

The lines which I saw are substantially built on the 4ft. 8½in. gauge. The speeds run are moderate, and not equal to those of the English lines. Where steep grades prevail speeds are necessarily restricted thereby, the practice differing but little from ours under similar conditions.

The carriage stock in many cases is dirty and uncomfortable; but there are great differences in type and condition. The wagon stock is of a very mixed character; much of it seems to be very old. The passenger-station buildings at the chief cities are spacious and handsome, but many of the smaller country stations appear very dirty and inconvenient. The rolling stock has grease-boxes.

The lighting of carriages seems to be chiefly in oil, and is, as a rule, inferior to our own lighting. Gas is also now occasionally used. Persons are not allowed on the station-platforms without tickets. No luggage is carried free, except what the passenger can take in the carriage. The charges on luggage are heavy, and the crowding of carriages, through passengers trying to carry their packages with them, is very inconvenient. I have procured and forwarded particulars of the Italian railway charges, and of the rates of pay which govern these charges, to a large extent.

Many things on the Italian railways which are indifferent may be attributed to the previous history of the system; but there is nothing, so far as I could judge, in the management which shows that any special advantage is gained in that respect by the system of control adopted—namely, in leasing the lines to be worked under a limited Government control.

While in Italy I procured patterns of a special form of ticket for advertising upon. This I have written to the Agent-General about, and he will send forward a small lot for trial, with a view to their introduction.

In Belgium nearly all the railways are owned and worked by the State, having been either acquired or constructed by the Government. They are managed by a Board of professional officers appointed by, and answerable to, the Minister. These officers, I understood, are the heads of the respective railway departments. The absorption of the remaining private railways appears to be actively going on. The general aspect of the stock and lines is superior to that of Italy. The same system of division of departments and of booking, accounting, and control prevails as is generally in operation elsewhere.

The rates and fares are made subject to the Minister's approval, and are tabulated, as is the case in Italy. Special rates are published where necessary for the exigencies of trade and of competition in the markets, or with other carriers. The Belgian railway officers showed me great courtesy, and gave me facilities for seeing their traffic work and their shops. The carriages are lighted by paraffin gas. It is claimed that it is cheap and clean; but what I saw was not especially good. The carriage and wagon stock is better than in Italy. Oil-boxes are used, and the same class of American oil as we have adopted in New Zealand; but recently a system of grease-boxes for locomotives has been tried, which is said to be cheaper. Particulars were furnished to me, and I have already reported on the matter; the papers will have reached you through the Agent-General, in which I have recommended a trial. Passengers are allowed 56lb. of free luggage in Belgium, charges are made on the excess, and all luggage has to be booked except it is carried by the passenger. The rates and fares on the private companies' lines are under Government supervision; they have all to be approved by the Minister for Public Works, and to be published. The Belgian laws forbid personal preference in rates. I procured from railway officers copies of the Belgian rates and fares, information about the rates of wages, and a copy of their report. The inference I drew from private information was that the Government railways could not be worked so cheaply as private ones are, not because the management was inferior, but on account of political influences. It also appears that on national grounds the rates are fixed very low, and the country does not look for the railways to pay much interest on their cost in consequence, notwithstanding the excessively low rates of wages prevailing, which in many cases are not a third of what they are in New Zealand.

In Belgium, then, the railways, for the most part, are State-owned and are worked by the Government under a professional Board responsible to a Minister. The Colony of Victoria has also a professional Board to work its railways; but in that case the Board has a status, which is not the case in Belgium.

I understood that very similar causes operate in Belgium to those which have been experienced in New Zealand and elsewhere. Political and national considerations act to prevent the same financial results being obtained from working as are obtained by private enterprise. In contrast to the Italian lines, however, the State-worked lines in Belgium appear to be better managed than the State-owned Italian lines, which are worked by companies.

During my stay at Brussels I was shown over the railway workshops at Malines, which are the principal shops. They are very extensive. I made special inquiries as to the experience of the railway engineers with the Belpaire fire-box, which was, some time since, introduced into New Zealand on trial. Many years' experience in Belgium has proved its utility for classes of light coals such as we use in some parts of the colony. So far as the appliances are concerned there was nothing more than we are acquainted with generally in New Zealand, and the arrangements were not so complete as those of some of the English shops.

After leaving Brussels I proceeded to Paris. The short time at my disposal prevented my making very close inquiries into the railway-working in France. The French railways are for the most part worked by private companies; a small portion of the whole are, however, worked by the Government—as the system is some distance from Paris I could not visit it. I obtained a copy of the companies' rates on the northern system. The companies are compelled by law to publish their rates, which are sanctioned by the Government. Personal preference is forbidden by law. The rates are tabulated, similarly to the Belgian and Italian practice and to our own. The lighting of carriages is of a mixed character, oil and gas; I saw nothing very brilliant of this kind. The lines are substantially built, and the appearance and working seemed very similar to the Belgian practice.