overcharge, you are to remit it to the person to whom the overcharge has been made, and the signature to the overcharge shows that it has actually been repaid. Under the old system in Otago, we had the same overcharge sheets, but these would have been sent to my office, and I should have looked into it carefully. I never handled the money in any form. If satisfied the overcharge should be made, I signed this as correct, and the Provincial Auditor would sign, whereas they now insist upon having Mr. Cunningham's signature. I submit the overcharge sheet cannot be done away with.

2207. Except making it public?—No; it is not advisable the public should know.

2208. I have been desired to ask you a question with regard to the advisability of allowing the railway fire-engine to be retained in Lyttelton, instead of Christchurch as at present?—Certainly not. I should say Christchurch by all means. Shall I give reasons?

2209. Yes?—The City Council is moving in the matter. They had a serious fire in Lyttelton two months ago. Some difficulty was experienced in getting the fire-engine from Christchurch, but I was instructed to send the fire-engine to Lyttelton and keep it there, and I did so. Since then Lyttelton waterworks have been completed, and are now in full operation. A fire took place there two or three weeks ago, when the waterworks proved to be very effective. The fire was extinguished at once. I think at the present time the fire-engine should be brought back to Christchurch, to the place where it belongs to, where the Government property is. It would be far safer.

2210. I suppose it can be used in all directions?—Oh, yes. It is kept on a truck. I am at present building a large truck close to it, and it can be worked without being moved at all. It can be run up or down the line in any direction, north or south. The truck is so arranged in the engine-house that the fire-engine can be run off the line to any part of the city. The truck floor of the house is level. The truck can be run off the line, and the engine used in the station, or worked where it stands. It is the most powerful fire-engine in New Zealand.

2211. I would like to ask you whether you do not think it is necessary the block system should be used on all lines where there are tunnels?—Where there are tunnels by all means the block system. I would not recommend it anywhere else in New Zealand.

2212. And to do that it will be necessary to have every station connected by telegraph wire?—Where the block system is worked we must have a special stock of instruments, and a block wire. It is in operation now in the Lyttelton tunnel. No train can move out of that tunnel without the knowledge of the signalman at the end. The instant it enters the tunnel the line is blocked, and no train can enter the tunnel until the other is seen to leave at the point of exit. The same plan should be adopted at Caversham, Chain Hills, between Moeraki and Oamaru, Deborah Bay, and all the tunnels. It would be a very serious thing where one train is entering a tunnel and another following closely upon it, if the first train were to break down.

2213. *Mr. Macandrew.*] What system would you adopt on the Port Chalmers tunnel?—I would divide the Port Chalmers tunnel into two sections, and work upon that system.

2214. Then the only risk would be the telegraph apparatus failing?—There cannot be any risk. Suppose a train has entered the tunnel, the lines are blocked. If the train were to break down no danger could occur to another train, because the line would not be shown clear. We have two wires, one for the block instruments and one for what we call the speaking instruments—they can speak to each other in the ordinary way. It is a separate wire altogether. I have never known it to fail yet. If the wires break the danger signals are hoisted, and all the line is blocked. At Lyttelton, the man who works the block instrument in the valley also works the semaphore signals, and the same operation he uses to set this signal clear from the main line to the tunnel sets all the points clear too, so that really nothing can happen. Everything is altered by the revert signals or points, the revert signals