

No. 2.
[Morning Herald, 1st March, 1882.]
RAILWAY MANAGEMENT.

SIR,—

To the Editor.

That railway men of the locomotive department have been unfairly used for some time is beyond a doubt. It may not be forgotten by your readers that a scale of pay was arranged and agreed to at the time of the 10-per-cent. reduction agitation, and which appeared in the daily papers at that time, viz., about 4th September, 1880; also, in conjunction, there was a Board constituted, giving any offenders a fair trial, with a right of appeal to the heads of departments, &c. This scale and Board Mr. Maxwell says are not in existence; but the question arises, when did they cease to exist? Why were not the employes consulted and made aware of this change? This for the past twenty-five years would in any other place have led to one of those fearful and destructive strikes that have taken place in Britain or America. An agreement in all fairness ought to be adhered to, and, when a change is imperative, employed and employer ought to and will have a voice in that change. Now, many artisans who were a credit to the railway are not there now. Why is this? The officers who wanted room for their friends soon found fault, and they (the artisans referred to) were forced to resign or be discharged. These men, on asking an inquiry into their case, are told that their case has been fully inquired into, and they are no longer wanted. I might ask, when were these numerous inquiries held? Who gave evidence? Certainly not the wronged. They had no voice in the case in which they were the most interested—the case of Bradley being so barefacedly unjust and tyrannical that the city members, by letter, requested Mr. Maxwell, on his late visit here, to do justice to this man by holding an inquiry. Mr. Maxwell's reply was that it had been fully investigated (in Bradley's absence of course); that the Board was *non est*; that the officers in the service were held responsible for the working of the same, and retained the most efficient, and sent those not suited about their business. And very proper say I. But Mr. M. did not say the management retained efficient officers. The time was when the best mechanics from the leading locomotive and railway shops in Great Britain were engaged and sent over the whole world as foremen and workmen; but there is not any locomotive foreman in any railway that is not a trained mechanic, except in this colony. I know that the Locomotive Foremen of Christchurch, Timaru, Dunedin, and Invercargill are not so trained. They have been put into position certainly not by merit. They have to entirely depend on mechanics who are subordinate to them. No wonder nearly every engine repaired has to be done often twice ere they are right. I am not surprised to hear some of these Foremen have a dislike to members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers; but the society will not collapse although these great guns are arrayed against it. I notice a newly-repaired engine had, after leaving Hillside, to be again overhauled at the running-shed; but I fail to learn of another Bradley being victimized for the carelessness displayed. By the way, the engines are being experimented on, as again the chimneys are again being altered. These are wonderful chimneys, as they have been altered five times, and yet fire flies from them. Also the repairs effected, and the clattering of engines with the sharp wheels, show there is something wrong. Instead of this work being supervised by an efficient engineer, it seems to me to be done under the eye of a French fencing-master. Mr. Fish having taken up the case on behalf of these men he will see justice done to them; and the very able article of yours will also materially assist the furtherance of this object. I may say concerning the two engines I mentioned in my last as unsafe to run, one was stopped the following day, and the other is laid by for a time. I will, I fear, have cause to let the travelling public hear of others unfit to run.

In conclusion, let me say there is one law to try Dunedin men, another for the Christchurch men—one of the former is instantly discharged for an offence; the latter is merely reduced. Another of the former is fined for a paltry handle; one of the latter is not even reprimanded for smashing a van. But these men are sent from Canterbury as examples of good conduct to the benighted Dunedin and Invercargill men. As Mr. Fish well remarks, there ought to be a Commission, and I hope I may be called as a witness face to face with those I am impelled to thus write about. Your readers, with me, will say it is time for a change when the railway is now in the position that our Foremen have their children, after school-hours, doing the duty of what once occupied a storekeeper. This is making railways pay with a vengeance. Also a new way of making railways pay is making men work overtime while good mechanics are to be seen idle in our streets. This is new economy. I do not hear of any of the rolling-stock from Oamaru coming to Dunedin for repairs, as promised us by the Hon. T. Dick. I think this is south of the Waitaki, which he defined as the limit of Otago railways; but of course this was an election speech.—Apologizing for again trespassing,

Manse Street, 22nd February, 1882.

I am, &c.,

ED. WILSON.

I had three letters about Bradley, whom I had dismissed for incompetency, from Mr. Fish, Mr. Green, and Mr. Bracken, to which I replied. I did not write to Wilson, but he clearly had access to one of my letters. I think I am justified in saying that irresponsible persons are interfering with the department.

96. But all this took place when there was almost a strike on the part of the railway employes?—Yes; there was some agitation at the time. There are two members of Parliament from Auckland who have taken up the cause of the men so far as their pay is concerned.

97. *Mr. M. W. Green.*] Am I included in these two men?—No.

98. *Mr. White.*] When mistakes are made, do you not think the men suffer for the faults of their superiors?—No.

99. You have said that the letters of the men always reach the Minister when they are sent to him?—Yes. I have never known any case in which any document has been suppressed.

100. By whose authority are locomotive drivers compelled to pay their railway fares when they are travelling from one place to another for the convenience of the department?—I have no idea that such a case has occurred. It is the practice to give the men a pass when they are travelling on the public service. It is quite possible, however, that, if a man neglected to get an order, he might be made to pay.

101. Has any scale of wages been issued since the 10-per-cent. reduction?—There have been two scales since the 10-per-cent. reduction.

102. When was the first scale issued?—The first was issued in May, 1881, and the second in May, 1882.

103. Are you aware that the men have no knowledge of the change in the scale?—No.

104. Are all the drivers treated alike?—The southern men have the best of it, because the privileges they enjoyed under the previous scale were not cancelled.

105. Are there some drivers in the Middle Island who work only eight hours per day, but who get the same pay as those who are on duty twelve or fourteen hours a day?—Yes.

106. Do you know how many hours the driver of the train which met with the accident at Shag Point was on duty before the accident occurred?—He had not been at work for fourteen hours previously; but before that he was on duty for thirty-six hours.

107. They started on Monday morning at 11 o'clock, and were on duty until Wednesday morning?—Perhaps so; I do not now remember exact details.

108. Do you not think that was rather hard on the men and dangerous to the public?—Yes; but in a case of emergency I do not see how it could always be avoided. I think, however, that if possible the thing should be managed in some other way.